You grew up in Mexico City and Vancouver, Canada, then went to undergrad and gradu- ate school at the Art Institute of Chicago. Do you feel that being in Chicago influences your work at all? If so, how? Does it matter where you are for you to maintain an art practice?

I was born in Mexico City and when I was a teenager my entire family moved to Vancouver, British Columbia. In a nutshell, the worth- lessness of that move at that particular point in my development—from one culture to another, from one language to another, and from one perceptual space to another—has more signifi- cantly shaped my vision of myself as an artist than the city of Chicago has been up to now.

This may be a small thing, but important nonetheless. I remember that when I first moved to Chicago I could not relate to the flatness of the land. Many friends who grew up in the Midwest crave the openness of the prairies, but I have not had such craving; at least not yet. When I first arrived in Chicago, I could not understand how I was going to survive without mountains nearby: mountains as points of orientation but also as markers of comparative proportion, of geographical heterogeneity. But Lake Michigan and the big Midwest sky became points of phenom- enological reference. I think that whenever I may live, I would look for these types of points of reference. Like so many people with whom I went to school, I used to see myself as someone with one foot out of the Chicago door. It took a while, but now I can fathom life as someone with one foot out of the Chicago scene here can be small, but it seems to be ever changing. And I have a great studio. I am very much a studio artist, so, wherever I go, I need a studio space to continue working.

Tell me a little about the process of creating a new work. What inspires you to begin an artwork? Do you sketch out your ideas with a drawing first? Do you ever work a composition out on a computer before you begin to create your piece?

I see much of what I do as drawing—in my use of thread and other kinds of linear ele- ments, but also in my activation of materials in a combinatory way. That is, I see my works, properties are amplified in the dynamic ten- sion of the results: I reconfigure and combine materials, and arrive at resolutions for which there is no prior blueprint or drawing. My process relies on both gained proficiency and spontaneous exploration, and it unfolds within the context of the studio. Like I said, for me the studio is a laboratory where I experiment and discover the multivalent possibilities of making art. Over time, I have come to realize that one of the reasons I make things by hand is to participate formally and critically in the volup- tuousness of the materially proximate world. I use the word ‘voluptuousness’ here in the spirit of Mario Rivas’s philosophical pro- posal: the great interests of man: air and light, the joy of having a body, the voluptuousness of looking.

Have you always explored time, death, space, clouds and weather, and ontology as subjects in your work? Does incorporating and working through such heavy themes and questions about the universe in your work help you to feel more at ease in daily life?

Philosophical questions concerning the nature of reality and how we attempt to make sense of it are at the thematic core of my research. I believe that I am in good company, for these themes have concerned poets, theologians, skeptics, scientists, and artists for millennia.
What factors into the process of selecting materials, size, and subject matter for a specific piece, since you work in so many mediums—sculpture, site-specific installation, collage, works on paper, painting, drawing, book arts, sewing?

So much of my work amounts to the acknowledgement of material reality. Given that our humanity is manifested within a tangible physical world, my research starts from the perspective of the material properties of this world. In my work, not only materials but also spaces are catalytic that, when activated, alert us to their physical presence and properties, to their—and our—phenomenological potentials. I suppose that I want to remain alert to such potentials, and thus to provoke self-reflectivity in relation to the sensuous, material world. As you point out, scales shift dramatically in my work, from the intimate scale of the hand-held book to site-specific architectural installations that can be entered. Each of these scales—and everything in between—does something different perceptually, materially, in relation to our subjectivity and our bodies.

You frequently work with materials which are associated with craft making and children’s art, such as colored construction paper, paper-mâché, and cardboard. These materials are thought of as ephemeral and flimsy but they can also be quite beautiful. Is there a particular reason why you began incorporating such materials into your work, what draws you to them? Do you like to use “throw-away” materials to contr-ast/counterbalance more large themes which you are addressing in the work you are creating?

I do not think of materials hierarchically and this is how I want my work to be positioned: sensuously but also politically. There is an assumption that all we see materials on a shared or unquestioned hierarchical scale. What is the possibility that may be found in a very sophisticated way for me, or vice versa.

There are many historical precedents for this. One important example can be found in the work of the artists who constituted the Arte Povera movement (lost to mention the artists who influenced that movement such as Luisa Fontana and Antoni Tapiés). Each of the Arte Povera artists is very different from the next, but they shared a clarity about eliminating material hierarchies. This was radical in the 1960’s, but it is curious that the question of hi-

erarchy still pops up—I infer from this that the question is unresolved. There is so much noisy

American art as superfluous. It is odd to me that intel-

lectuals would think that the intellectual and the sensual are extricable from each other, as if work that gives pleasure and joy cannot also be smart and analytical.

Do you feel that by using the materials associated with children’s artmaking that you are creating a ‘world of wonder’ as you may have when younger (while playing in a backyard)? You are creating a ‘world of wonder’ as you may have when younger (while playing in an art studio) during a time when you were more innocent and less knowledgeable about the ways of the world?

I do not see my work as naive or childlike. I do not think that any given materials belong to children or adults in general. Thought, analysis, the honing of skills, the deployment of materials to tackle complex ideas—these are all part of my long-term project and they did not emerge spontaneously out of thin air. The spontaneity you see in my work is honed. Besides, I do not think children are necessarily “innocent.” My work arrives at resolutions in very particular ways from project to project. I may not always know what I am doing, but this does not mean that I am “child-like” or an ingénu.

To tell us a bit about the Vertical Shadows and Explodes of Weather installation? Are these sculpture objects that populate the installation? Are they meant to represent archetypal weather phenomena? Or are they catalogues of what is related to the weather or both? You tell us a bit about the pieces Untitled #4 (Reflection of Bolts) and Untitled #2 (Cumulo Nimbus) specifically?

The Vertical Shadows sculptures and The Engines of Weather C-D collages are two related bodies of work that I first exhibited in 2008. I started to make the sculptures in 2006 after I got my current job teaching sculpture at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I started to make the Vertical Shadows for many reasons but I confess that an important one had to do with the fact that if I was going to teach sculpture, I wanted to use my studio practice to rethink making sculpture in the most physi-

cal and in-the-round sense. For a while I had been looking at Brancusi’s use of the base. I was intrigued by the fact that sometimes it took him many years to pair up a constructed pediment with a particular cast or carving. He did this formally but also strategically as an assembled base. It is one of the few bases that has become so ubiquitous, but also after all, the crucial repositioning of the work. In retrospect I recognize that I wanted to think about the intersection of sculpture, pattern, architecture (think of mosaics and tiles), the miniature model, abstraction and representation. The Vertical Shadows became my vehicles for these multiple explorations.

Besides, when I had the chance to travel and these thoughts were still maintaining their modularity. It is not as if the verticality of children’s art were always present. I was trying to establish connections at the edges of each pattern and shape. I understood this research coming from how textiles and tiles are used in cosuming and in architecture. Patterns complement each other, sometimes acting
We can address pattern from so many perspectives. There is the optical perspective, of course. Others have interpreted my work as a reflection of the patterns that occur in natural phenomena. But there is another way of addressing pattern. Pattern can be an index of a thought as well as of a manual process. Lately I have been re-seeing the series of actions that I repeat again and again in the making of my work. These actions can be quite monotonous and boring. But after crossing a certain threshold of boredom I find that on the other side repetitive actions become trance-inducing. Embroidering, cutting, stacking, sanding, all of these repeated types of action can, at the best of moments, make time disappear or stretch. While making the work I have become interested in the possibility of getting to a place through the process where the “self” can get lost. It doesn’t happen all the time, but when it happens sometimes I can look at the work with some detachment and see with a clarity that I could not have anticipated or planned.

Text shows up frequently in your work, especially in your artist’s books. Have you had any graphic design or typography training? How do stories, or fragments of text, from popular media (such as a line from an obituary, a line from a classic work of literature or poem, a word from a dictionary, a touching newspaper story) make its way into one of your works?

I did not have any formal graphic design training but early on I collected closely at how books are designed. The book is the perfect technology. I don’t think anything can be done to improve it, but much can be done within the parameters of its structure. Text and language unfold visually and/or temporally in a sequential way. In a book you can move backwards and in non-linear ways to disrupt or evade a sequence, while acknowledging that it is there at all times, in a physically tangible sense. I am drawn to how books make me self-aware of language’s materiality. The materiality of language is part of what I try to address in several of my artist’s books. The translation of one type of materiality to another is also part of what I think about when I use words taken from a page and then give them visual and conceptual import in a newly translated form. In the instances where I use words from, say, the Odyssey, my work mergers appropriation and ekphrasis.

You have been producing books since 1993. How many have you made? What are a couple of your favorites and what do you like about these books in particular? Could you discuss what the Engine’s Archives entail?

I began to make books circa 1992, as a way to give enduring form to ephemeral works that had been documented photographically. These included interviews and performance works that I did collaboratively when, for a very short spell of time, I lived in Oxaca, Mexico in the early 1990s. I came up with the name ‘Artery Archives’ at around that time. I cannot remember why I chose that name—something about the alliteration perhaps, in addition to the expansive meaning of the concept of an archive: where one book is only a part of a collective organism. To this day I think of my books as one larger work... When I moved to New York in 1995 I lived in NY for little over four years. I did not have a studio space at first and making seen sculptures—this is how I thought of the books—was a way of addressing topics of whatever magnitude at a small and intimate scale. I continue to make the books today, sometimes in bouts, sometimes with large pauses between one book and the next.

What artists would you cite as influences? Are there any modern abstract painters that you admire? What type of visual art are you most drawn to?

I gravitate to the work of various artists, and am, if anything, drawn with even greater intensity to the work of writers. My experience reading and re-reading the books of Claire Leispector remains an important point of reference and orientation. I am self-conscious that I am reading Leispector in translation (from Portuguese to English or Spanish) and such “reading-in-translated” is in itself also a valuable point of reference. As I said earlier, some of the Arte Povera artists remain important to me—Alighiero Boetti and Giuseppe Penone in particular. I was really interested in what Catherine de Zegher was doing curatorially at the Drawing Center, and her show “3 Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing. Hima Kloft, Emma Kunz, Agnes Martin” was a revelation. Her book “On Line” at MOMA from 2009. As far as contemporary artists, lately I have been looking at Serpji Jensen’s fabric paintings, at Phyllida Barlow’s and Karla Black’s sculptures and at Sheila Hicks’s weaving projects.

Tell us a bit about your residency at the Wall House Foundation in Groningen, Netherlands? (You were working on a site-specific project for 2013?)

I spent a few weeks at the Wall House this summer to begin to imagine a project for the summer of 2013. The Wall House Foundation project, which is titled ‘The Inside from the Inside,’ is a response to the architecture of the late John Hejduk, who designed the Wall House #2 in 1972. Of the many theoretical houses that Hejduk designed, the Wall House #2 is one of the few ever built (it was completed posthumously in 2001). Hejduk, who was also a poet and a draftsman, was deeply engaged with language and drawing as foundations for envisioning buildings. The Wall Housegenerates questions about the relationship between drawing, poetic symbolism and what a dwelling can be; it also prompts me to address the connections between Hejduk’s imaginative conception of the house and the signals he left in it to encourage us to perceive space in mysterious ways.

At the center of my project is a large graphite wall installation. This three-floor drawing will act as an interior connective tissue between vertically stacked rooms. The rooms are only accessible by crossing a threshold marked by the wall that gives the building its name, and by ascending or descending a staircase. My installation will be an intervention that models a different kind of link between ‘insides’. The artist’s books play an important role in conveying this interiority. Artist’s books, in their modest scale, can temporally ‘insep’ a person [I am borrowing the figural use of ‘insepction’ from Hejduk]. The traversal of an artist’s book is a sequential traversal of spaces. Like rooms in a building, the traversal of the book’s space is given meaning by the manner in which a sequence generates content.

Although I have made projects for architecture before—notably eyeglass and spectra for the 400 square meter atrium of the Neues Künstlerforum in Cologne—the inside from the inside makes the first time that I will respond to a considerate architectural landmark. On the one hand, this is a rare opportunity to showcase a firmly researched and materially poetic dialogue with John Hejduk’s legacy. On the other, it will be a pivotal work that will allow me to join together facets of my practice—artist’s books, drawing, poetry and installation—with one unified site.

What are your future plans. Do you have any shows coming up in Chicago, New York or beyond?

Depending on funding the project at the Wall House may become large and involve other artists in an inter-disciplinary sense, so this is where most of my outward energies have been focused. However, I have started new work in the studio (some large drawings and smaller sculptures). While nothing is scheduled, I have been lucky that there is ongoing interest in showing my work both here and in New York in the near future. I do not like to repeat myself again and again, and this is why having a lot of time between exhibitions can be not only convenient but, above all, creatively important. This summer I will be making some new lithographs with Bud Shark, a master printer who has a studio outside of Lyons in Colorado. I have worked with Bud Shark before and have had one of my most satisfying collaborative experiences as an artist doing that. Before I worked with him I told him that I knew nothing about printmaking in general and lithography in particular; he told me that this is why he was interested in working with me. What could you imagine doing if you did not create art?

Horticulture. Or being a social worker. I suppose that being an art educator at a public university like UIC already in a sense involves aspects of both.