

STUNT DOUBLE

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

by Erin Christine Miller

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ABSTRACT

Erin Miller presents her MFA Thesis Exhibition, *Stunt Double*, at Bibliowicz Gallery in Ithaca, New York. This body of work responds to notions of theatrical production through material exploration and improvisational staging, where elements of chance are welcomed and celebrated. Methods of printmaking, textile dyeing, painting, and object making are choreographed to direct viewers through a combined subtle and pattern-heavy space, where abstracted representations of spotlights, curtains, and stages present themselves repeatedly. The work doubles itself, shifting forms as the exhibition develops. *Stunt Double* serves as a window into the world of materiality, where fact and fiction overlap and where the symbiotic relationship between the stage and the audience are challenged.

PRINTMAKING EXPANDED

Materials are squished onto/into other materials to create images. A transformation of the self/original occurs. A second, or third, or fourth... state of being.

Prints are direct traces of the thing that came before it—a mark, a movement, a memory. They are serial in nature but can reject multiplicity. Monotypes, for instance, are transformed through pressure but exist as one-offs. Ghosts of past selves can be printed but fade with each run. Like memory, they haunt and dissolve over time.

Printmaking relies heavily on muscle memory; the body performs repetitive motions—pulling, cranking, pressing, wiping—to make images. Like bodies prints spit, bite, burn, kiss, dampen, and dry.

Layering is the mediator between artist/print and hand/image in my work, where elements of chance are welcomed. Here additive processes embody performative and enchanting qualities—a stage magic show realized.

Inspired by production, my work hones in on materiality. Textiles, carpeting, dyeing, bleaching, etc. inspire a deep material exploration beyond the printing press, conflating in form and subject matter theatrically. Movie sets, stage design, prop building, and world building serve as anchoring points, where techniques of doubling are incorporated.

Color is a key actor in my practice. It can be many things at once: bright and shiny/sinister and acidic. Double meaning and interpretation remains crucial to my work. Repeated motifs of water, fountains, hair, spotlights, and curtains combine with exaggerated color to elicit conflicting notions of relaxation and unease. Water, for example, is calming to listen to but can be dangerous to experience. It trickles, soothes, and sustains, but can also flood, swallow, and drown.

I question what we are really looking at as audience members in a theater, and further, as viewers in a gallery. Representations of truth, mimicking gestures, or something entirely new altogether? What is false and what is reality? And what exactly are the roles that viewers and performers play in relaying pictorial information?

My work is representative of physical touch and material evolution, where emotive color and theatrical staging ask for your attention.



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

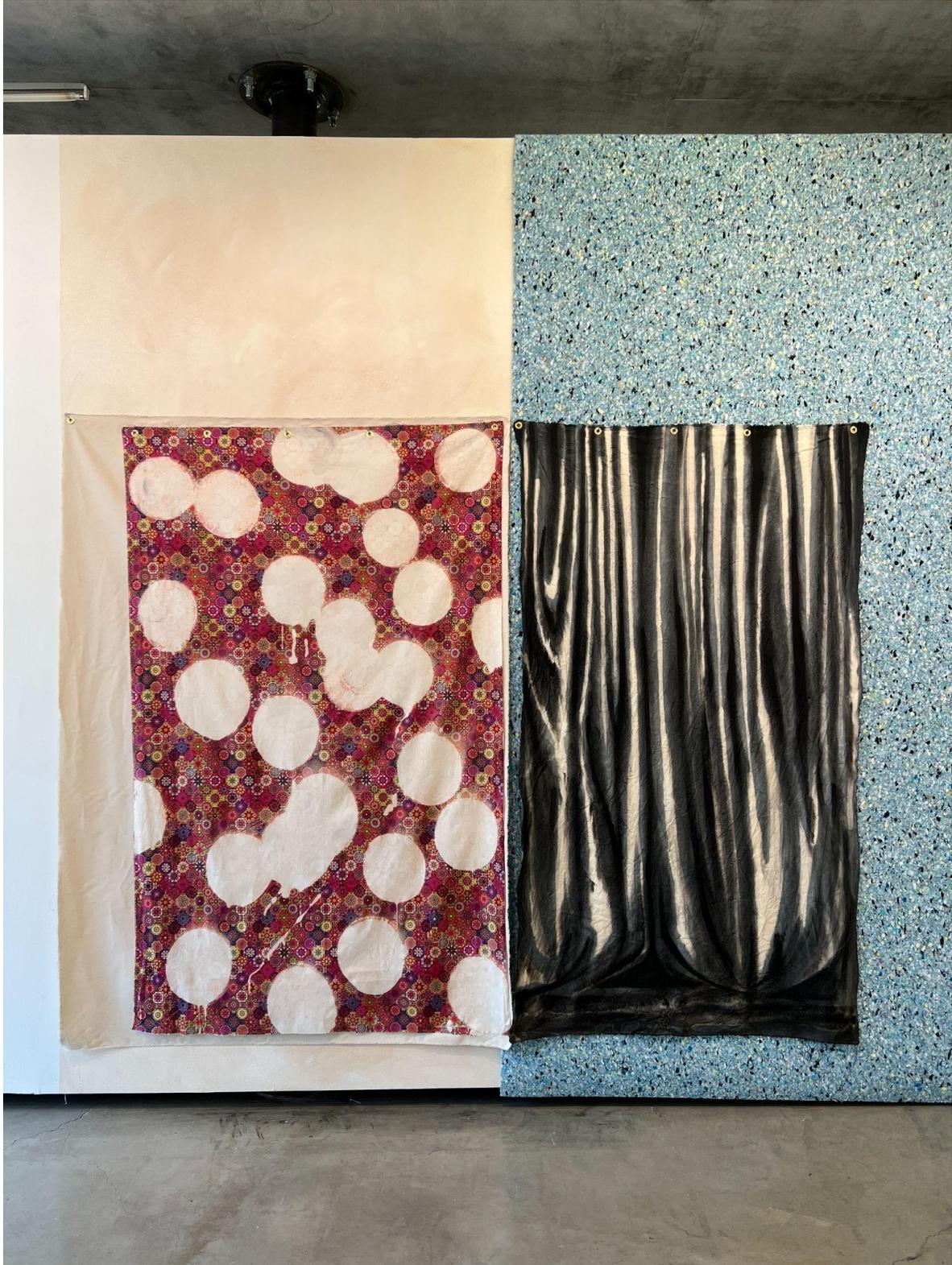
A STAGE AND A CURTAIN

Materials: canvas, fabric, Rebond carpet padding, india ink, bleach, dye, shag carpet, vinyl, silkscreen monotype, Rockite, silk chiffon, cling wrap, plastic party wrap, silkscreen ink, Phototex, grommets, nails, thread

Stunt Double begins with a stage and a curtain: two theatrical modes of display and obfuscation. A stage is something built for the actor and the prop; a curtain helps to direct the stage—opening and closing, presenting and hiding. Each commands attention, organizes time, and delineates space. Here the materials absorb aqueous materials like ink, bleach, and dye, transforming into stages of their own. Repeated motifs of spotlights and patterns perform continually throughout the gallery, which has been transformed into both a site-specific and site-responsive installation that is carpeted, curtained, tinted, and cling wrapped.



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

Materials: fabric, bleach, dye, Rebond carpet padding, grommets, canvas, india ink, silkscreen ink



Split Fountain, canvas, bleach, dye, fabric, 72 x 96 inches, 2022

CHARACTERS

Stage, Curtain, Spotlight, Carpet, Grommet, Pattern, Circle, Artist, Audience

The space is created to conflate feelings of pleasure and discomfort, therefore introducing the cinematic possibilities of feeling and perceiving. Part of this pleasure/displeasure pull comes from the continual reintroduction of the above characters and materials throughout the exhibition. Together, they perform. Jumping from stage to stage—work to work—they shift in material and color, donning new costumes with each reappearance. The title of this body of work speaks to the tricks of these characters.



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

Materials: Rockite, silk chiffon, shag carpet, fabric, bleach, grommets, india ink, phototex, silkscreen monotype



(L): *Bright Light*, vinyl, fabric, thread, bleach, canvas, dye, grommets, cling wrap 40 inches x 240 inches, 2022

(R): *Glare*, silkscreen monotype, india ink on paper, 38 x 50 inches

SPOTLIGHTING

Like curtains, spotlights can direct and disorient our attention. Staring directly into a bright light, for example, can temporarily blind and obscure visual information. Alternatively, they can bring someone or something into focus. Here, materials are intervened upon or left raw with spotlighting in mind. Bleach, for example, blows out color on found fabric, removing pattern in a near blinding effect.



Blind Spot Detection III, monotype on paper, 22 x 30 inches, 2022



Blind Spot Detection II, monotype on paper, 22 x 30 inches, 2022



Blind Spot Detection I, monotype on paper, 22 x 30 inches, 2022



Siren, monotype on paper, 6 x 9 inches, 2022

BACKDROPPING AND TINTING

These visual aids help to create a story and to establish time/place, but are often produced via tricks or shortcuts. Backdropping requires a balance of making something just realistic *enough* to be convincing. This *enough*-ness is questioned through the use of combined spatial cramming and restraint.

Diluted screen printing ink tints the walls, seeping into the space's foundation. The tint is a subtle light beige and is implemented throughout the exhibition as both a framing and staging device. Applied with a sponge, this faux finish recalls the set design from old western films and simultaneously mimics the gallery's concrete flooring. The decision to stuff pink plastic party wrap under the base-boards implies life beneath the surface of the gallery. The material pools and rests like a hanging velvet curtain, awaiting the next performance. Artificiality coexists with the genuine. Motion Pictures' past collides with the present. Pleasure and discomfort contradict through color, selective pairing, and repetition.



Bright Light, vinyl, fabric, thread, bleach, canvas, dye, grommets, cling wrap, 40 inches x 240 inches, 2022



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

Materials: Rebond carpet padding, plastic party wrap, silkscreen ink, canvas, dye, grommets, india ink



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

PATTERNING

Casinos, arcades, and movie theaters are often clad in dizzying, hyper-patterned carpet that is designed to keep you moving, spending, eating, and drinking.

A carpet crowd control.

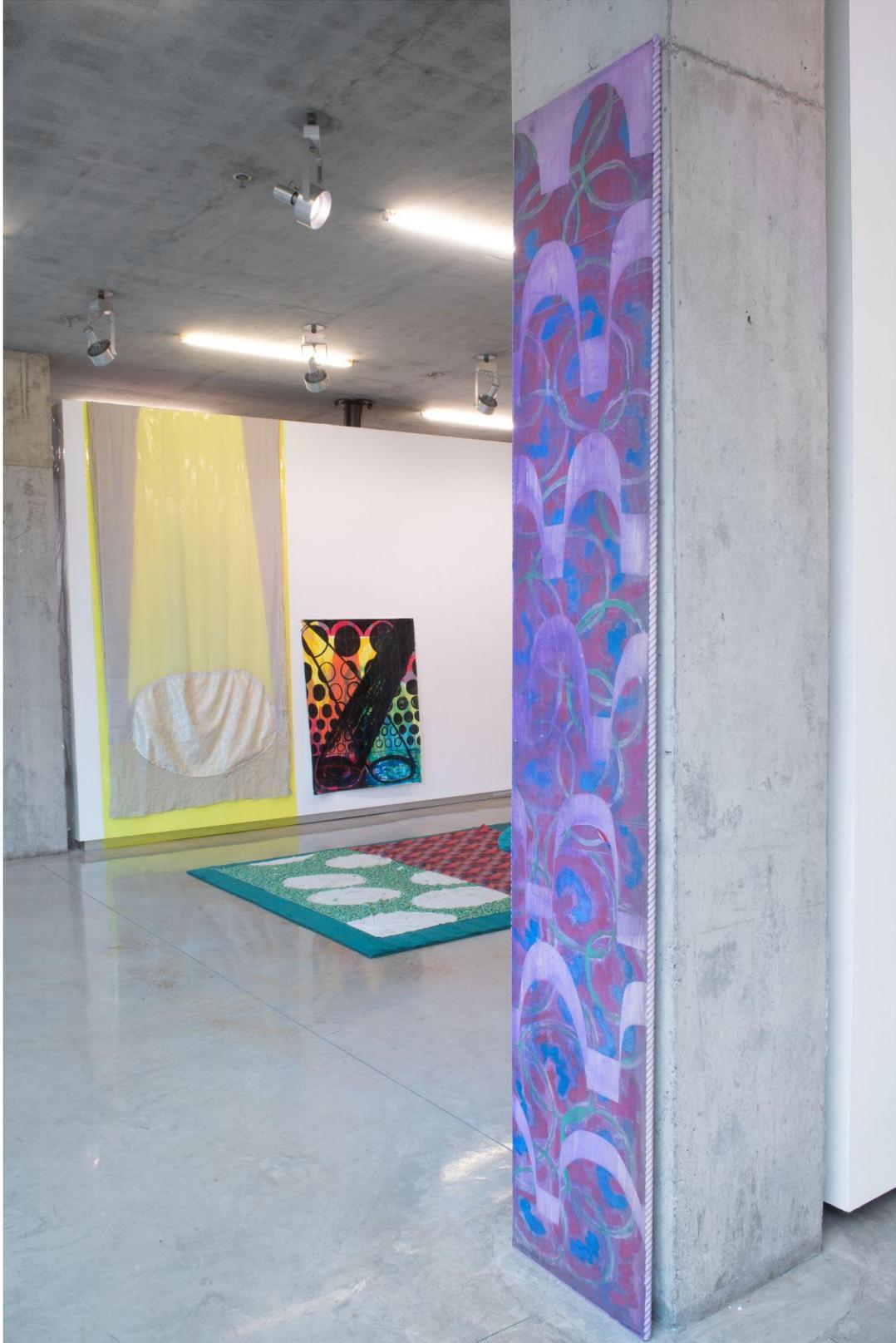
These patterns are also incorporated in costuming and tailoring. Like spotlights, they are flashy and direct attention. Found fabric, textile intervention, ready-made carpeting, and hand-printed works on paper pattern and direct.



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022
Materials (leaning work): wood, braided trim, silkscreen monotype, wheatpaste, dye



Pattern Plank I, wood, braided trim, silkscreen monotype, wheatpaste, dye, glitter, 24 x 96 inches, 2022
(leaning work)



Pattern Plank II, wood, braided trim, silkscreen monotype, wheatpaste, dye, 24 x 96 inches, 2022 (leaning work)

MULTIPLICITY AND DOUBLING

Stunt Double is a large-scale installation work that not only celebrates the theatrics of display, but also the act of doubling. Techniques of repetition and layering recall traditional printmaking, a medium that celebrates the multiple. Spotlights in a hybrid print-drawing, for example, reemerge in india ink, rockite, and rebond carpet padding. These circular forms reiterate the existing architecture of the gallery: a window and a concrete support base, each six feet in diameter. The space is also encompassed by exterior and interior windows, creating a fishtank effect for onlookers. The windows create a mirroring effect that doubles the exhibition space, establishing a second, liminal reality for the works. In this way theatrics act alongside sites of architectural intervention to become one piece.



Glowtorium, canvas, dye, india ink, 38 x 72 inches, 2022



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

Materials: Rockite, silk chiffon, shag carpet, india ink, readymade carpet, fabric, grommets



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022

Materials: silkscreen monotype, phototex

TEETERING

The encompassing windows encourage visitors to view the entirety of the exhibition in one glance, creating a cross-sectioning effect where works can teeter between physical space. Rebond carpet padding, cling wrap, and vinyl drape over the gallery walls to further the works' presence within the space. Draping double ends the work, flipping its perspective at the center. A teeter-totter of images is established that mimics the gallery space while demanding to be seen.



Installation view: *Stunt Double*, Bibliowicz Gallery, Cornell University, 2022



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SELF REFLECTION: A TRAJECTORY

The first works I made here at Cornell were prints. These silkscreen works on paper were important in establishing a framework for what was to come in the short two years ahead: a cacophony of prints. I was making work about color, the senses, and the internal body. The prints celebrated things like swallowing, digesting, consuming, and expelling—all bodily performances. I began thinking about fountains in relation to pleasure and to bodily reflexes like spitting, slurping, drooling, and gleeking. Homages to the fountain are present in *Stunt Double* and can be found in floor pieces and in the draping of blue Rebond carpet padding.



Peristalsis I and II, watercolor monotype, silkscreen on paper, 30 x 40 inches (each), 2020

An interest in the internal body led me to think about the body as a stage and processes like digestion as a choreographed dance. From here I began looking at my own body and how it performs while printmaking. I began to think of hands as extensions of my mind, bringing thinking and imagination into a physical realm. They became actors on a printed stage. Again I celebrated theatrics.



Hair Touching No Talking I, silkscreen monotype on paper, 38 x 50 inches, 2021

Stunt Double is a love letter to my past prints. My thesis considers these past themes but in a more physical realm. The work is printerly; it remains relatively flat and celebrates layering and multiplicity. My aim was to create a space that felt like being inside one of these works—full of conflicting color combinations, bombastic patterning, and restraint. Working in large-scale installation allowed me to physically engage with artmaking in a new way, one that is performative and spontaneous.



View Finding (out), silk screen monoprint on paper, 38 x 50 inches, 2021