

*And, Apollo: A Laboratory*

*Dean Erdmann*

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**And, Apollo: A Laboratory**

**Dean Erdmann**

As authoritarian regimes continue to emerge in unexpected parts of the world, we seek radical gestures to counter such developments. What if we look to recent modes of art-making and declare art itself a political practice? What if we take this proposition quite literally, and follow artists as they create spaces where individuals and communities, but also archives and ancestors, soil, plants and air come together as political subjects? In Fall 2018, we launched *If Art Is Politics* as the Vera List Center's two-year focus theme generating a constellation of research clusters. Among them are the open campus-style VLC Seminar *Freedom of Speech: A Curriculum for Studies into Darkness* with performances, lectures, and a forthcoming publication; a series of panels on institutional accountability and philanthropy; an international convening around the legacy of Pan-African solidarity for the Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice; and as culmination this exhibition, *And, Apollo: A Laboratory*.

Dean Erdmann is a 2018–2020 Vera List Center Fellow whose fellowship project, *And, Apollo*, positions the political at the confluence of material and social history, autobiography, and notions of progress. Each element of the installation at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center is anchored by a historical moment, and from there spins out and contributes to a dynamic landscape, a force field of interdependent agents. Accommodating different temporalities as the exhibition does with glass as ancient sand, one-off, sun-melted relicts or kiln-blown casts; considering a range of subjectivities, here for instance, the artist's hand, the roaring sound of wind, budding plants; and acknowledging, even reconciling

different scales of impact from mind-altering substances to geological forces, might provide important pointers on how to move forward on this planet.

The Vera List Center Fellowships support exceptional artists at a critical moment of their career, who undertake ambitious projects that advance art as a vital tool for social and political agency. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Andrea Geyer, Bouchra Khalili, Kobena Mercer, Lorraine O'Grady, and Walid Raad are but a few of our more than thirty fellowship alumni whose bold projects are locating the liminal spaces where aesthetic practices translate into political realities. We're proud to add Erdmann to this roster of artists and thank them for sharing so generously their transformative work. Thanks also go to the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, to Urban Glass, as well as to my colleagues at and the board of the Vera List Center.

Carin Kuoni  
Senior Director/Chief Curator  
Vera List Center for Art and Politics

*And, Apollo: A Laboratory* by artist and Vera List Center Fellow Dean Erdmann is an exhibition combining experimental documentary, video, and sculpture to connect autobiography to historical pasts that have produced current moments of social and political crisis. The narrative of *And, Apollo* is anchored in the Mojave Desert, the place where the artist grew up and the background for their exploration of Americana, the body, and queerness.

Using artifacts and storytelling Erdmann turns the Californian desert into a landscape reverberating with connections between the Cold War space race, militarization, technological acceleration, All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) culture, class, and meth addiction. What might seem to be unrelated histories and cultural expressions, rituals, or diseases is distilled into a complex narrative that crystallizes intersections between the deeply personal and the geopolitical.

Riding ATVs, descendants of the lunar landing vehicle, has a rich culture in the desert. NASA's Saturn V rocket, which enabled the Apollo missions to land humans and the original vehicle on the moon, was developed with the help of Werner von Braun, who had overseen the design of the German V2 missile during WW II and was one of the top Nazi scientists and engineers brought to the U.S. by the military during the Cold War. Local ATV riders often build giant bonfires in the desert, which litter the terrain with translucent glass detritus. Glass also materially connects to the desert in that it is the end product of heating sand at very high temperatures. The glass objects on view in the exhibition reference the bonfires of ATV culture and also capture a process of imprint and transfer that becomes part

of glass casting as a source object is passed back and forth between molds. Glass has yet another connotation, being a nickname for methamphetamine or crystal meth, developed by Japanese chemists in Berlin in 1893 and used in pill form by German and Japanese militaries as a drug unleashing 'super-human' abilities. In the exhibition, crystal meth is embodied in *Ephedra sinica* plants, which contain ephedrine and pseudoephedrine—used by amateurs to illegally manufacture crystal meth—as active constituents. The video *Glass* weaves voice and screen logs from Apollo's Space Command with descriptions of meth use by German World War II soldiers and German writer Heinrich Böll, as well as conversations Erdmann had with their family about meth use. In the exhibition, *Glass* is represented both as video and as prints of stills from the video work. The artist raises the question of whether the technologies of the Apollo era, premised upon acceleration and speed (another name for one of the forms of crystal meth), contributed to generating social conditions that set up the use of drugs.

Together the works on view become a multifaceted and open-ended reflection of the artist's intimate knowledge of the desert's physical force, its potential for radical openings and different forms of being, as well as its geopolitical complexities. In the desert landscapes of *And, Apollo*, Dean Erdmann discovers materialities and their transformation, queer fragmentation, and cosmic exploration.

Christiane Paul  
Director/Chief Curator  
Sheila C. Johnson Design Center

*Put all the images in language in a place of safety and make use of them, for they are in the desert, and it's in the desert we must go and look for them.*  
– Jean Genet

We place each glass object on an 11 × 17 paper on a kind of lazy Susan. Doug says it's to help the scanner orient itself.

Grill, tire, time, filter, dust

Tire, tire, handlebars, holding, fossil

Frame, Time tire time, ignition

We wait.

A point cloud emerges.  
Dots in space will triangulate further.

*Raimund, the gay archivist, is a satellite. Hitchhiking toward his own horizon, I think about the colors that envelop him as he speeds towards it, as it perpetually recedes: hot pink, cyan, orange.*

*His description feels like an invitation.*

There are a handful of places the bike touches me, and I touch the bike. Thumb throttle, palm steer. Thighs hot, foot balance. Handlebars: what is the spread of my arms? The prosthesis reverberates.

The force of my touch is asymmetrical to the amount of force required to slow.

Fossil fuel is life that went dead and then came back around again. In transforming, did it become undead? Alive?

Tongue numb in my spinal cord and bones ringing in my cells.  
Are you ever afraid?

*Sometimes I have to do a body check several times a day like when I was deployed. Then the adrenaline takes over and I usually don't think of it again. moto\_dave.*

*I sometimes say I'm gonna hang it up...which lasts for three months. But, that feeling fades and the itch comes back and I'm back out there. What can you do...its as much fun as it is dangerous. mark\_s.*

*I don't race anymore I just head out to the desert.*

Apollo lands. The potency of jet fuel: how did something so new and fast come from something so old and slow?

*For him, modest and even abject objects are hieroglyphs in whose dark prism social relations lay congealed and in fragments. They are understood as nodes, in which tensions of a historical moment materialize in a flash of awareness or twist grotesquely into the commodity fetish. In this perspective, a thing is never just an object, but a fossil in which a constellation of force is petrified. Things are never just inert objects, passive items,*

*or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged.<sup>1</sup>*

We are already time traveling – so many latent relationships within us. I am also trying to understand modernity's arc towards progress and the future, and the depletion of resources that figures the future into a place that is nearly impossible to live.  
How to figure the fold of the present?

When I read, I'm in communication with someone who wrote 100 years ago, 50 years ago, 200 years ago, and I am connecting with them in their future, which is my present.  
What about things that have not been digested, that linger here and inform the present? Violences or pain inherited, not dealt with. The law of the conservation of matter. Energy cannot be created or destroyed; it simply changes shape. Rather than addressing the pain of guilt, responsibility, and shame following the disgraces and mass criminality of the Nazi period, the Mitscherlichs describe that post-war Germans focused their energies on technology, with charitable progress and gains.<sup>2</sup> The moon landing, inhabiting a different place in American history, also holds a will towards a particular mark and value of progress (technology), global dominance, and an unwillingness towards other forms of progress (social equity, justice, national rehabilitation). Its byproduct produces a mirror or opportunity for reorientation.

The simultaneity of disparate stories in my body.

*High Country News*: the “poor man's cocaine” (meth) delivers a similar euphoric high. Tony was incarcerated for meth use after using for years to get through grueling 12-hour days of oil and gas drilling.

Either you're wired, or you're fired, he says.

*Speed provides the one genuinely modern pleasure.*

*History, Benjamin told us, is a pile of rubble. Only we are not staring at it any longer from the point of view of Benjamin's shell-shocked angel. We are not the angel. We are the rubble. We are this pile of scrap.*

Tumb nongue

Why would a thing be called a tire, because it never stops?  
In the room that is not windowless, but does not really have a window either, Doug and I sit and talk about politics and family.

*Dear James,  
To dusty mouths  
And sore hands  
Surface burns  
And  
Adrenaline exhaust  
It was a great ride*

*love, dean*

1. Walter Benjamin described by Hito Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me,” *eflux 15* (April 2010):<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me>.

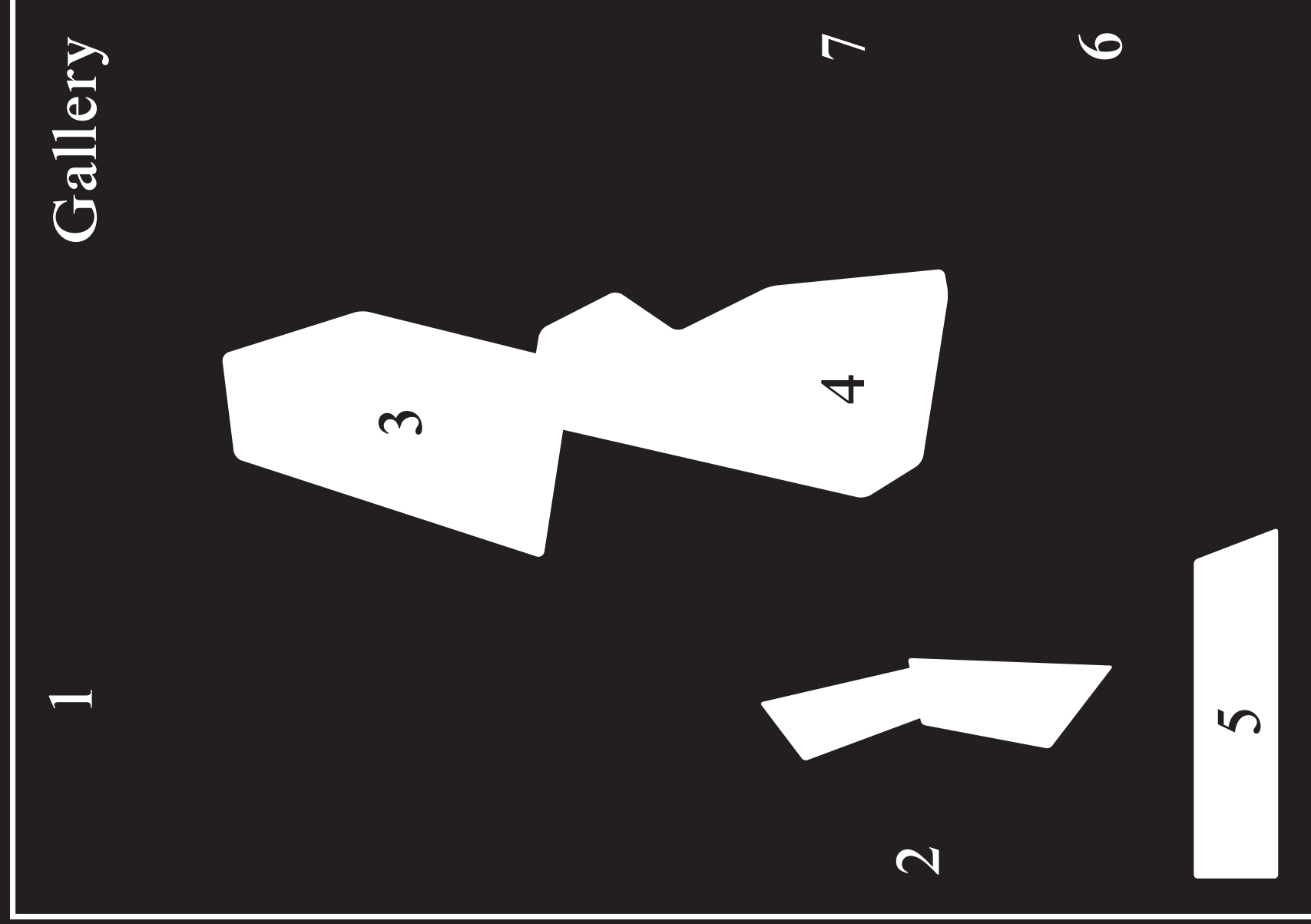
2. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn* (New York: Grove Press, 1984).

3. Aldous Huxley, “Wanted, a New Pleasure,” (1931) in *Music at Night and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), 162–8.

4. Hito Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me.”

# Hallway

13  
12  
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8



## Gallery

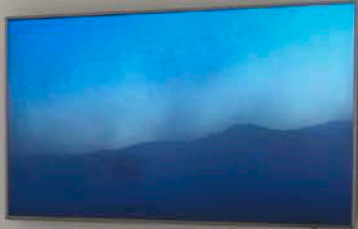
- 1 *Untitled (Sand)*, 2020  
Video, sound, 7 min.
- 2 *Glass*, 2020  
Video, sound, 28 min.
- 3 *Parts*, 2020  
Front Tire (Right). Glass, hot blow mold, 21 in. diameter × 9 in. high.  
Front Tire (Left). Glass, hot blow mold, 21 in. diameter × 9 in. high.  
Battery. Glass, hollow-core kiln cast, 5 × 5 × 3.5 in.  
Grill. Glass, slump cast, 10 × 13.5 × 3.5 in.

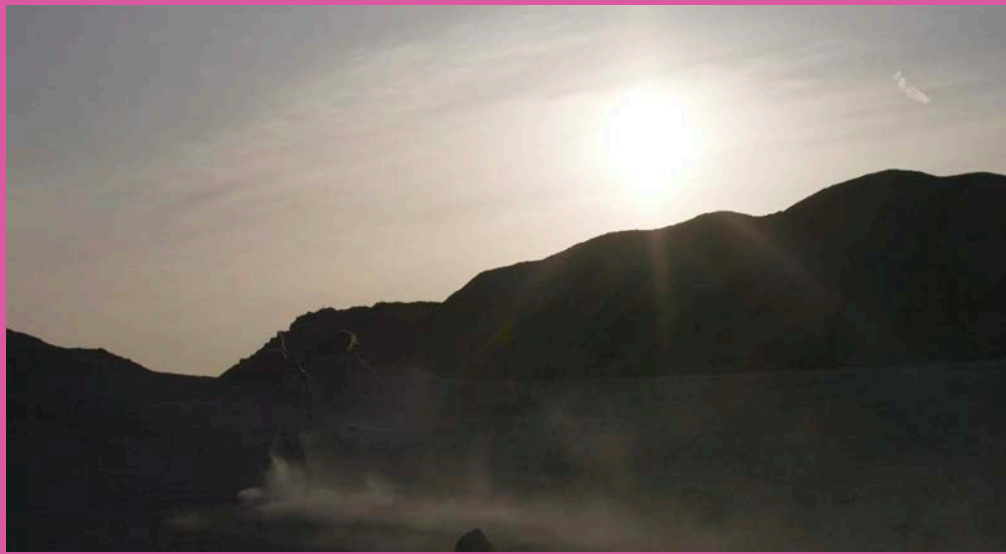
- 4 *Untitled*, 2020  
Unique glass amassed by fire, dimensions variable.
- 5 *Untitled (Phytochemicals)*, 2020  
Ephedrine Installation: Modified glass vessels, Ephedra sinica (Ma Huang), Ephedra distachya, Sida cordifolia (Bala), Pinellia ternata (Ban Xia), soil, desert sand, rock.  
6 *Untitled (Dig)*, 2020  
Video, sound, 1:33 min.
- 7 *Untitled (37)*, 2020  
Scan of unique glass object.  
Giclée print, 48 × 65 in.
- 8 *Untitled (37)*, 2020  
Scan of unique glass object.  
Giclée print, 36 × 52 in.
- 9 *Untitled (2)*, 2020  
Scan of unique glass object.  
Giclée print, 24 × 36 in.
- 10 *Untitled (3)*, 2020  
Scan of unique glass object.  
Giclée print, 24 × 36 in.
- 11 *Untitled (40)*, 2020  
Scan of unique glass object.  
Giclée print, 24 × 36 in.
- 12 *Untitled (43)*, 2020  
Scan of unique glass object.  
Giclée print, 24 × 36 in.
- 13 *Donut*, 2008  
Video, sound, 7 min.

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Giclée print, 24 × 36 in.
- 13 *Donut*, 2008  
Video, sound, 7 min.

The young soldier, though, needed more of the drug, much more. He was exhausted by the war, becoming cold and apathetic, completely without interests, as he himself observed.





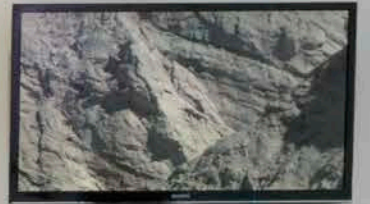
*Untitled (Sand)*, 2020  
Video, sound, 7 min.



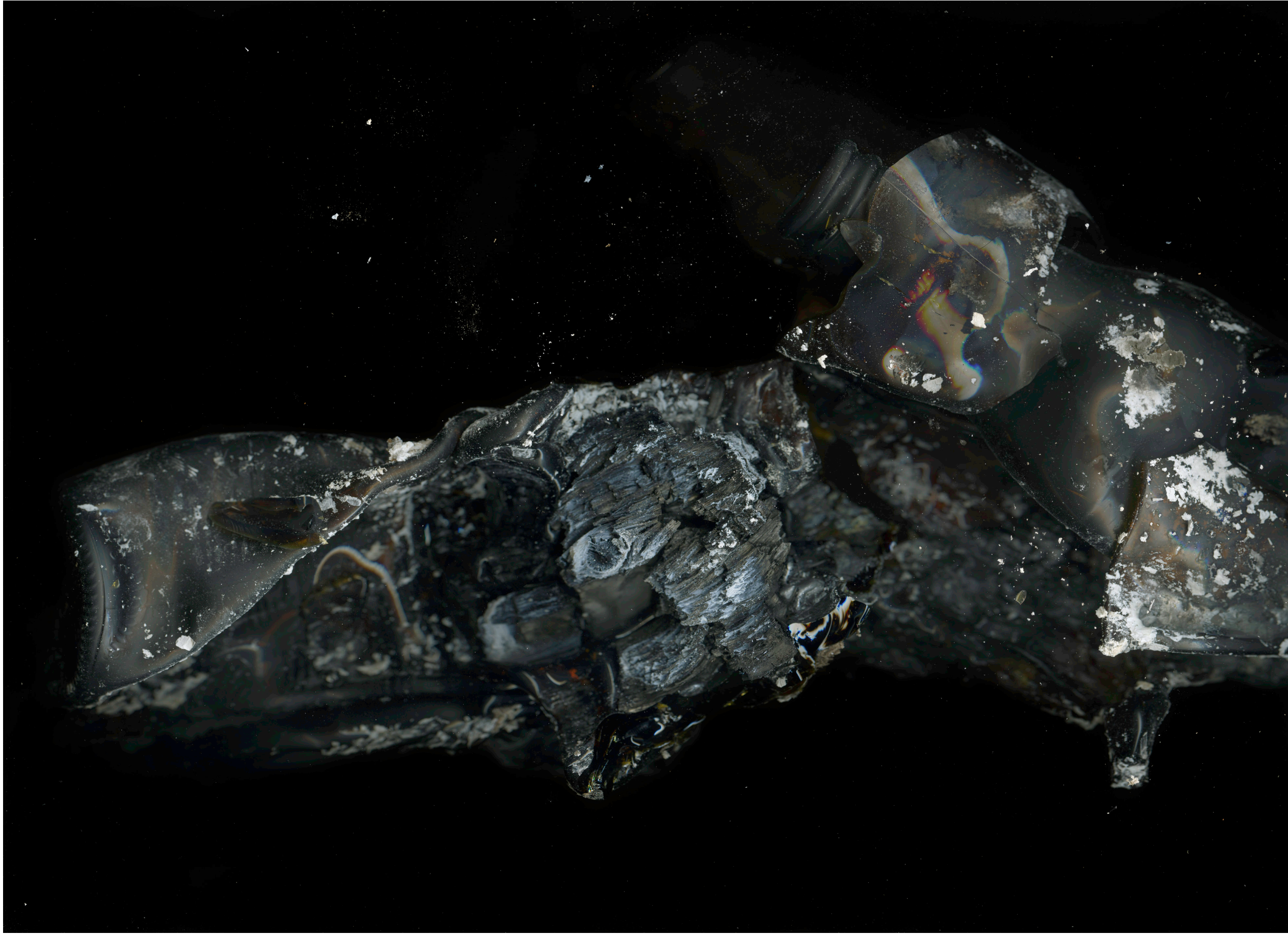




**The Science of the Glass**  
The glass is a non-crystalline solid, a state of matter that is intermediate between a liquid and a solid. It is formed by cooling a liquid so rapidly that the atoms do not have time to arrange themselves into a regular, crystalline lattice. This process is called vitrification. The resulting glass is a disordered network of atoms, which gives it its characteristic transparency and brittleness. The glass is a unique material with a wide range of applications, from optical fibers to architectural glass. The glass is a non-crystalline solid, a state of matter that is intermediate between a liquid and a solid. It is formed by cooling a liquid so rapidly that the atoms do not have time to arrange themselves into a regular, crystalline lattice. This process is called vitrification. The resulting glass is a disordered network of atoms, which gives it its characteristic transparency and brittleness. The glass is a unique material with a wide range of applications, from optical fibers to architectural glass.



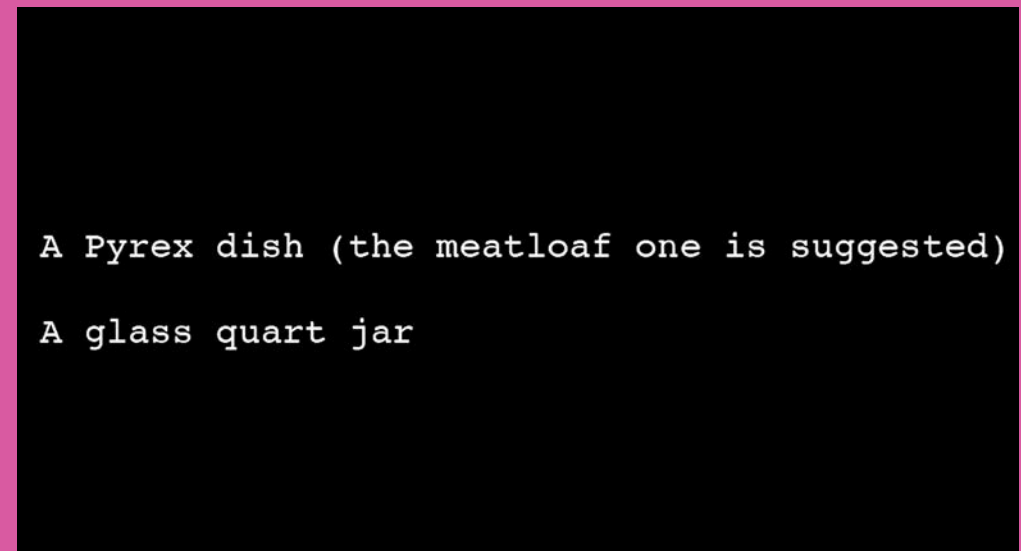
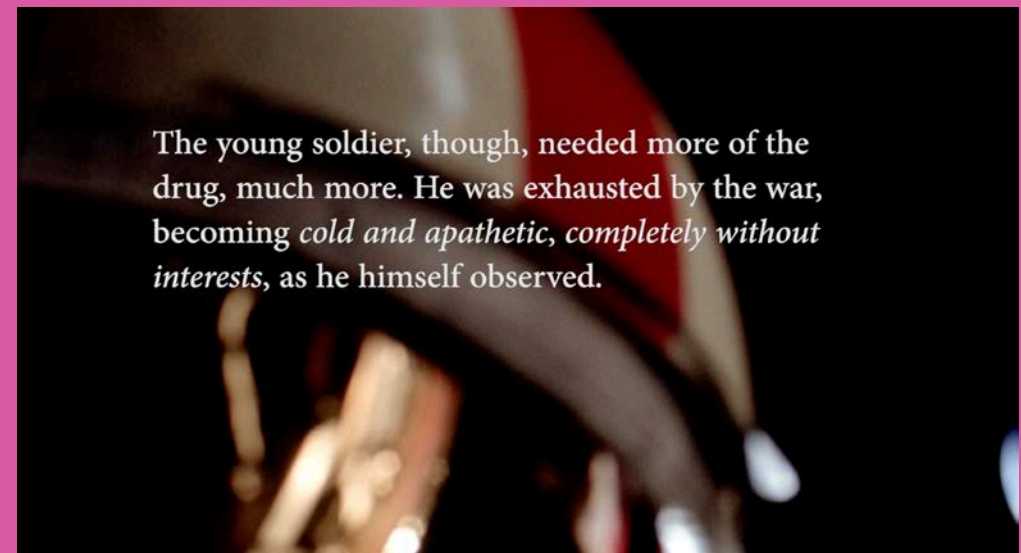
A long, low wooden table with a light-colored top and dark legs, serving as a display platform for various scientific specimens. On the table, there are two large, clear, textured glass rings, several small, dark, crystalline structures, and a small, clear plastic container. To the right of the table, a small, clear glass jar contains a young plant seedling in soil. In the foreground, two more glass jars are visible, one containing a small plant seedling and the other containing a dark, granular substance. The floor is a light-colored, hexagonal tile pattern, and the background features a large, dark, rectangular opening in the wall, possibly a doorway or a large window.



*Untitled (37), 2020*  
Scan of unique glass object. Giclée print, 48 × 65 in.







*Glass*, 2020  
Video, sound, 28 min.



*I am sweating so I open the window. The plants on the radiator near the windowsill quiver in the breeze. They like it warm and dusty, and would be happiest near a footpath in the desert, but they survive in my apartment where the heat has only one setting: on. They have journeyed from warmer climates, and are preparing to settle into their next habitat, as participants in Dean Erdmann's And, Apollo: A Laboratory.*

*Ephedra sinica* is a spindly, pine-scented shrub that grows along faces of mountains, spreading on the edges of desert landscapes from East Asia to Northern China. It originates in these regions, and is also known as a popular traditional Chinese medicinal supplement, *Ma Huang*; some believe that it has been cultivated longer than any other herbaceous plant in the world.<sup>1</sup> Pollen from an *Ephedra* plant was found in the Shanidar cave of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, where the remains of Neanderthals over 60,000 years old were discovered to have been buried alongside other long-valued medicinal plants.<sup>2</sup>

*Ephedra sinica* has been used medicinally for the treatment of asthma, lung disorders, fevers, colds, and headaches, and contains phytochemicals that include significant amounts of ephedrine, a stimulant. It is prepared by boiling the stems in water, and is consumed as a tea.<sup>3</sup> Upon consuming *Ephedra*, the body reacts similarly to when it is pumped with adrenaline; increased blood pressure and constricted blood vessels resulting in euphoria, enhanced cognitive abilities or awakening, and weight loss. Ephedrine is an alkaloid, a term derived from the Arabic “al-qalwī” or “ashes of plants.” Plants high in alkaloids are powerful substances with pharmacolog-

ical uses. These alkaloid-rich plants have been captured, cultivated, commodified, and traded throughout the world for centuries. Crops like *Coffea arabica* (coffee) and *Erythroxylum coca* (cocaine) are some of the most highly valued plants with alkaloids.

First isolated from the *Ephedra sinica* plant in 1885 by Japanese chemist Nagai Nagayoshi, ephedrine would later be synthesized with pseudoephedrine to create methamphetamine, a highly addictive central-nervous-system stimulant. Nagayoshi and fellow researchers found that the “crystalline material recognizable to the naked eye coexisting in the blackish brown essence extracted from wild ma huang<sup>4</sup>... was too toxic to the body's circulation to be used...”<sup>5</sup> For thirty years after these experiments, this research lie dormant. In the United States in 2006, the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act restricted purchases of more than 3.6 grams per day of substances containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which included over-the-counter decongestants Claritin D, Zyrtec D and Sudafed, also requiring photo identification and a signature in a log book for the purchase of these household drugs.<sup>6</sup>

*I am drinking coffee. It is Monday, and the light beams through the open window. I water the plants, watching as the liquid drains. There is a patch of uncultivated dormant Jimson weed (Datura stramonium) that once thrived in a tree pit just outside the window. There are no living trees in the patch, but there are several dead trees piled, where residents also dump their household trash. The places where wild plants thrive in New York City tend to also be where trash collects.*

*Ephedra sinica* has been an “ignored and nearly worthless mountain shrub” in the

southwestern Bakwa province of Afghanistan until recently. Since the widespread bombings by the U.S. military in 2018 that destroyed opium labs throughout the region, the plant, here known as *oman*, has been harvested and gathered to produce crystal methamphetamine or “*sheesha*”—a name given due to denote its ‘glass’-like shards that are crushed and smoked or injected.”<sup>7</sup> According to one of the plant gatherers, “It has grown in the mountains for a very long time... No one cares for it, people just go to the mountains during harvest time... In one season I can collect up to 99 lbs in one day.”<sup>8</sup>

In recent American history, outdoor labs where people “cook” methamphetamines appear in the Mojave National Preserve, along dusty hillside trails littered with trash including empty containers of drugs containing pseudoephedrine.<sup>9</sup> These sites are categorized by what is left behind; toxic chemicals are accumulated and abandoned in the landscape, polluting soil and contaminating groundwater. Global desertification or the loss of fertile soil due to poor land management, overfarming, and deforestation, constitutes a major threat to life on earth—according to the United Nations, “every year, 75 billion tons of fertile soil is lost to land degradation.”<sup>10</sup> As a growing number of regions experience desert-like conditions,<sup>11</sup> we might benefit from acknowledging the plants thriving in these harsh conditions—amidst lifeless soil and detritus produced by humans.

*Sida cordifolia arrives in January. Each pot is wrapped in plastic bags, with drops of condensation and miniature yellow flowers emerging on the plants inside. I rinse each one in the kitchen sink. Caring for plants that are weeds—and would grow easily if left in the right habitat—feels akin to encouraging an invasive plant revolution. These plants have migrated from their places of origin, and bring new life to our shifting ecological networks. Perhaps they can contribute a mutually affective glow within the murky spectrum of co-mingling that emerges as “nature” is recognized as “culture”.*

A pervasive shrub that originates in India, *Sida cordifolia* grows in sandy soils near agricultural disturbances, and is an invasive weed in the United States. *Sida* is used as an herbal supplement called *bala*

(strength in Sanskrit) which has been valued in Ayurvedic medicine for thousands of years for its aphrodisiac properties, in the treatment of asthma, to boost physical and cognitive abilities, and for weight loss.<sup>12</sup> The plant was a component of *Herbal Ecstasy*, a popular supplement in the 1990s, “designed to expand people's consciousness by giving them access to another dimension,” according to Iranian-American filmmaker and herbalist Shaahin Cheyene. Cheyene ran a multimillion-dollar company producing *Herbal Ecstasy* until 2004 when the United States Food and Drug Administration banned all products containing ephedrine.<sup>13</sup>

*Plants that grow like weeds have queer tendencies: they are strange, out of place, spoiling or ruining pristine landscapes. These plants hold spaces in-between brownfields and farms, cultivated lawns and asphalt streetscapes, accumulating knowledge of resilience and regeneration amidst a changing climate. Weeds travel by any means necessary to gather in new enclaves—wherever they find the conditions to live.*

*Pinellia ternata*, also known as herbal supplement ban xia, originates in China, Japan, Korea, and now grows in parts of Europe, California, and North America where it is considered invasive. It can be found along roadsides, growing in disturbed soil, and in New York City, it thrives near the untended edges of gardens alongside fellow volunteer plants. Its roots are tubers that are toxic when raw, containing high levels of ephedrine and calcium oxalate, which upon consuming, “make the mouth and digestive tract feel as though hundreds of needles are being stuck into it.”<sup>14</sup> When prepared properly, the root is a powerful remedy with warming, drying properties, used in Traditional Chinese Medicine to treat nausea, vomiting, coughs and mucus. Along with its activating and warming properties, it is also a sedative, calming the nervous system. Several studies cite ban xia as a synergistic element in herbal antidepressant formulas.<sup>15</sup>

*I am handling the stem of Pinellia ternata, as it reaches for the last bits of sun and begins to flower. I insert a small wooden stick into the soil, and gently lean the stem of the plant against it. Interactions that involve humans touching living plants produce calming*

effects on human physiology.<sup>16</sup> Plants high in alkaloids contain a power that startlingly juxtaposes these effects when ingested in the human body. This disambiguation may be likened to the difference between how one might experience living plants, and the effects upon consumption of plant-based extractions without contextual understanding of their origins.

Marisa Prefer helps to facilitate relationships between plants and people and helped to grow the flora for And, Apollo: A Laboratory.

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Towards the end of *Untitled (Sand)* (2020), a meditative, almost hallucinatory video, bodies appear, three of them, defined by the very dust their feet kick up as they frantically move across the screen. Conjured by sand, wind, and sound, these figures materialize on screen as sculptural images. The desert where Dean Erdmann grew up is the backdrop for this video, and it underscores the exploration of speed, technology, and time in their first New York solo exhibition, *And, Apollo: A Laboratory*. The desert is also characterized by both constant change at the surface level and a static, deep time quality. The possibility of being able to experience self and body as governed by this geological time/space stands in contrast to the sociocultural time/space that governs the desert and its subcultures. In the expanse of the desert, gender, class, and identity become less determined. They are replaced by a shared temporary presence and sensory experience, while limitless narratives of being emerge, as does a terrain of queered bodies.

In a second video, *Untitled (Dig)* (2020), a woman softly digs around a mound of rocks in the desert until a molten mass of glass appears. Detritus from beer bottles thrown into bonfires after recreational ATV (all-terrain vehicle) rides across California's Anza-Borrego Desert; the colored glass has lost its translucency to become condensed cultural sediment from working-class, rural white American communities. Exhibited in the gallery as artifacts, these glass objects recall the social aspects and space of these desert bonfires—a space that is replicated in the seating arrangement of a third video in the gallery, *Glass*. For Erdmann, these and other “sculptural images” are parts from

which new objects can be built, “capable of strategically retrieving both reactionary horrors and fleetingly queer ephemerality from the otherwise sequestered terrain of the working-class desert.”<sup>1</sup>

Glass is derived from heating at extremely high temperatures the chemical compound silica (silicon dioxide, or quartz), the primary constituent of sand. In the deserts of the American Southwest, where nuclear testing was carried out during WWII, the blast heat transformed sand into atomic glass. A preferred site of military testing, war, and planetary violence, the desert is also connected to the military's invention and use of crystal meth, also known as “glass,” which today ravages many American poor and white communities. Alongside voice and screen logs from Apollo's space command and the history of the military's development and use of methamphetamines, *Glass* (2020) recounts a family member's experience with meth and other drug addictions and recovery. First developed by Japanese chemists in Berlin in 1893 and later refined in 1919, meth was used in pill form by German and Japanese militaries during WWII. Sold as Pervitin and nicknamed Tank Chocolate or Pilot's Salt by German soldiers, while Japanese soldiers called it Hiropon, which is roughly translated as “love of work,” the miracle drug could keep tired pilots alert and an entire military euphoric. It was the ideal war drug. *Glass* includes German World War II soldier and writer Heinrich Böll's letters home asking for more Pervitin as he grew cold and apathetic to the war.

After its military use, crystal meth found a consumer market in the postwar period. Beginning in the 1960s, it was sold

up and down the West Coast by the Hells Angels, a motorcycle club started by WWII war veterans, likely named after Howard Hughes' *Hell's Angels* movie about WWI fighter pilots. The first chapter of the Hells Angels motorcycle club, the Berdoo chapter, started in San Bernardino, California, in 1948, the same county where the artist grew up. Here meth was nicknamed Bikers Coffee. When used recreationally, meth is known as “speed” or “ice.” The subcultural thrill of speed, of riding motorcycles and ATV's—the sound of which punctuates *Untitled (Sand)*, together with its material remnants—is also manifest in the gallery through glass cast sculptures of parts of an ATV, a technological descendant of the moon buggy. Glass tires, battery, grill, ignition switch, handlebars, air filters and so on occupy the center of the gallery. According to their method of casting, they have varying surfaces or qualities, from the translucent and reflective to the more opaque and frosty. This echoes the aforementioned “ice” and “crystal.” It also refers to the different states of water, from clear glass-like liquid to frosted ice, which for the artist also connects to the idea of deep time: the California desert was formerly oceans and may well return to that condition as the acceleration of speed and technological production impacts the planet's climate and the ice caps' melt.

Under the glow of grow lights, plants containing ephedrine grow in glass receptacles in the gallery. Most significant among them is *Ephedra sinica* or *Ma Huang*, a bushy, evergreen plant that grows in Central Asia, as well as North America, first used to synthesize methamphetamine from the ephedrine found in it. The recipe for how to make meth, listing lab equipment and chemical ingredients, is audible throughout the space. “A laboratory” in the title refers both to the suggested meth-lab and Erdmann's in-progress research project, of which this exhibition is only a part. The larger project probes wartime cultures, the space race, speed, technology, and xenophobia. Taking an archival approach to the artist's white, working-class family history, it also encompasses a trove of family letters sympathetic to the Nazi regime that was sent to relatives in Germany and recently found by Erdmann.

Although reactionary and rural sub-cultures are often thought to be isolated and inward-looking, politically conservative working-class communities have always been global in their networks. Erdmann draws out connections between them through a shared pursuit of speed, be it in the shape of (space) travel velocity or that of cheap stimulant use, legacies of war and imperial conquest, or both. Looking at the highs of nationalism and technological advancement of the last century and the highs of hallucinatory substances, Erdmann asks us to consider if our current moment of social and political crises isn't the comedown or crash. What comes after—Erdmann's project includes work with the archive and archivists of the Magnus Hirschfeld Society in Berlin, who are actively recuperating the history (and oppression) of sexuality and sexual science—is a commitment to reparative histories and the construction of alternative repositories for histories and reorientation for the future. Taking a long view of our current political landscape and rising illiberalism, Erdmann generates new materialities, images, and meditative and queer experiences that allow for the kind of transformative, recuperative and sensorial responses we may be lacking in facing such fast-coming urgencies.

*Eriola Pira is Curator at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics.*

1. Dean Erdmann, Parsons Fine Arts Visiting Artists Lecture, The New School, New York, September 11, 2019.

Dean Erdmann  
2018–2020 Vera List Center Fellow

Dean Erdmann completed their MFA at UC San Diego (2008). They received a CCI Completion Grant (2012), CCF Emerging Artist Fellowship (Los Angeles, 2013), Vera List Center for Art and Politics Fellowship (2018–2020), Urban Glass Artist Fellowship (2019). Erdmann’s work has been exhibited at ONE Archive (Los Angeles), 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art (Kanazawa, Japan), REDCAT (Los Angeles), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), the Images Festival (Toronto), and the MexiCali Biennial (San Bernardino) among many other locations. Their Los Angeles Metro artwork commissioned for Crenshaw/LAX Line project opens later in 2020. A genderqueer artist who grew up in a small desert town, Dean Erdmann currently lives and works between Los Angeles and New York.

#### Vera List Center Fellowship

The Vera List Center Fellowships support exceptional artists at a critical moment of their career, who undertake ambitious projects that advance art as a vital tool for social and political agency. The appointments provide the opportunity to develop a project drawing from the resources of The New School, to expand on it in collaboration with students and faculty, and to bring it to the public through the Vera List Center’s interdisciplinary public programs.

The Vera List Center Fellows are part of the intellectual foundation of the Center. With their fellowship projects, they advance the understanding of the intersection between art and politics, in relation to the Center’s biennial focus theme.

Past fellows include Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Maurice Berger, Wendy T. Ewald, Andrea Geyer, Casey Gollan, Margarita Gutman, Susan Hapgood, Sharon Hayes, Danny Hoch, Ashley Hunt, Bouchra Khalili, Lin + Lam, Jill Magid, Kobena Mercer, Lorraine O’Grady, Olu Oguibe, Silvana Paternostro, Wendy Perron, Marjetica Potrc, Leslie Prosterman, Alexander Provan, Walid Raad, Sarah Rothenberg, Edward Rothstein, Katya Sander, Robert Sember, Joshua Simon, Victoria Sobel, Elisabeth Sussman, David Thorne, and Jonathan Weinberg. The 2018–2020 Vera List Center Fellows are Dean Erdmann and Helene Kazan.

#### Vera List Center for Art and Politics

Established at The New School in 1992, the Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a research center and a public forum for art, culture and politics. Through public programs, classes, prizes, fellowships, publications, and exhibitions focusing on a biennial research theme, the Vera List Center champions the arts as expressions of the political moments from which they emerge, considers the intersection between art and politics as a space where new forms of civic engagement must be developed, and fosters a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policy makers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change.

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New York

The exhibition is accompanied by the following program:

*Queer Archives:  
Between the Individual and the Institutional*  
January 27, 2020  
Theresa Lang Community and Student Center  
The New School

A conversation with artists Dean Erdmann, Tiona Nekkia McClodden, Carlos Motta, and scholar Shannon Mattern, moderated by Christiane Paul.

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