



Window Dressing

by

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Sculpture

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Window Dressing is an exhibition that makes a public display of systemic privilege with a particularly careful eye to the way privilege is constructed, maintained and perpetuated by systems. Privilege is made material in the space of the gallery through the use of 'display' as a controlling metaphor.

Systemic privilege is difficult to conceptualize for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most significant struggle is in coming to terms with the ways individuals are affected by privilege, and, what is more, benefit from it. Likely these benefits come in subtle ways that are uncomfortable to reconcile to perceptions of the self. Privilege is the product of an individual's situatedness in race, class, gender, ability¹. It is a series of power dynamics that intermingle and cumulatively affect the lived experience.

Consistently having conversations about privilege means coming to terms with questions such as: "How do you benefit from privilege? What does it look like in your life?" These are, in some ways impossible questions. As privilege is systemic, many of its damaging features are invisible, affecting everyday lived experiences in very subtle ways. I could, of course, look to Peggy McIntosh's writing and understand manifestations of privilege in the ways "I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race," or "I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group"². But what is more significant is recognizing that the systemic is enmeshed in society. Privilege is not a separate thing, outside of culture and norms. Privilege is an everyday process.

A useful framework to come to terms with the ways systemic privilege manifests racism, sexism or other un-savouries is in linguist George Lakoff's distinction between direct causation and systemic causation. In direct causation, there is a relatively simple cause and effect relationship, like when you push a button and the doorbell rings. There is "One agent. One entity affected. One action performed freely (using free will)"³. In contrast to this, systemic causation comes through a complex system with inter-animating components. Rather than understanding poverty, for instance, as a lack of ambition (direct causation) poverty should be seen as the product of a complex system: "Early cultural experience (a complex system) may systematically cause your

¹ These are only the most frequently referenced manifestations of privilege. Other types of privilege can exist, like privilege that comes through education or language. What's more, these categories can be further broken down. For instance, class privilege involves both economic class and social class.

² Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Independent School*, Winter (1990): 31–36.

³ Lakoff, George. *Whose freedom? : The Battle Over America's Most Important Idea*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 112.

brain to be shaped so that you cannot function in an educational or professional environment”⁴. This is to say, social issues like poverty are not the product of a simple, easily articulated cause. They come through systemic systems.

In Lakoff’s formulation of systemic causation, what is systemic involves a significant amount of time⁵. This contrasts direct causation which relates to an event. Robin DiAngelo clarifies systemic racism in a way that easily maps onto Lakoff’s terminology: “Although mainstream definitions of racism are typically some variation of individual “race prejudice”, which anyone of any race can have, Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color”⁶. Rather than direct causation (the racist slur, the misogynist violence, an event that occurs in a moment), systemic causation is always happening in the present moment through complex systems.

The objects and images presented in *Window Dressing* emphasize the systemic nature of privilege. Using conventions of display in more and less literal ways, the objects on display are highlighted in such a way that the systems, structures and supports that make that object’s position possible are also acknowledged. Each composition connects to and interacts with the architecture of the gallery, situating the work in a larger context. This parallels the way that discreet manifestations of privilege do not come about through a direct cause, but rather are the product of systemic infrastructure which upholds and maintains the possibility for privilege

In *A Centred Perspective*, as a case in point, there are objects facing out the gallery’s front window. Compositionally this situates the people outside passing by in a way that recalls the experience of a store-front window. From inside the gallery the viewer is given limited access to the rather superficial objects on display, but are instead confronted with a system of pipes, cumulatively creating a support structure for display cases. The objects on display become increasingly insubstantial when considered next to the infrastructure that constitutes the presentation of objects.

Window Dressing is an exhibit that uses unconventional metaphors for specific political questions. This approach disrupts taken for granted conclusions and easy answers to systemic problems. Here, the problematics of privilege are explored materially.

⁴ Ibid. 117.

⁵ Ibid. 112.

⁶ DiAngelo, Robin. “White Fragility,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, Vol 3.3 (2011): 56.

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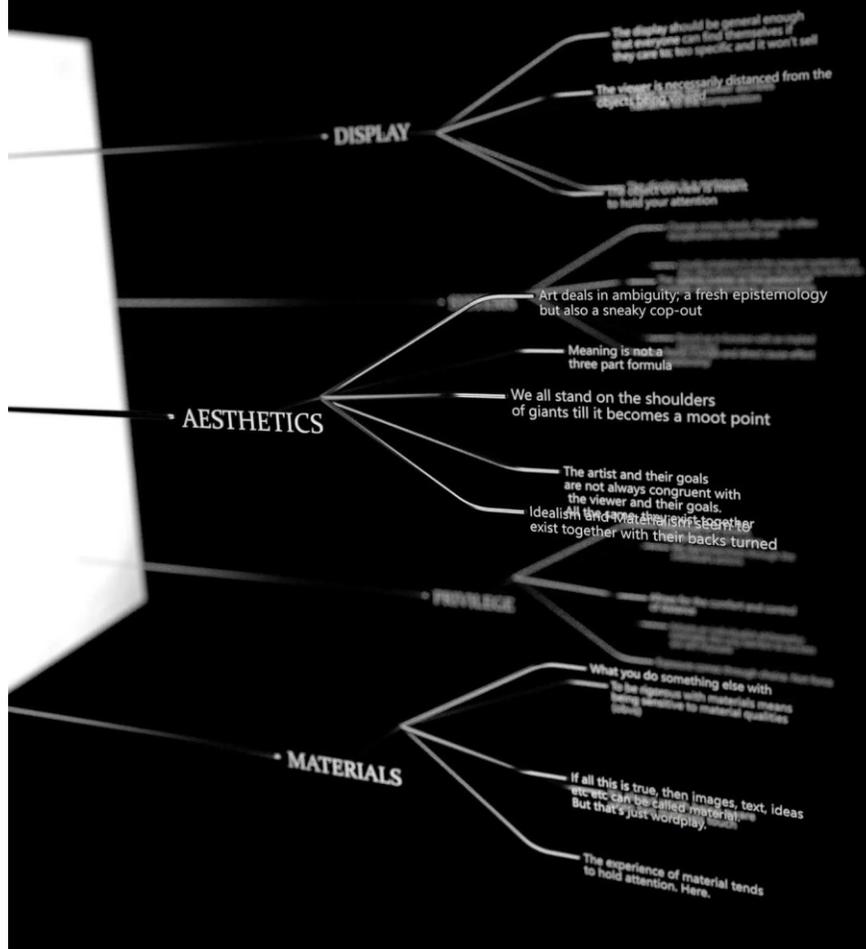
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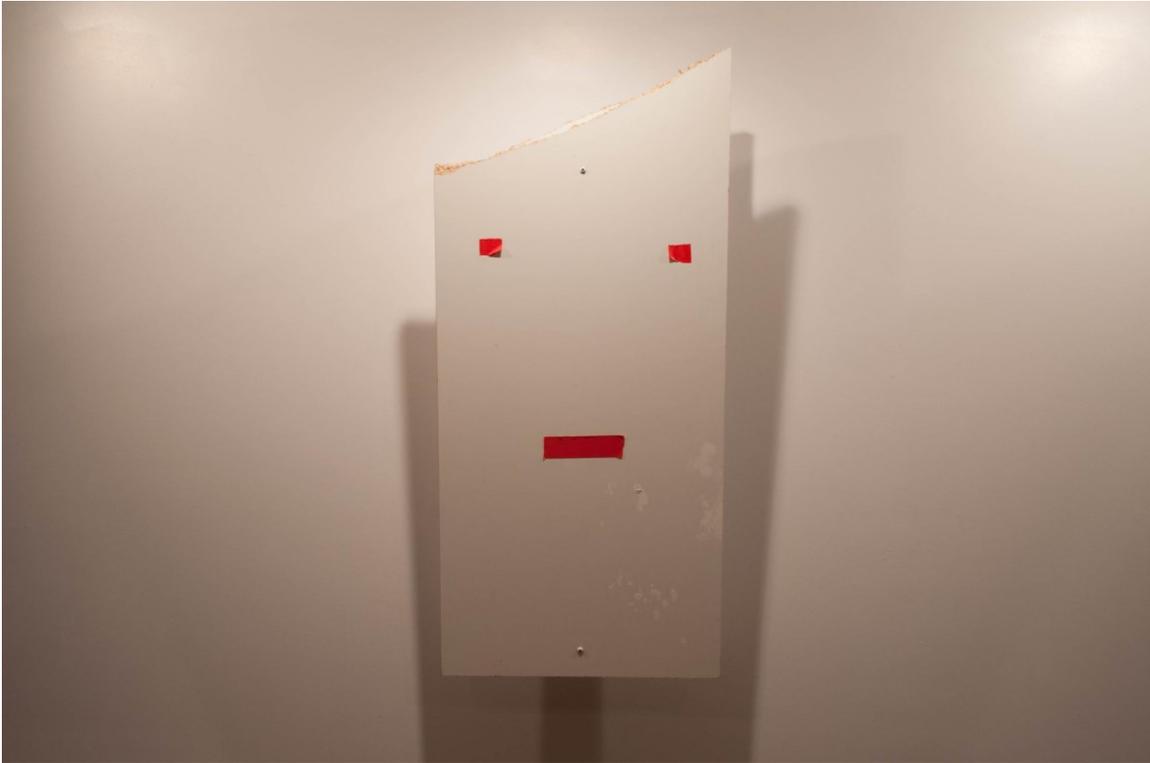
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In this exhibit, discrete concepts are brought together to inform and interanimate each other. Display, Systems, Privilege, Material and Aesthetics overlap and animate the experience of the gallery space. In acknowledgement of the viewer's agency, any of these factors could be used as a starting point to add depth and nuance to the experience of the other components. For instance, starting with the materials present in the gallery, considering their juxtapositions and points of connection, it is possible to foster a deeper sense of how systems work to fulfill a purpose. Systems could then be used to gain leverage into the workings of privilege and the ways that it is, in fact, systemic. In order to preserve the complications of these themes, here a few facets of each theme are shown existing spatially, moving in and out of focus.



McLachlan_001 Artist Statement, 2017, Film Still



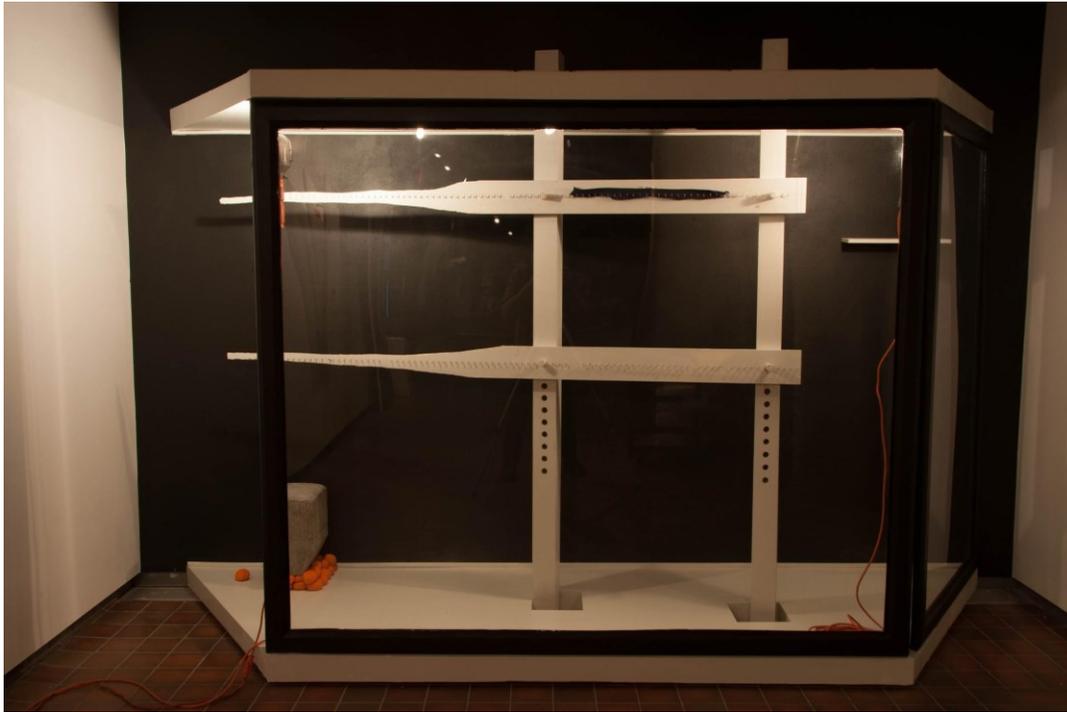
McLachlan_002 mood rn (portrait of artist), 2017, melamine, duct tape, 7" screws, dry erase marker, 24"x48"



McLachlan_003 mood rn (portrait of artist), 2017, melamine, duct tape, 7" screws, dry erase marker, 24"x48"



McLachlan_004 mood rn (portrait of artist), 2017, melamine, duct tape, 7" screws, dry erase marker, 24"x48"



McLachlan_005 **A Tenter With Hooks**, 2017, Wood, tenterhooks, plexiglass, drywall, concrete, stress balls, 24"x48"



McLachlan_006 **A Tenter With Hooks**, 2017, Wood, tenterhooks, plexiglass, drywall, concrete, stress balls, 24"x48"



McLachlan_007 **The Void**, 2017, found cart, wine making bucket, broken wheelbarrow, blue paint, 30"x 48"x36"



McLachlan_008 **The Void**, 2017, found cart, wine making bucket, broken wheelbarrow, blue paint, 30"x 48"x36"



McLachlan_009 **A Centred Perspective**, 2016, mixed media, variable dimension



McLachlan_010 **A Centred Perspective**, 2016, mixed media, variable dimension



McLachlan_011 **A Centred Perspective**, 2016, mixed media, variable dimension



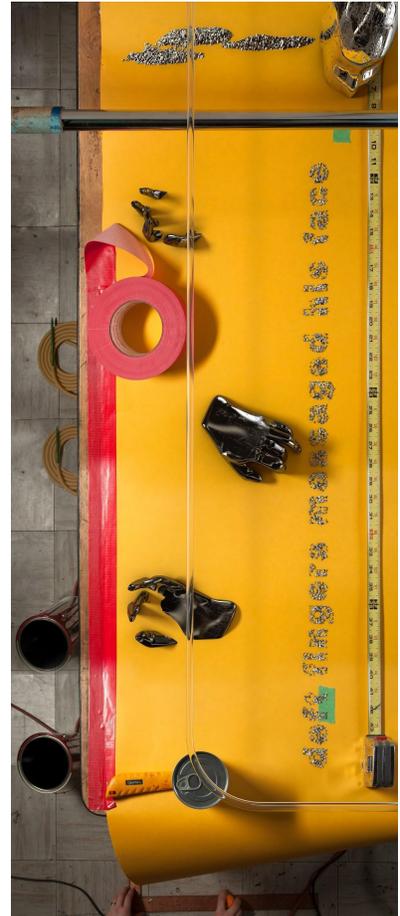
McLachlan_012 **Insulation Isolation**, 2016, mixed media, variable dimension



McLachlan_013 **Affections**,
2017, Photo, 14.25"x33"



McLachlan_014 **A Part**, 2017,
Photo, 14.25"x33"



McLachlan_015 **Deftly**, 2017,
Photo, 14.25"x33"



McLachlan_016 **Installation Shot**



McLachlan_017 **Weatherman**, 2017, mixed media, video, dimensions variable



McLachlan_018 **Weatherman**, 2017, mixed media, video, dimensions variable



McLachlan_019 **Weatherman**, 2017, mixed media, video, dimensions variable

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