

Catriona Jeffries

*Slow Looking*

Devon Knowles  
Liz Larner

in correspondence

February 19–  
March 5, 2025

Vancouver

*As part of Slow Looking, the gallery has invited selected participating artists to be in correspondence with one another. The following is a conversation between Liz Larner and Devon Knowles, which transpired between February 19–March 5, 2025.*



Devon Knowles, Clémence de La Tour du Pin, Nairy Baghramian, James Carl, Ellen Neel, Matt Browning, Liz Larner, installation view, *Slow Looking*, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver, 2025. Photo: Rachel Topham Photography

**DEVON KNOWLES:** During my flight back home, I’ve been thinking of the show, our work, this writing exchange, and what I might approach here. The header of my notes app has “Body and Support” as the saved topic and I’d like to use this as a thread to begin this conversation and its intersection with what frames the exhibition.

When I was younger, I participated in a lot of competitive sports and music. Naturally there was a lot of training where you build up a muscle memory, so you were able to perform complex feats without struggle—including complicated compositions, shaping volume and space, spinning, jumping or moving with extreme speeds. Across these varied activities, there was always a revealed moment when I felt or observed myself completing the impossible within an exacting moment.

In the work you presented in *Slow Looking*, I sensed similar complex feats, but they sat in an unknown origin. I see and feel the lift, flip, or point of contact that offers the anti-gravitational move, but the force(s) that drives or “trains them” is invisible to me—it’s a joyful moment! I consider this invisibility as a divider or partition which affords me a distance from the arena of practice and opens to an area where I can witness these

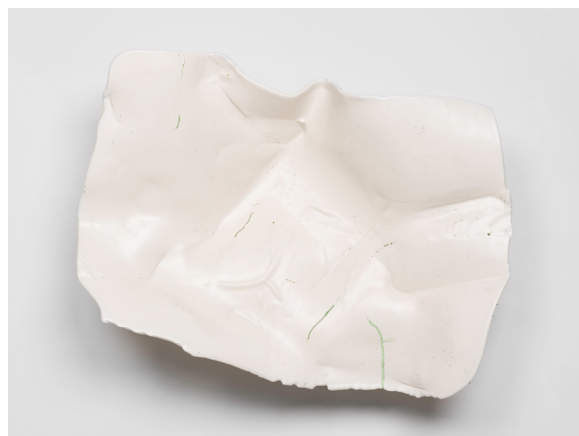
controlled feats without interruption.

Where I get curious is how colour operates for you, particularly within the nearly-all-white in *green granted*, the dense black in *dark*, secret joy and the mottled combination of grey, green, white, and brown in *Liken*. Are these colours used to bring focus to form and not the work's formation? Or is the choice something more intuitive?

**LIZ LARNER:** I can run with “Body and Support” for now, I hope I don’t ruin the sense of unknown origin, but I probably will with what follows. Body and Support gets at something that is at issue with all my artworks in *Slow Looking*. Through these wall objects, I feel that I’m trying to supplant the distinction that arises in sculpture and with objects on the wall. Sometimes Support is referred to as the mount. Mounts are often cleverly, and therefore intentionally, hidden. The distinction between Body and Support, mount and object, in both *dark*, *secret joy* and *green granted* is complicated by a few things, but to name only two: the relationship of the touch points of what I call the ‘legs’ of the ceramic (that are in some respect another form of Support), and the high-polished metal they are attached to, which determines the shape of the metal wall plate.

In both works, I want to show and include the mount or Support in the perception of the object, and in this way perplex the notion of function and grow the meaning of Support. The polished metal allows the back of the work to be seen, and, at the same time, creates illusion—bringing the space around the object onto the same plane, as the reflection of the backside of the ceramic is now visible. The move to this iteration of support came from the very straight forward angle bracket, which I have been using on the ceramic slab works for a number of years now.

In these works (*Liken* being one) there is a definite distinction between the choice for the supporting bracket and the ceramic Body. This Support is as simple and matter of fact as I could make it. It’s not hidden, which allows a heavy thing to be on the wall without illusion. Simple, effective, obvious. So much so that I doubt anyone ever thinks about the fact that if I don’t have an angle bracket on the bottom leg, it must be slightly longer than the top leg. This creates a form of bracing that is also a form of Support, as



Liz Lerner, *green granted*, 2024, ceramic, ceramic glaze, high polish aluminum, enamel paint, 27 x 30 x 12 in. (69 x 76 x 29 cm)



it pushes the top leg onto the bottom horizontal extension of the top angle, that then attaches it to the wall. There may be some subtle athleticism there, as it's all straight-forwardly physical. This straight-forwardness may let a viewer sense the ceramic floating on the wall and that it still seems heavy, making some space for contradictions, or maybe complications? There is probably a better word for this.

Liz Larner, *Liken*, 2020, ceramic, glaze, 19 x 26 x 11 in.  
(49 x 66 x 27 cm)

I didn't get to the colour part of your question yet. I will though, but I would like to bring up a question for you first on material, repetition of pattern, title of

works, and how you engage in these. In particular, I'm thinking between the two works in separate rooms; *Not Wholly Itself* and *Self-Presence*. I think it would be interesting to hear your thoughts on/of colour in these two works, and otherwise if you'd like.

**DK:** Nothing "unknown" ruined here at all! Despite seeing the physical offering of Support and the points of contact with the ceramic body, there is still an exchange that dissolves this logical reading and allows me to get to the next place in a sculpture experience.

For me, this can happen where the high polish of those metal planes extinguishes all sightlines, (everything is now everywhere) combined with the surprising exceptional thinness of the U-channels and the minimal hardware that manage to bolt and secure the weight of the sculpture's body. Things slip from a known structure of material and how it functions, to it all becoming peculiar or strange-making. I know it's all there, it's all on offer and I can read it, but something else happens. It's beyond the physical or athletic and falls somewhere in this exchange between support and the body, this is where it gets weird and wonderful, as I can't, or maybe I won't, pin either down.

(I keep on thinking about this general image, I made a sticker and texted it to myself. While I didn't participate in this exact sport, it's not far off.)

As an aside, Liz Magor and I did an early walk through *Slow Looking* and that missing angle bracket in *Liken* on the bottom was clocked. We did linger to chat about it. There was the flipping between Support and Body, a wondering as to how that was happening and then the physical breakdown of how it operates but, you still can't help but wonder... I guess this would bring me back to you sharing that



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you want to show and include the mount or Support in the *perception* of the object, and this is the way it perplexes the notion of function and grows the meaning of support. It's perception that is the pivot.

I think material has language. This can be visual, verbal, social, cultural, economic, etc. "We" generally decide, but this all gets folded in together. Glass has a long history in terms of people making objects, and it also has the edge of craft in there too. Not Wholly Itself is mostly glass, specifically glass frit that was fused together in a mold. The process is similar to standard object casting, but the control of how frit responds to the heat-work, time, and energy in the process of kiln casting was all controlled by me. I wanted the different-sized particles to just touch—the beginning or end of a bond resulting in a rough, porous surface that invites glints of light, rather than how glass typically reads.

**LL:** Controlling the heat-work, thereby interrupting the full melt to smoothness, and stopping it when heat and the material make a complicated structure that shows itself through glinting—love this!

**DK:** The processing of the material here offsets the typical language we associate with it, allowing an entirely new dialogue to come forward, until the material list is read, then it's back to the beginning. The Douglas fir that frames the frit was chosen as it also has a long-standing relationship to preservation, but its heat treatment is also a marker of destruction. Housed together, the two materials offer different states of transformation.

*Self-Presence* uses casting as well, but it is metal casting, which is an equally ancient process. The choice alloy here was aluminum. It's often known as the junk drawer of alloys as it is endlessly recycled (cans, motor and bike parts, etc.). While it isn't exactly visible, it is at its core malleable, changeable, and able to shift when

set to the correct temperature. Both works use repetitive patterns which are almost entirely identical (there are a couple edges in the frit work that have been trimmed), but they originally came from the same mould, with one scaled up. This receptive repetition of pattern isn't exactly easy to catch as they sat in opposite rooms, but they were made to operate independent of one another.



Devon Knowles, *Self-Presence*, 2024, aluminum, chromaflair paint, 36 x 36 x 3 in. (91 x 91 x 8 cm)

**LL:** I did notice the same pattern being reiterated, and that this wasn't emphasized by the works being seen next to each other. It caused me to wonder and question my feeling that they had a similar topology. I had to travel back and forth a couple of times to assure myself of this (slow looking!). What I feel a kinship with here is that there is a play with coming towards knowing through multiple encounters from many vantage points.

**DK:** Pattern here is a lattice, and it is coming out of an indexical process I've used in previous works. In these new works, I've kept the original source out, and I imagine it will never return. What is in focus is the pattern. Like music, it has a cadence, and it can be expressed louder or softer depending on where it is placed in a volume of space.

Two identical patterns, made from differing materials, in two different scales, and both consider how looking happens and what informs the act of looking. *Not Wholly Itself* is hard to see, like looking over to see an object you think will be there, but then is not. You scour all the empty space, believing it is there and expecting its contour to define the space, until your brain catches up. In that work, these contours arrive in some of the patterns that hold an edge, predominantly bound by tone or colour. *Self-Presence's* title points to searching: what is perceived and what shifts when the body moves in space while looking at it? The work keeps on changing as the viewer moves, and it's actually the optics in the colour at play. The searching in that moment of where the pattern settles in the eyes, or the memory of what it should be: moment-to-moment is the offer. I acknowledge the self here because it is in constant interplay of these two mirroring qualities that maintain the loop of searching.

Now to colour: do we consider black, white, and grey colours or tones? If we go with tones, then both *Not Wholly Itself* and *Self-Presence* are devoid of colour, as there are no traditional pigments used. The "colours" you are seeing are refractions of light that cause the ruby and emerald colours to appear, similar to a hummingbird's feather. Do you consider black, white, and grey to be colours or tones? If so, how does true colour, in the traditional



Devon Knowles, *Not Wholly Itself*, 2024, glass frit, douglas fir, 13 x 13 x 2 in. (33 x 33 x 5 cm)

sense, creep in? If not, how do they operate in your work?

**LL:** From what I know about colour, there is no true colour (as it is not really there), but something that we see due to light refracting off of our eye's rods and cones, or something like that. What I find lovely, and somewhat disturbing about colour, is that we only know what it looks like to us individually. Green for instance may appear as red to someone else, but we agree that this is green. I think this was Wittgenstein's idea. I read his book *Remarks on Colour* long ago and it made a big impact. I should read it again.



What I can say about colour in my works in the show is that I don't think that *green granted* is white and I don't think *dark, secret joy* is black. What I hope is perceivable is the colours that make up the works as wholes.

**DK:** Colour is the form, space and body and are irreducible! Thinking about your titles fortifies this sense of indivisibility and in turn, 'the thingness' of these sculptures to be presented. You must have read Heidegger's "The Thing" many times...

**LL:** The relation of Thing to Object has an implied hierarchy that bothers me. The object is to be used, and its use is its purpose—this makes it an object in the essay. Whereas the broken object and/or artwork has no purpose, and this is why it's defined according to Heidegger as a Thing. I'm not sure I agree with this. Does this mean when a child comes across an object and doesn't know what it is for, that it is a Thing? I agree that sculpture more than any other art form cannot be accurately represented as it must be experienced in space. This experience is not the same for anyone and this includes fungi, bacteria, molds, viruses, animals, vegetables, minerals... Sculpture is an offering. An outpouring that needs no movement to be an offering. The reception of the offering comes through movement of humans, or persons other than human.



Liz Larner, *dark, secret joy*, 2024, ceramic, glaze, aluminum, stainless steel, leather, enamel paint, 25 x 23 x 9 in. (64 x 58 x 23 cm)

This movement will never be retraced by another exactly, it is a spontaneous choreography driven by desire, or at least curiosity. A replication of this motion would be a representation of someone else's engagement with the Thing or the Object. "The thing

of the thing,” “the nature of nearness,” “the relation of being as being.” I love how all of this sounds, and all occur most readily when experiencing art—especially sculpture. I feel much is missing in “the mirror play of the fourfold,” except if the definition of mortal includes mortals other than human. Maybe there is no such thing as a mortal, as what most everyone and thing does at death is decay and become part of something else.

When I walked into the large room it was gratifying to see how perfect *green granted* appeared from a distance—the surface looked smooth and white with soft round highlights. As I got closer I was more relieved to see the little green marks overtaking the perfect seeming, slightly warm white. To me, *dark, secret joy* has brown and purple tones that make up what can be called a warm-and-cool black, and I think the notion that black is all of the colours and white is the absence of colour is not something that applies.

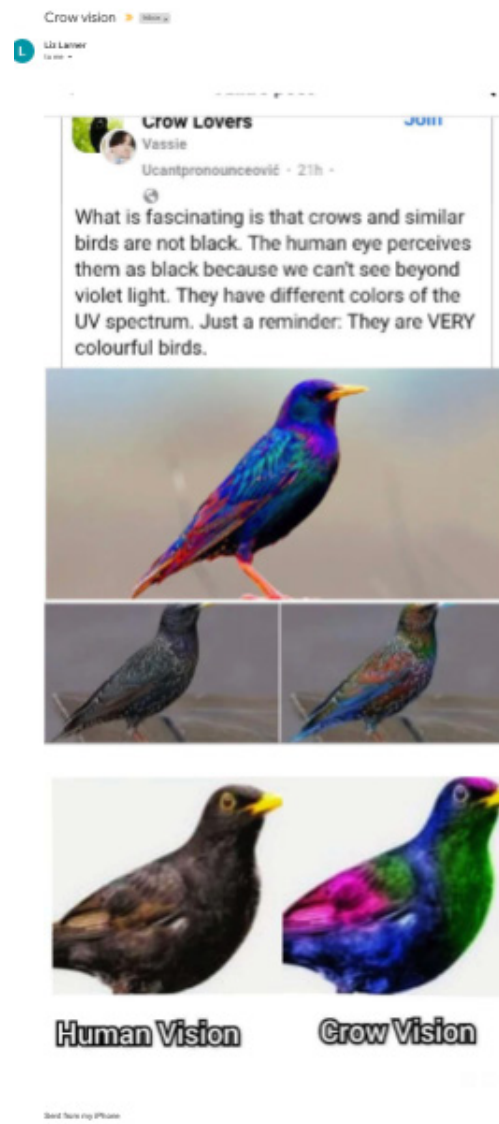
The other very active colour in these two works is the ever-changing flash as one moves around them due to light and environment, and what and who is around these things. This is a continually changing aspect to the colour of these works. After talking about these ideas, an old and dear friend of mine, Tim Power—a painter and a writer (we’ve known each other since our Cal Arts days)—sent me a post about how humans can’t see ultraviolet light like birds can. For example, crows appear as vividly iridescent to other birds, and not black as we know them!

**DK:** This is interesting considering the time I spent viewing your works and the environment was contingent to the experience—nothing was exactly the same each time I returned. Between surface, colour, scale, and material, there is so much to be learned from these formal decisions in sculpture if time can be afforded. Each visit offered a new surface to encounter!

Crow vision will now be in my lexicon of what colour is and can be. Thank you for sharing that Liz and Tim Power! It’s now clear why they walk with such a strut!

Going back to the Body of these works, now indivisible from colour, is there a reason why you choose clay as your material?

**LL:** I fell into using clay after over ten years of making sculpture. I wanted to make cast porcelain forms



Original artist unknown  
<https://jamesgurney.substack.com/p/colorful-crows>



from models made of foam core and put together with a glue gun. They were large and had to be cast in three sections, first carefully put together, and then ever so gently placed in the kiln. I had to buy a kiln to make these works. There was tremendous loss during this process, but I did make a few *smiles* though it. I didn't realize at the time when I started that I was beginning at the deep end. After going through the process of making these objects, I had worked with a very sensitive clay at a large-scale in a large kiln. I could not move on from this media. It is ancient and there is more technique developed than could ever be mastered by one maker. The sense of the earth, its clay, water, and minerals, no matter how refined, is always there and perceivable. Its initial malleability and then rigidity after firing, the trace of impression and the way clay takes different kinds of glaze formulation and colour is like nothing else. The medium is so deep, approaching the infinite. My art practice and engagement with colour and form has curved around it.

**DK:** Curving around the infinite is a beautiful thing to think about. I am gutted, in a good way.

I will pick up on that final sentiment of a practice trying to move along something that is larger than itself. In *Grains of Sand*, the work sits with the ideas of weight and measure. You see the droop and pull of the rope created by the weight of the glass noodles pulling down with gravity. However, the physical weight is no more than five pounds as the glass frit isn't solid—there is space between those particles, it's actually sponge-like.

What I see unfolding here is that the physical expression of weight is exceeded by how it measures up to the idea of it. How scale enters this, in practice and idea, is also connected—the culmination of the three which allow for an approach as to how weight can be arrived at. While *Not Wholly Itself* and *Self-Presence* approach the task of looking, *Grains of Sand* also considers the intangible act of how one measures, scales, and experiences weight. To me, it arrives with an ever-increasing heaviness, even though I know the lift is no more than five pounds in the form of a macaroni necklace.

**LL:** Something I love about sculpture is how one gets to see the engagement, or desire to experience, through the movement of the subject taking in the object. I don't see this so much as a representation, but rather as a witnessing of traces of both curiosity and engagement.



Devon Knowles, *Grains of Sand*, 2024, glass frit, nylon rope, painted metal, rubber, 56 x 18 x 4 in. (142 x 45 x 10 cm)

**DK:** I did notice the amount of movement in the room during *Slow Looking*. Visitors were seeking out experience through looking which was not located in one singular view. It took the whole body to look and become conscious of the work through a direct experience.

**LL:** Yes! I love this about the art experience and experiencing the art experience.



Devon Knowles, *Grains of Sand* (detail), 2024, glass frit, nylon rope, painted metal, rubber, 56 x 18 x 4 in. (142 x 45 x 10 cm)