

In Susan Sontag's 1964 essay, *Against Interpretation*, she argues when looking at a work of art we should ask, "how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means." She continues, "What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, *hear* more, to *feel* more." With these quotes as sensual and intellectual pathways, I would ask viewers to consider for themselves how their senses might be guides to paying attention to the installations exhibited. This might afford viewers new insights that would ordinarily go unseen, or unavailable if the typical questions of "what does it mean" or "what is it about" were asked.

In William Bronk's poem, *Yes: I Mean So Okay — Love*, he writes, "Some people say, 'well good, now you write about love' — 'yes', I say, 'what else, I always have, what else?' 'You don't understand' they say, 'I mean, love, that's what it's about' — 'yes', I say, 'about love, but that's not what I mean.'" When Bronk confronts the word "about", he acknowledges the word points, but is not the thing itself, in this case — love. We seem to mistake the finger pointing at something for the thing itself. We seem to mistake the "about" for the ontology of being. Sontag too, is not interested in the "aboutness" of a work of art. Rather, she wants to experience what the work of art *is*, not what it's "about". These are not simple trifles or word games.

In William Faulkner's, *The Sound and the Fury*, we are confronted by the totality of four chapters, each spoken from the vantage point of a distinct narrator regarding a family in decline. The title of this exhibition quotes Benjy, the first narrator of the text. In my opinion, Faulkner trusts his reader because his book *is* rather than *is about*.

The decline of a family feels close to me. My father died in 2019 and my mother's health continues to diminish. Part of the seed this exhibition grows from the visible decline of my parents' house and yard. My father used to do this work and with his death, I can begin to see how his care shaped a world. A new world has begun to slowly take over and though most might not see the changes, I see them.

Like my parents, me, and you, my art is mortal.

This exhibition is not *about* decline or my parents. It is not *about*. Perhaps one lens from which to view the exhibition is through *aboutlessness*. I think at our core there is an *aboutlessness* that *is*. Perhaps this is why our species needs to make art, have made art from epoch to epoch. If nothing else as a species, we are curious and complicated. In this exhibition, I trust viewers' curiosity will lead them to the art's *aboutlessness*, if it's there at all. They will linger with the art and hopefully see for themselves something that might illuminate, might ring a bell of a "yes".

Seamus Heaney, in his book, *The Redress of Poetry*, states, "...it happens that such a revelation, once enshrined in the poem, remains as a standard for the poet, so that he or she must submit to the strain of bearing witness to his or her own life to the plane of consciousness established in the poem." Art can create standards. However, before we arrive at that point, as Sontag noted, we should use our senses to discover for ourselves, "how it is that it is, even that is what it is".

"if word is, if/world is: it is outside *what-/ever* it is that wishes to name, number, elaborate".

— Gustaf Sobin, poet