

DEB SOKOLOW

LOOSE HISTORY



THERE'S A LOT OF
HARD-EDGED
FUNNY LIKE IN THIS
PLACE. [REDACTED]
BUT
THE DEBRISIVE ROCKS
SEEM TO BE A BIT DON'T
YOU THINK?

THE ART THERAPIST
REALLY LIKED HOW
ANGLETON ADDED A
SPLASH OF PEACH PAINT
TO THE TOP OF THIS ONE.

"I SEE CATHARSIS IN
THE PEACH PAINT. THIS
IS PROGRESS, MR.
ANGLETON."

AFTER PINNING MEYER'S HEAD,
ANGLETON TOOK BACK ALL THE
ROCK SCULPTURES AND INVITED ME TO WORK ON

VERY
YES BASIC. NO STAIRS. NO KITCHEN.
NO TOILET.
MAYBE SHE WAS A MINIMALIST?

HERE WE HAVE A BASIC RENDERING OF
THE WASHINGTON, D.C. HOME OF MARY PINCHOT MEYER,
PAINTER-SOCIALITE, SECRETLY KNOWN BY SOME WHITE HOUSE AIDES FOR HER
SIGNIFICANT SEXUAL AND INTELLECTUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JFK IN THE
LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE.¹

*KENNEDY'S MARILYN MONROE AFFAIR?
IT DIDN'T MEAN MUCH. NONE OF THE AFFAIRS MEANT MUCH OF ANYTHING, EXCEPT FOR THIS ONE.
WHICH IS STRANGE, BECAUSE NO ONE SEEMS TO KNOW MUCH, IF ANYTHING, ABOUT IT.*

PINCHOT MEYER WAS KILLED IN 1964, LESS THAN A YEAR AFTER JFK. SIMILARITIES IN
THE TWO UNSOLVED MURDERS POINT TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEIR DEATHS COULD HAVE BEEN PLANNED
BY THE SAME PARTIES.

PINCHOT MEYER'S MURDER WAS INITIALLY PINNED ON AN INNOCENT MAN^{A PATSY} WHO HAPPENED
TO BE NEARBY WHEN SHE WAS KILLED WHILE WALKING ALONG THE C&O CANAL NEAR HER GEORGETOWN
HOME. A RECENT DISCOVERY POINTS TO "THE JOGGER," A WITNESS AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME, AS THE
ACTUAL MURDERER. THE JOGGER WAS USING A FALSE IDENTITY, FABRICATED BY THE CIA, AND THE
JOGGER'S ORDERS TO KILL PINCHOT MEYER CAME FROM JAMES JESUS ANGLETON, CIA COUNTERINTELLIGENCE
CHIEF, AND CLOSE FRIEND OF PINCHOT MEYER'S EX-HUSBAND CORD MEYER, ALSO CIA.

ARE YOU SAYING THAT ANGLETON ORDERED THE HIT ON KENNEDY? TOO MANY PEOPLE WHO'VE SAID YES TO THIS QUESTION HAVE DIED STRANGE DEATHS.

THIS MIGHT EXPLAIN WHY, IN 1963, WHILE DRINKING WHISKEY WITH CLOSE FRIENDS, ANGLETON BRAGGED
ABOUT THE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM HE HAD INSTALLED IN PINCHOT MEYER'S HOME TO KEEP TABS ON HER.

*HE NEEDED TO KNOW HOW MUCH SHE KNEW ABOUT THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION.
APPARENTLY SHE KNEW TOO MUCH.*

DEB SOKOLOW

LOOSE HISTORY

Feb 4-Apr 9, 2020 | Fine Arts Gallery
UW-Parkside | College of Arts and Humanities

INNER CIRCLE, BELLY BUTTON

On the Understandable Preoccupations of Deb Sokolow

Nicholas Frank

Television light from the flatscreen above a branded cooler reflected in countless mirrors stamped with familiar names framed by various degrees of ornate filigree: Miller, Bud, Jim Beam, Jagermeister. Sporting feats flickered vaguely in the sheen of the linoleum bartop, athletic ghosts interrupted by intermittent pairs of resting elbows. Amidst general murmurs could be heard a comment comparing the current cold snap to prior cold snaps, another asking whether the house down the street was a drug house or just a bunch of weird hippie dopers, and another wondering if the co-op next door would drop off leftover coffee after closing.

A sudden exclamation interrupted the din. “That *goddamn* Obama has got to go!!” A red-faced, flustered older white man slammed his fist on the bar. His wife shushed him, cautiously looking around the bar to see who might have noticed. He continued. Something about a new regulation that required chips to be implanted in all cars, to secretly track all drivers and collect data, thereby crushing our sacred American freedoms.

I had already known that this “old man bar,” as such persistent neighborhood joints are called, was a hotbed of conservatives and stubborn racists, situated in the middle of what was once a working-class Polish neighborhood in what is now considered a liquid political swing state. The owners were old-school, small-business Republicans, who regularly voiced complaints about difficulties imposed on them by the system: high taxes, onerous regulations, and the like, but we got along fine.

The thing about the car chips stuck in my mind. I just had to know. When I got home later I looked it up, and found that the regulation was actually enacted by Congress in 1992. Clinton signed off on it. Nothing whatsoever to do with Obama, but as this was 2015, it turned out to be

an early glimpse of the disinformation that would soon become our political campaigns. Today, Hulu and other channels are regularly permeated by advertisements from car insurance companies offering safe-driving incentives which use those very chips to track a driver’s every move, to determine whether you’re worthy of favorable rates. Surveillance, as we all now know and seem strangely comfortable with, is everywhere.

Orwell was prescient, but did not imagine the utterly voluntary buy-in to the totalistic state of surveillance that pervades our world 70 years on from when *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written. Back then, state prying was a nascent scourge, the province of other, presumably more totalitarian countries. Now, it’s our literal bread and butter, tacitly sanctioned by Congress and freely enacted without regulation by insane, unchecked internet conglomerates, who know whether you cut your toenails this morning, how much toothpaste you use per dose, whether you’ve missed your period or cut down on your fuel consumption these past few months, and who regularly scour your emails for juicy tidbits. Our ‘lil bruh’ version of Big Brother is so much more pernicious than Orwell might have imagined, given his overconfidence that humans would want to protect their private lives against all-prying eyes. In 1949, privacy was precious, independent thinking a bulwark against not just the state but against pernicious groupthink. Stupid people didn’t have a potential platform of millions.

Today, conspiracy is real. Only it’s not a conspiracy. Did you know the Trilateral Commission is for real real? Google it. They have a website. It lists all former and current members. Sure, it’s all elite diplomats, economists, cabinet members, and gazillionaires we all hear way too much about because they control our lives, but it’s way more transparent than conspiracists would have us believe. Illuminati? Meh. The actual conspiracies come from decidedly unilluminated manufacturers, who make theories by the dozens, only adding to the swampy smell overtaking our six senses.

But somehow the always level-headed Deb Sokolow loves this shit. I mean, she thrives on it. It’s in her blood. Don’t believe me? Google “Irving Sokolow.” (Better yet, use Firefox and DuckDuckGo “Irving Sokolow” -- the browser and search engine won’t track you and sell all

your personal information.) Any familiarity with Deb's preoccupations with conspiracy, shadow governments, spycraft, assassinations and plots, might produce a gasp: a Warren Commission document names Irving Sokolow, Deb's first cousin once removed, as a psychological evaluator of a young Lee Harvey Oswald.

We can thus forgive Deb for believing that the Denver airport is the site of a secret underground military installation, and for her obsession with presidents, given their persistent gravitas in American history. If you've ever looked up the coincidences of assassinations and attempts, Lincoln elected in 1860, Kennedy in 1960, Reagan in 1980, etc., etc., you begin to sense the head-spin of unrelated facts appearing as not only adjacent but connected. This appearance of relationships is the realm of the conspiracy theory.

Sokolow (Deb, not Irving) is brilliant at plying this uncertain terrain, which has few defining characteristics other than the undefinable quality of suspicion. It's not unlike Irving's Oswald evaluation on April 17, 1953, wherein the nascent assassin was found to display "bright normal intelligence" with an I.Q. of 118. "Although presumably disinterested in school subjects (the reason for the evaluation, requested by worried school administrators) he operates on a much higher than average level."

Irving also evaluated Oswald's drawings. "The Human Figure Drawings are empty, poor characterizations of persons approximately the same age as the subject," Irving noted. "They reflect a considerable amount of impoverishment in the social and emotional areas." We all saw the ultimate results of that impoverishment.

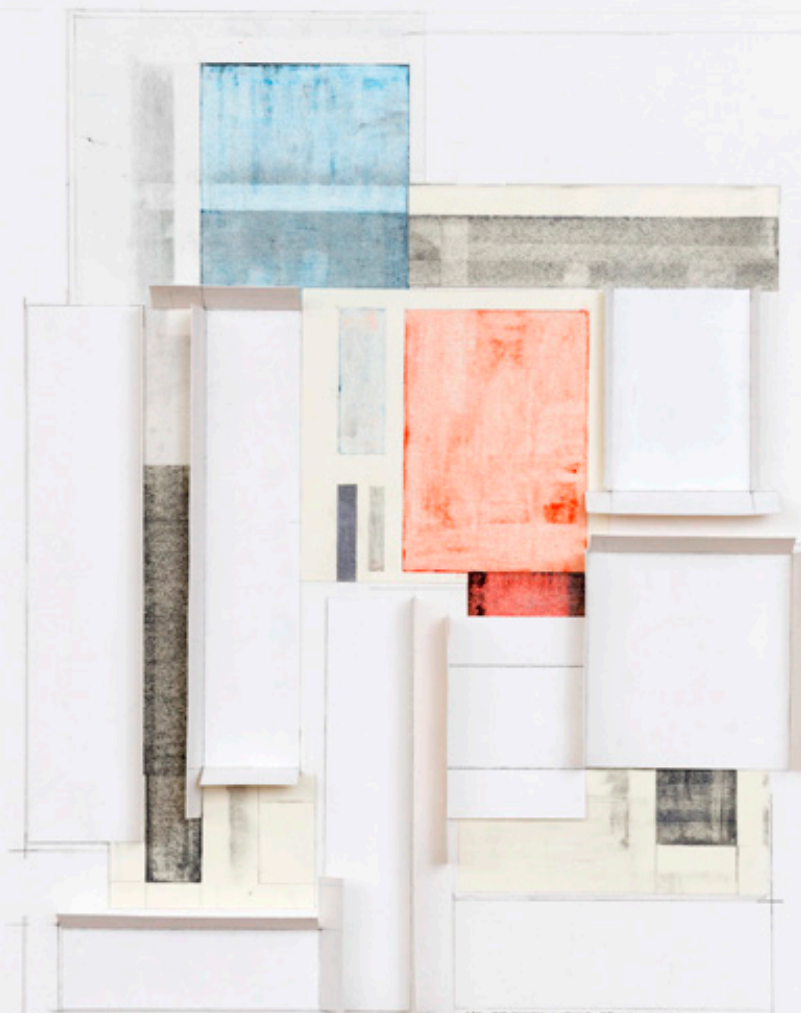
I, too, became fascinated with the Kennedy assassination, voluntarily indoctrinated by Robert O. Wilson's *The Illuminatus Trilogy* at an age still vulnerable to persuasion. Look at all the mysterious Masonic symbols on the dollar bill! Well, yeah, okay... but? But multiple witnesses about to testify to the Warren Commission met untimely ends! Well, yeah, but there were literally a thousand witnesses. Yes, that magic bullet made an improbable journey through two humans and a car seat, and lots of weird shit went down. But when any situation is examined down to the micron, I bet it would also yield a bevy of unaccountable connections best explained by conspiracy, by someone

pulling unseen levers. Ted Cruz's dad did it! Yeah, okay. No. Meanwhile, the actual conspiracies that decide our fates, like the Russian weaponization of Facebook, manage to hide in plain sight.

More intimate conspiracies also decide personal futures. One scenario: a young female art student cuts through the bullshit of received expectations and finds her own way of bringing her inner life into form. But, an older male art teacher in a position of authority and influence tells her viewers will never read her work the way she'd want them to, and suggests she just give up.

Does the patriarchy defeat this young artist, or does she tell it to fuck off? The Rita Tallent Picken Regional Center for Arts and Humanities is smart enough to have the results of this question on view in Deb's show *Loose History*. What's great about Deb's work is that it's publishable, mass-distributable, because she so loves the drawing and book formats. Never precious, her materials remain simple and direct, a tangible result of scratching away alone in the studio contemplating the dark shadows animating human endeavour with decade after decade of unfortunate ends.

Right now, Deb might well be lurking in the parking lot shadows off to the side of your favorite restaurant, observing suspicious transactions passing through the drive-through window. She is taking detailed notes, recording your appearance and aspect, that of the attendant taking your order, your license plate and the amount of exhaust your vehicle emits as it idles there, waiting for your order to be satisfied. Don't wonder whether she follows you home to count how many times you chew each bite, what you say to your intimate partner, or how much of the bed you take up when asleep. Why think on it? You already know the answers.



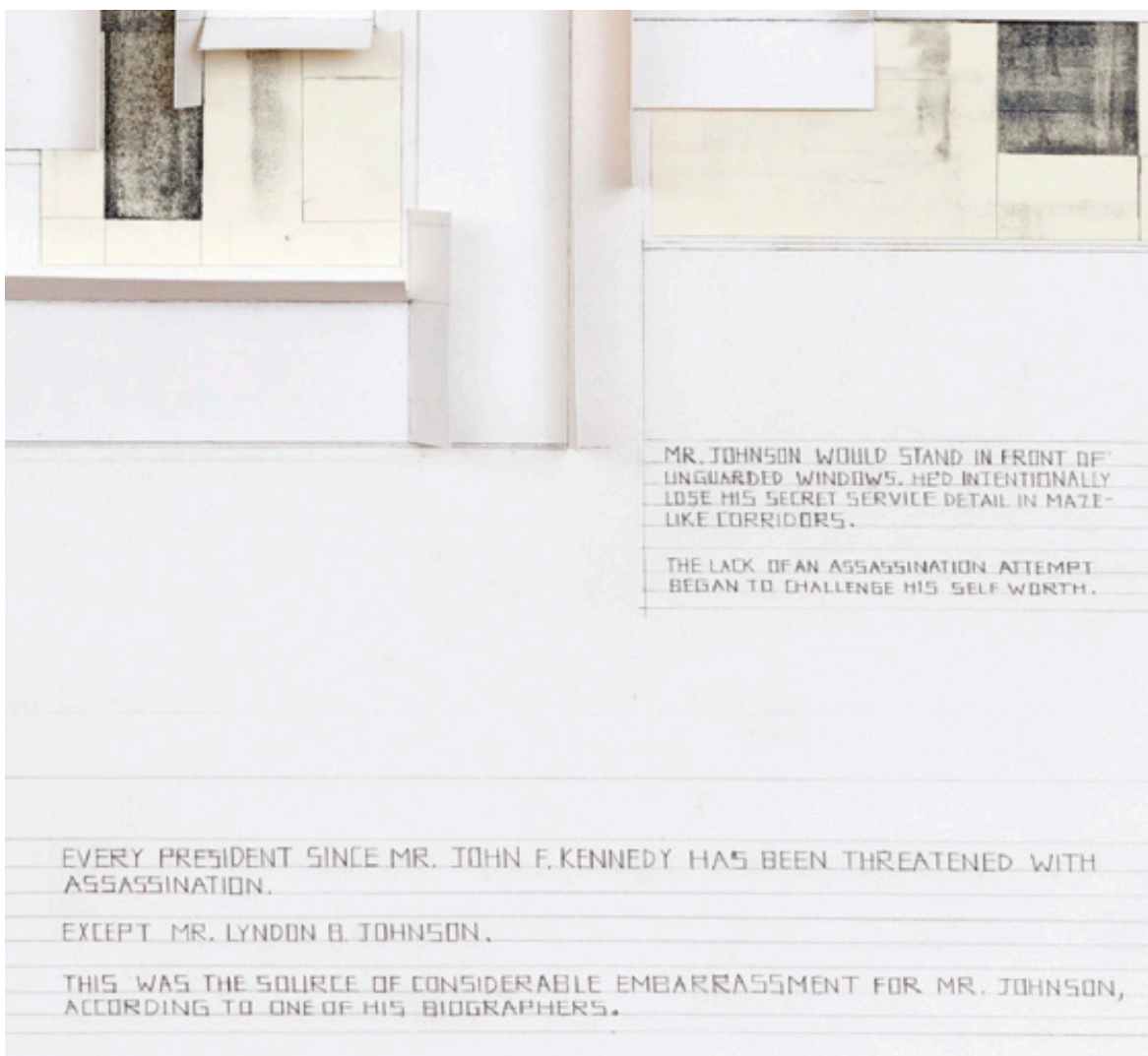
MR. JOHNSON WOULD STAND IN FRONT OF
UNGUARDED WINDOWS, HE INTENTIONALLY
GAVE HIS SECRET SERVICE DETAIL IN HALL-
WAY EDRIDDERS.

THE LACK OF AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT
BEGAN TO CHALLENGE HIS SELF WORTH.

EVERY PRESIDENT SINCE MR. JOHN F. KENNEDY HAS BEEN THREATENED WITH
ASSASSINATION.

EXCEPT MR. LYNDON B. JOHNSON.

THIS WAS THE SOURCE OF CONSIDERABLE EMBARRASSMENT FOR MR. JOHNSON,
ACCORDING TO ONE OF HIS BIOGRAPHERS.

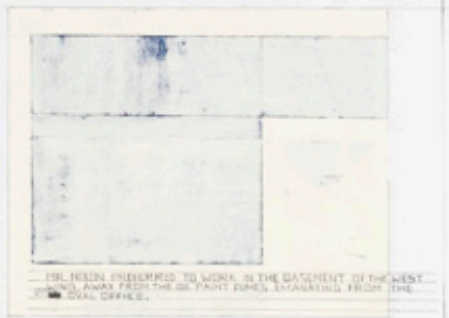
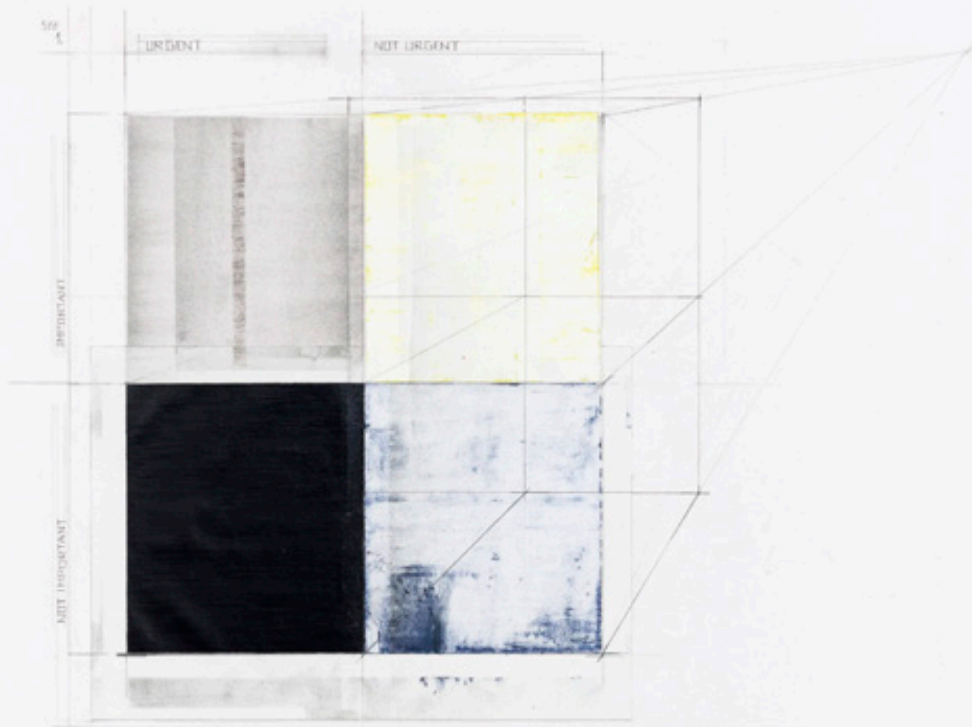


LEFT | ABOVE (DETAIL)

The Source of Mr. Lyndon B. Johnson's Embarrassment

30" (h) x 22" (w) x 1" (d)

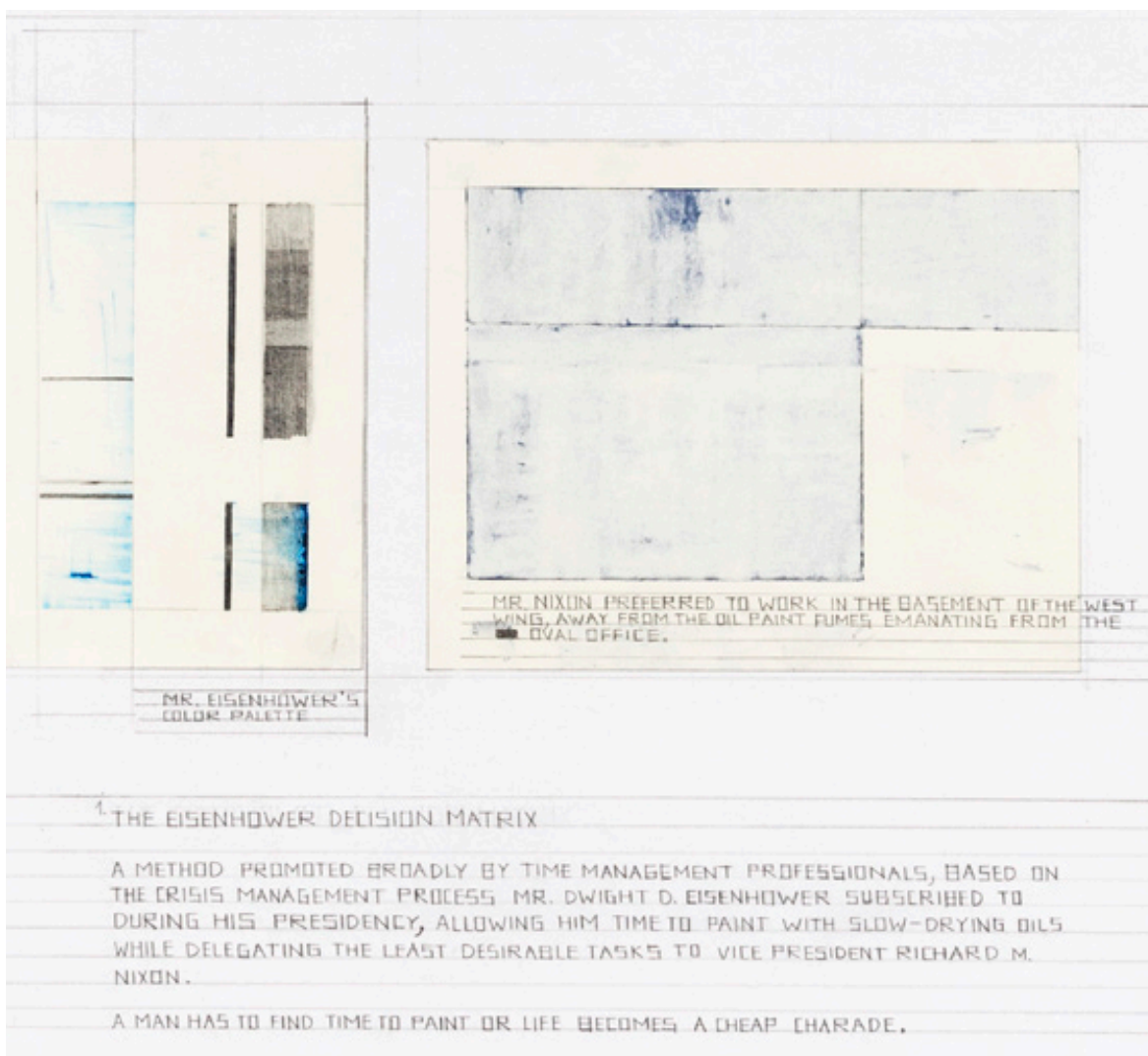
graphite, crayon, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2016



THE EISENHOWER DECISION MATRIX

A METHOD PROMOTED BROADLY BY TIME MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS, BASED ON THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROCESS, MR. DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER SUBSCRIBED TO DURING HIS PRESIDENCY, ALLOWING HIM TIME TO PAINT WITH SLOW-DRYING OILS WHILE DELEGATING THE LEAST DESIRABLE TASKS TO VICE PRESIDENT RICHARD M. NIXON.

A MAN HAS TO FIND TIME TO PAINT OR LIFE BECOMES A CHEAP CHAUCER.

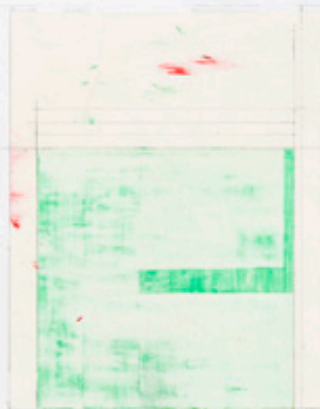


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Mr. Dwight D. Eisenhower's Decision Matrix

30" (h) x 22" (w)

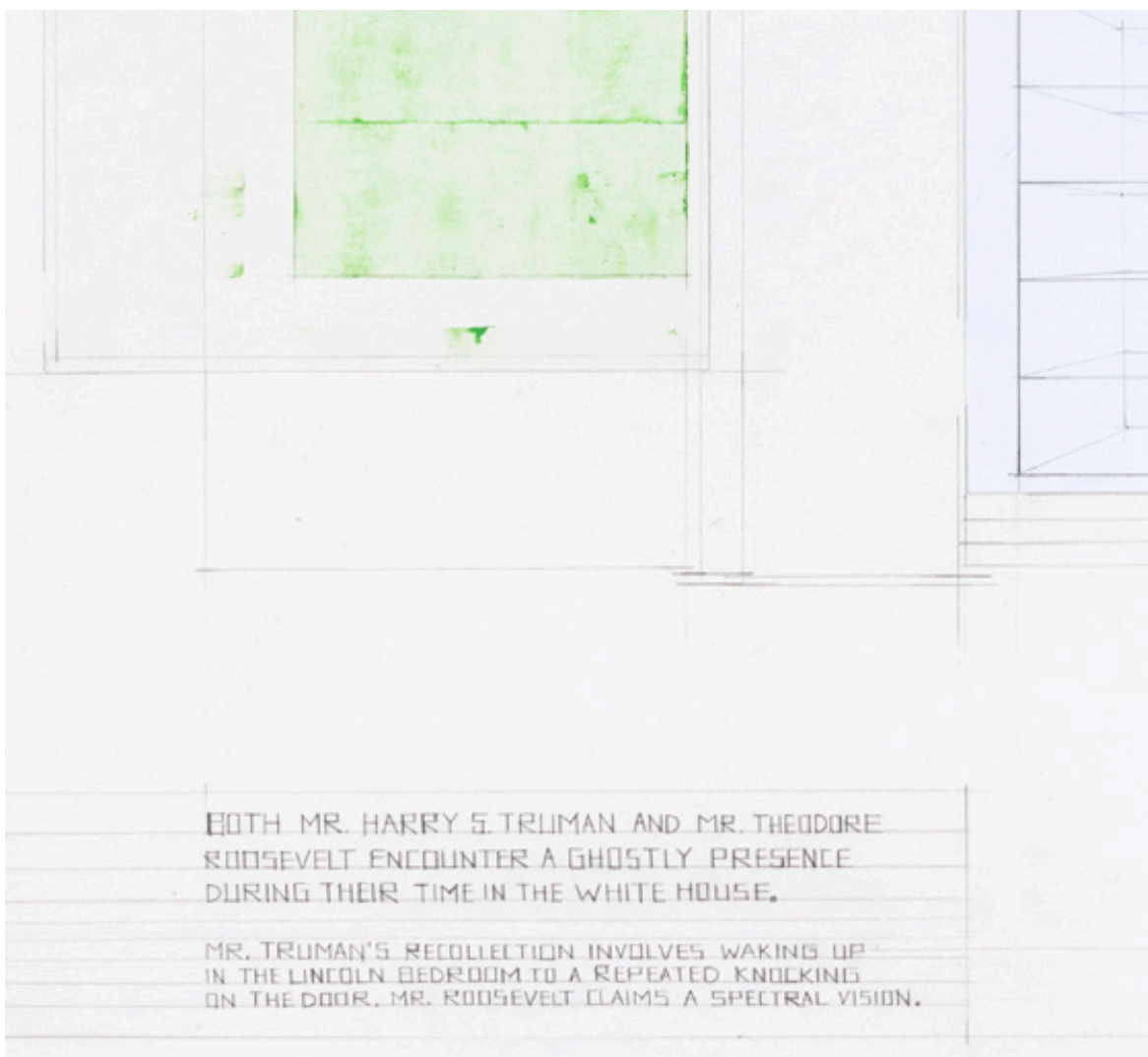
graphite, crayon, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2016



BOTH MR. HARRY S. TRUMAN AND MR. THEODORE
ROOSEVELT ENCOUNTER A GHOSTLY PRESENCE
DURING THEIR TIME IN THE WHITE HOUSE.

MR. TRUMAN'S RECOLLECTION INVOLVES WAKING UP
IN THE LINCOLN BEDROOM TO A REPETED KNOCKING
ON THE DOOR. MR. ROOSEVELT CLAIMS A SPECTRAL VISION.

BOTH CLAIM IT IS MR. ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
PROVIDING A CRUELTY OF THEIR OWN'S
MANAGEMENT SKILLS.



LEFT | ABOVE (DETAIL)

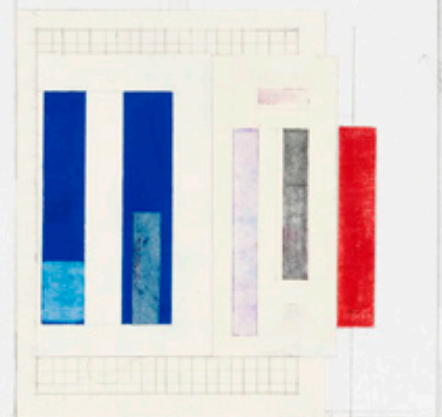
Mr. Abraham Lincoln's Critique

30" (h) x 22" (w) x 1" (d)

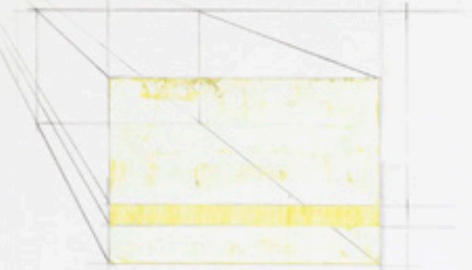
graphite, crayon, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2016



MR. CARTER'S REPORT IS FILED IN THE SUB-BASMENT AT JUSTICE.



UFO COLOR SPECTRUM AND OUTLIER SHAPES

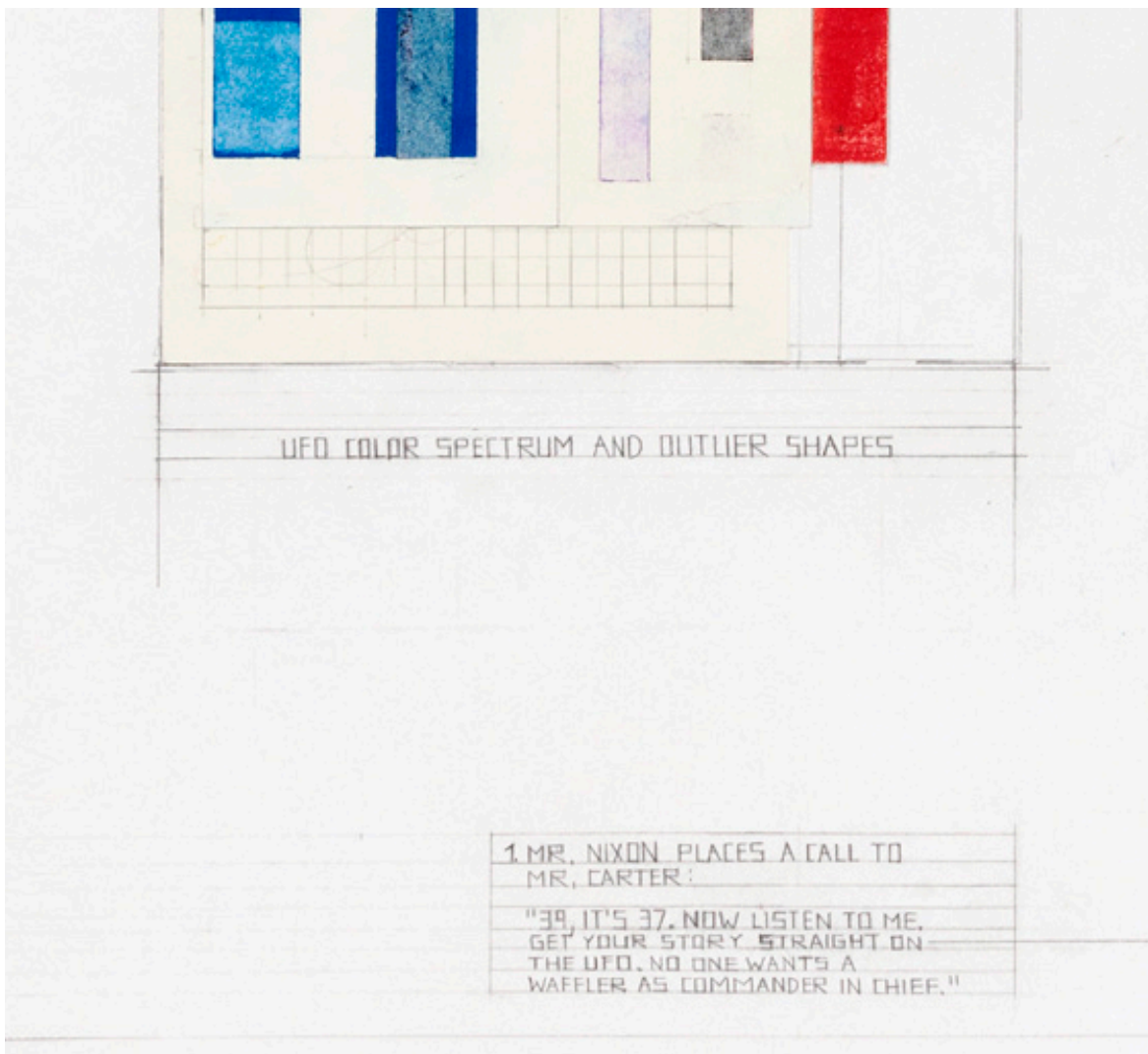


MR. NIXON PLACES A CALL TO MR. CARTER.

"MR. IT'S 37, NOW LISTEN TO MR. GUY TELER 5 TEN 4. MR. CARTER, THE UFO, AND ONE WANTS A MATTER, ALL LUCKS IN DEEP."

MR. JIMMY CARTER, SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE ASCENDING TO THE U.S. PRESIDENCY, FILES AN OFFICIAL REPORT DETAILING HIS PROP. SIGHTING OF AN UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT WHILE AT A LOBBY CLUB MEETING IN LEANS, GEORGIA.

IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS, MR. CARTER'S DESCRIPTION OF THE UFO CHANGES... AND CHANGES AGAIN.



LEFT | ABOVE (DETAIL)

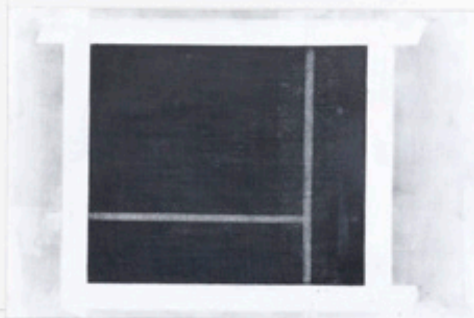
Mr. Jimmy Carter's UFO Experience

30" (h) x 22" (w) x 1" (d)

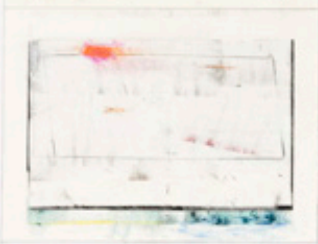
graphite, crayon, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2016



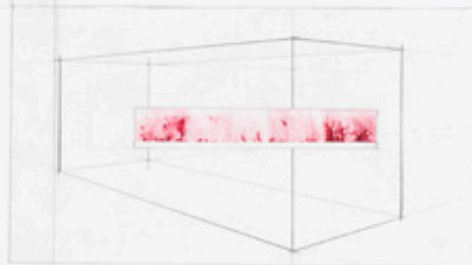
WITH AROUND THE PICTURES



A REGULAR STAGE



IMPROV STAGES

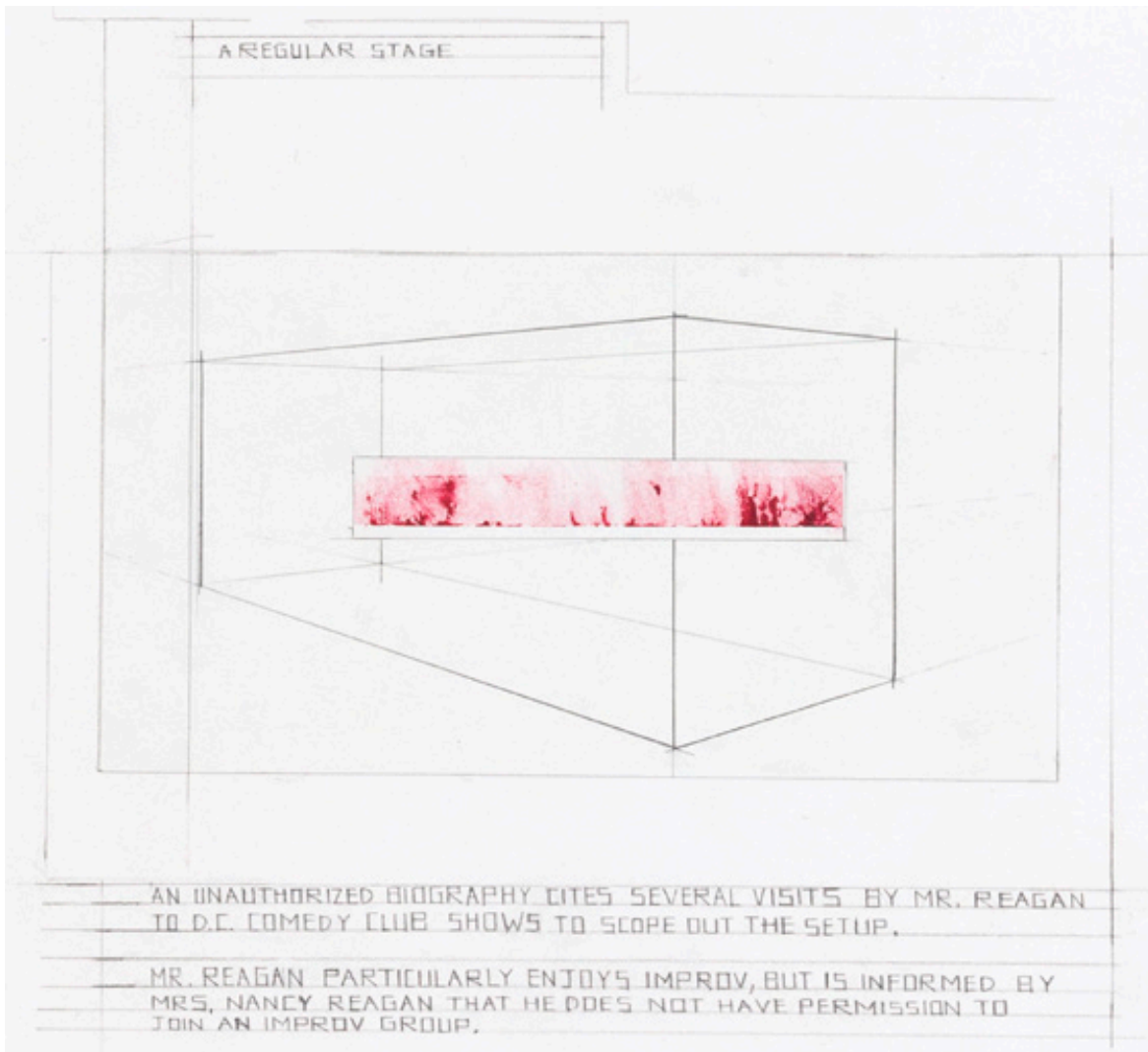


AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY CITES SEVERAL VISITS BY MR. REAGAN TO D.C. COMEDY CLUB SHOWS TO SKETCH OUT THE SETUP.

MR. REAGAN PARTICULARLY ENJOYS IMPROV, BUT IS INFORMED BY PMS, NANCY REAGAN THAT HE DOES NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO JOIN AN IMPROV GROUP.

REPORTS CONFIRM SEVERAL SECRETARIES IN HIS CABINET HAVE ADVISED FOR MR. RONALD REAGAN TO TRANSITION INTO STANDUP COMEDY AFTER HIS SECOND TERM AS PRESIDENT.

AT FIRST, MR. KINGAN RESISTS THE NOTION, BUT THE IDEA PERSISTS. "IF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE LAUGH AT WHAT I SAY, I MUST BE SAYING SOMETHING FUNNY."

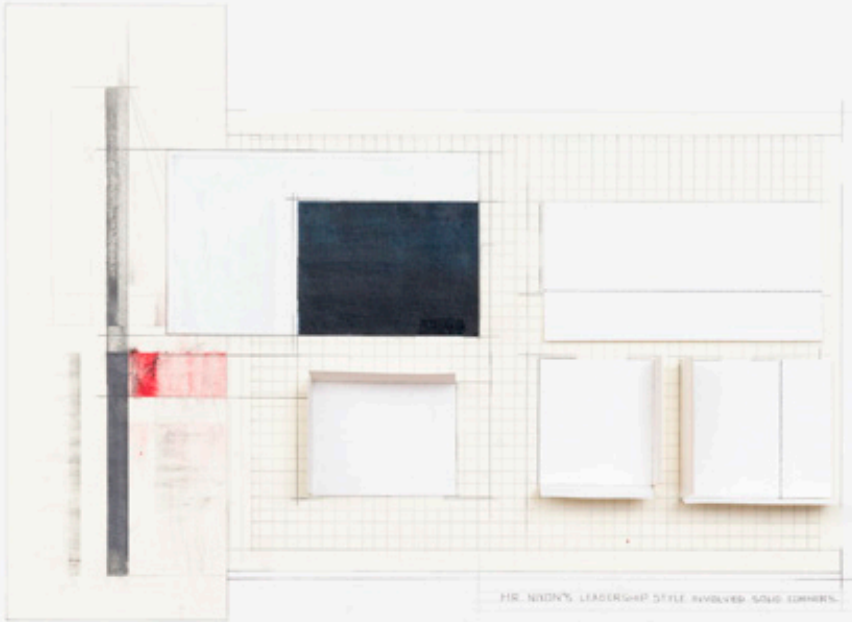


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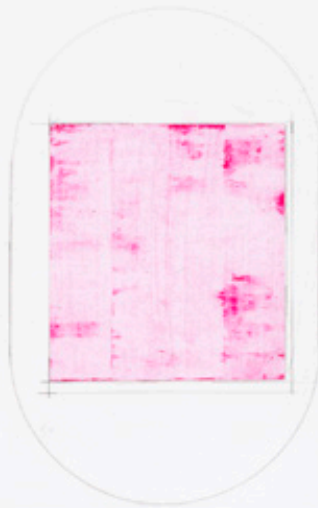
Mr. Ronald Reagan's Tour of D.C. Comedy Clubs

30" (h) x 22" (w) x 1" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2016



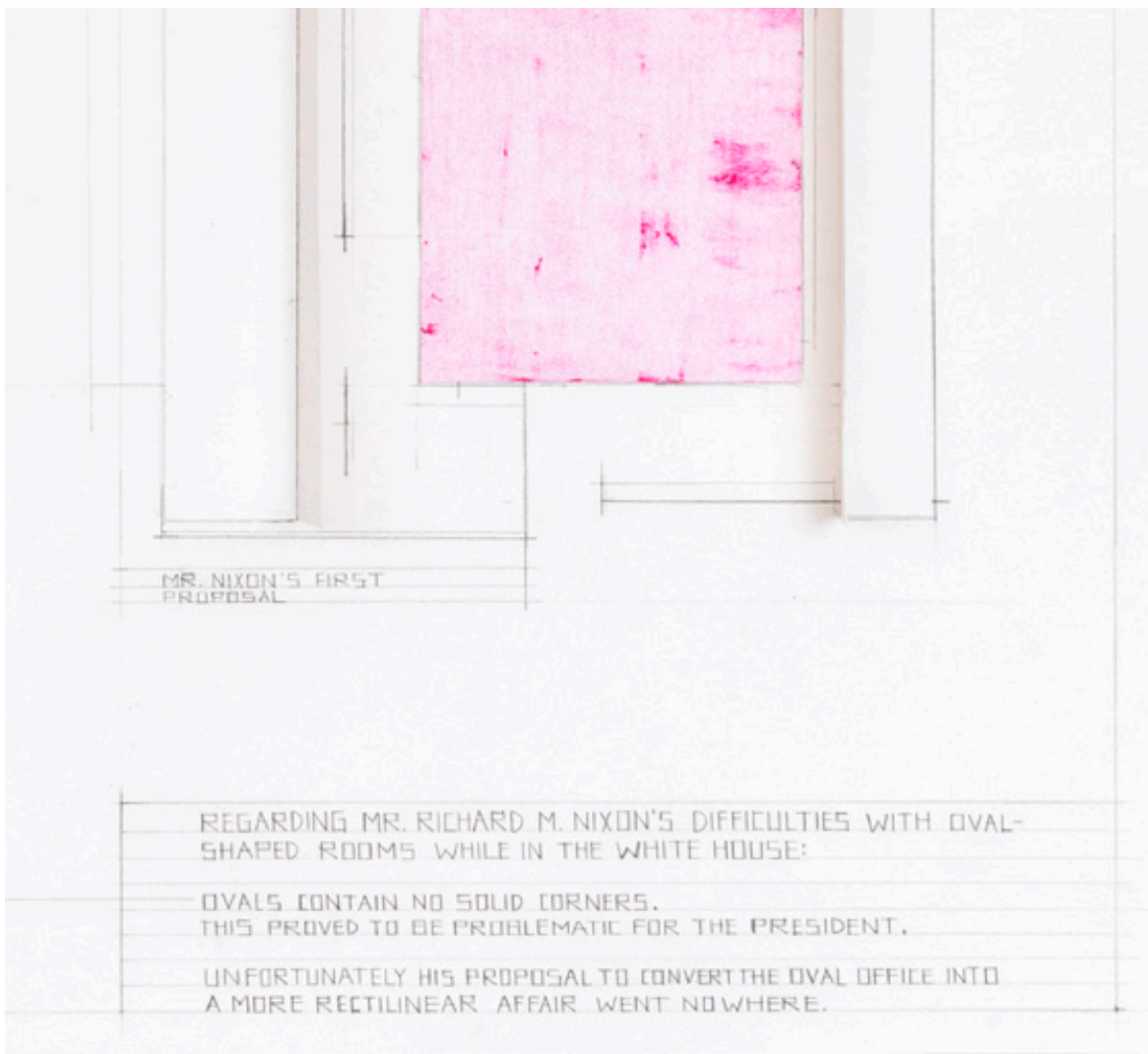
MR. NIXON'S LEADERSHIP STYLE INVOLVED SOLID CORNERS.



MR. NIXON'S FIRST PROPOSAL.

IT CAN PROVE TO BE QUITE DIFFICULT WHEN ATTEMPTING TO FIT A RECTILINEAR CARPET IN AN OVAL-SHAPED ROOM.

REGARDING MR. RICHARD M. NIXON'S DIFFICULTIES WITH OVAL-SHAPED ROOMS WHILE IN THE WHITE HOUSE:
 OVALS CONTAIN NO SOLID CORNERS. THIS PROVED TO BE PROBLEMATIC FOR THE PRESIDENT. UNFORTUNATELY HIS PROPOSAL TO CONVERT THE OVAL OFFICE INTO A MORE RECTILINEAR AFFAIR WENT NOWHERE.

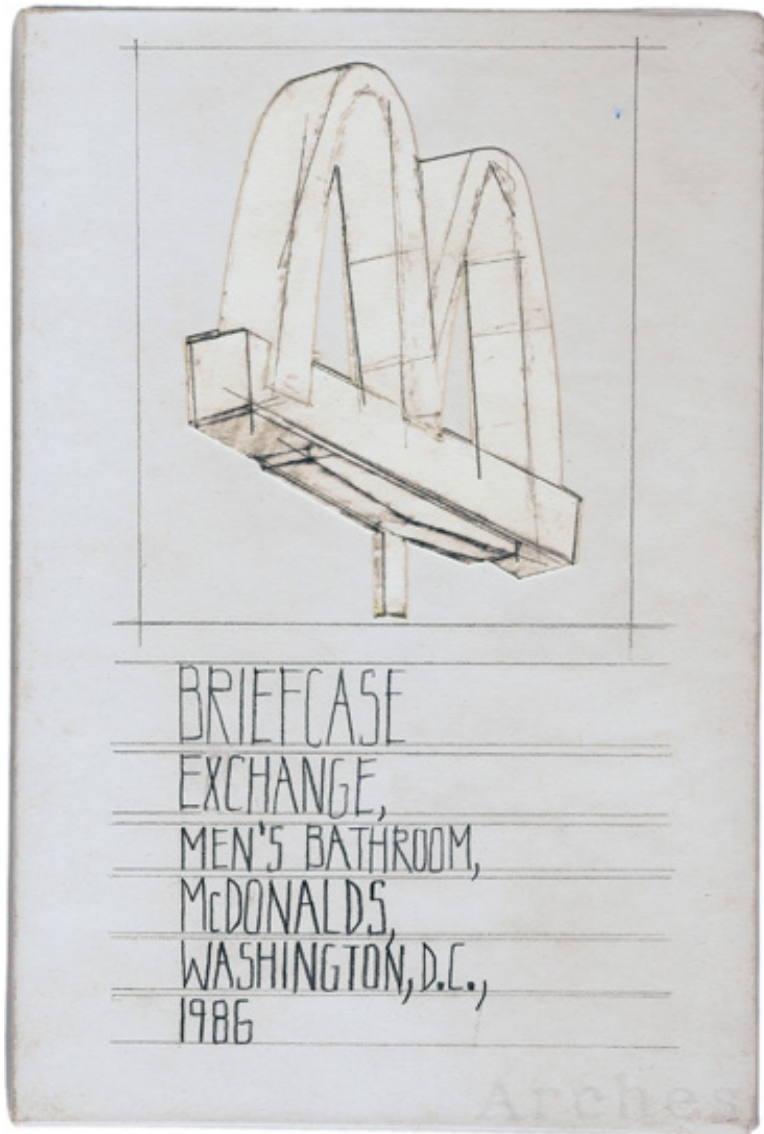


LEFT | ABOVE (DETAIL)

Mr. Richard M. Nixon's Difficulties with Ovals

30" (h) x 22" (w) x 1" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2016



ABOVE (COVER) | RIGHT (DETAIL)

Briefcase Exchange, Men's Bathroom, McDonalds, Washington, D.C., 1986
hard-cover, accordion fold: 9" x 6" x 1" (closed); 9" x 44" (open)
artist proof, unique edition of 5
graphite, acrylic, ink, collage on acid-free paper, book board, 2010



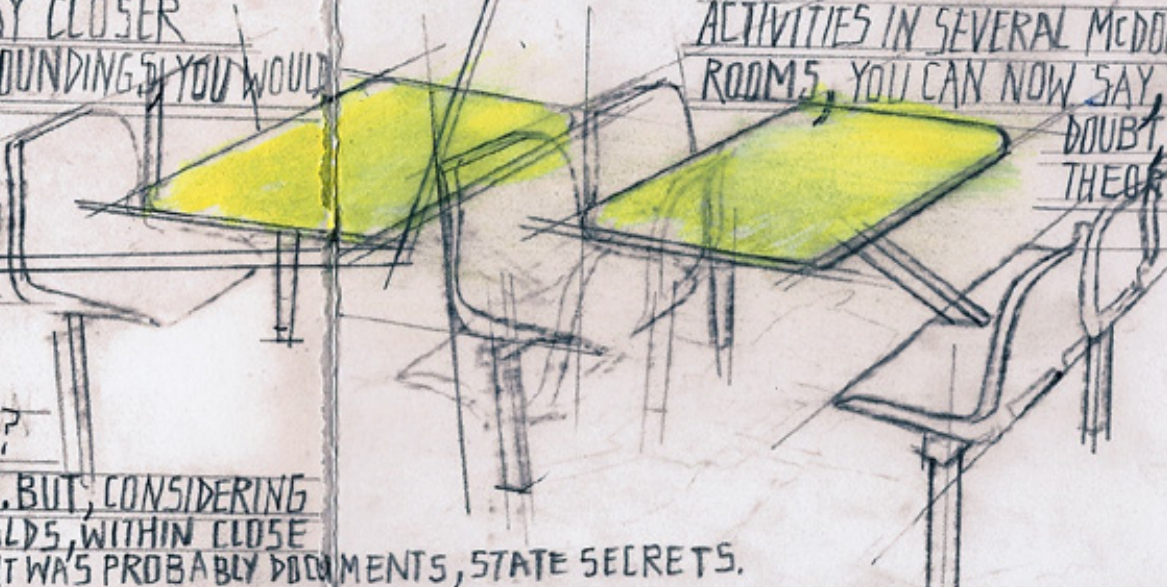
WHAT SPACE
COULD BE MORE
INCONSPICUOUS
MORE ANONYMOUS?

→ YEARS LATER, YOU WOULD
WONDER IF BRIEFCASE
EXCHANGES WERE FREQUENT
OCCURANCES IN ALL ~~WASH~~
WASHINGTON, D.C.-AREA
McDONALDS.

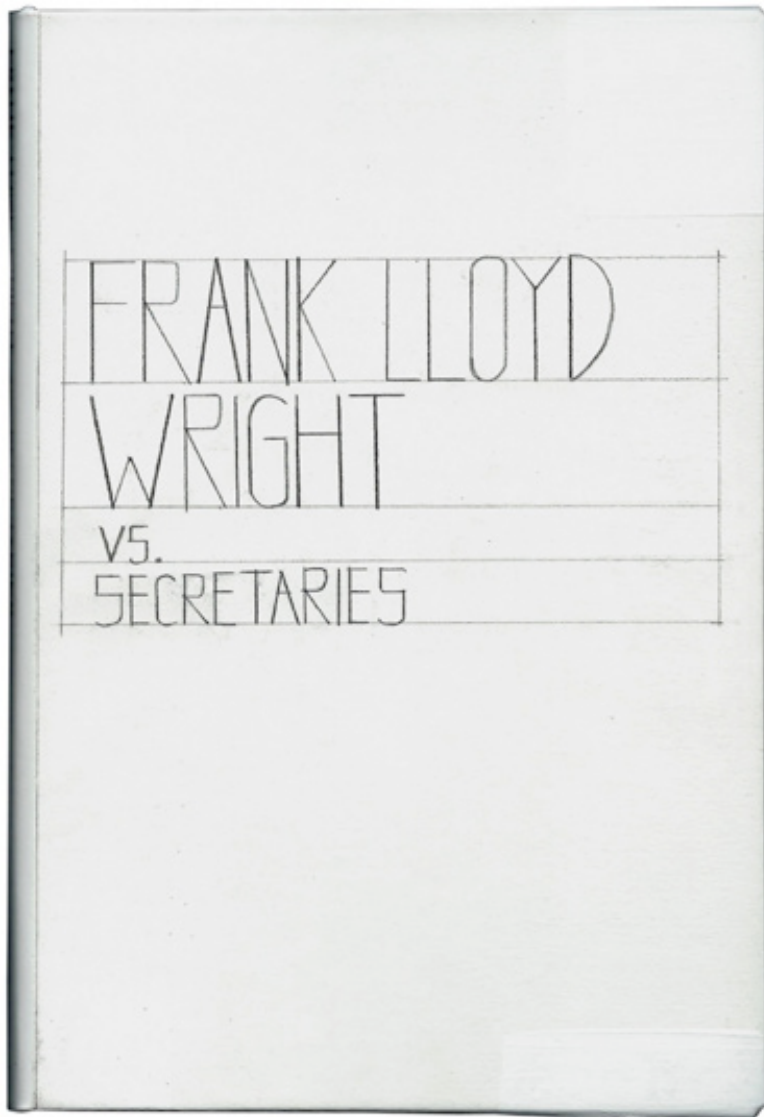
↓
AND MAYBE McDONALDS
KNOWS ABOUT IT AND ENCOURAGES
IT, MAYBE IT'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS?
MAYBE THEY FIGURE THAT SPIES
ARE INTO THE McNUGGETS AND
THE DIPPING SAUCES, TOO.

↓
A FEW YEARS AGO YOU WENT BACK TO D.C.
TO TEST OUT YOUR THEORY. AFTER OBSERVING
ACTIVITIES IN SEVERAL McDONALDS BATH-
ROOMS, YOU CAN NOW SAY, WITHOUT A
DOUBT, THAT YOUR
THEORY HAS SOME
VALIDITY.

ENT, YOU BEGAN TO HAVE
OF A THOUGHT THAT PER-
WERE TO PAY CLOSER
TO YOUR SURROUNDINGS, YOU WOULD
E THAT
NOT ALWAYS
ARED TO BE.



GE OF MONEY?
G5? PERHAPS. BUT, CONSIDERING
OF THE McDONALDS, WITHIN CLOSE
EMBASSY ROW, IT WAS PROBABLY DOCUMENTS, STATE SECRETS.



ABOVE (COVER) | RIGHT (DETAIL)

Frank Lloyd Wright vs. Secretaries

hard-cover, accordion fold: 9" x 6" x 1" (closed); 9" x 44" (open)

artist proof, unique edition of 3

graphite, acrylic, ink, collage on acid-free paper, book board, 2014

OUTWARDLY, THESE
[REDACTED] WO
WRIGHT FROM HIS
CONTROLLING THE
WORLD'S SECRETARIES

ONE OF THE
FEW IMAGES
IN WHICH WRIGHT
IS NOT SLOUCHING



INWARDLY THOUGH
NERVOUS. IF THE
WORLD WERE 50%
MANIPULATIVE THAT
A WAY TO ENTER
TO PREVENT HIS PER
SHARPENED, WHAT
HAVE IN STORE FOR

"I'M NOT AFRAID OF

AFTER ALL, SECRETARIES

AND HE, [REDACTED]

WELL.

HE WAS A GENIUS. EVEN

THE SMALL ANTICS OF
COULD NOT DETER
A WORLD VISION OF
POSTURE OF ALL THE
MARRIES ONE DAY.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT WOULD NEVER
KNOW FOR SURE WHAT BIG PLANS THEY
WERE HATCHING AGAINST HIM, BUT THE
SMALL INEFFICIENCIES IN HIS LIFE CONTINUED.



WRIGHT'S ANXIETY LEVELS

TH, WRIGHT WAS
SECRETARIES OF THE
ORGANIZED, SO
AT THEY COULD FIND
HIS STUDIOS IN ORDER
NCILS FROM BEING
ELSE MIGHT THEY
OR HIM?

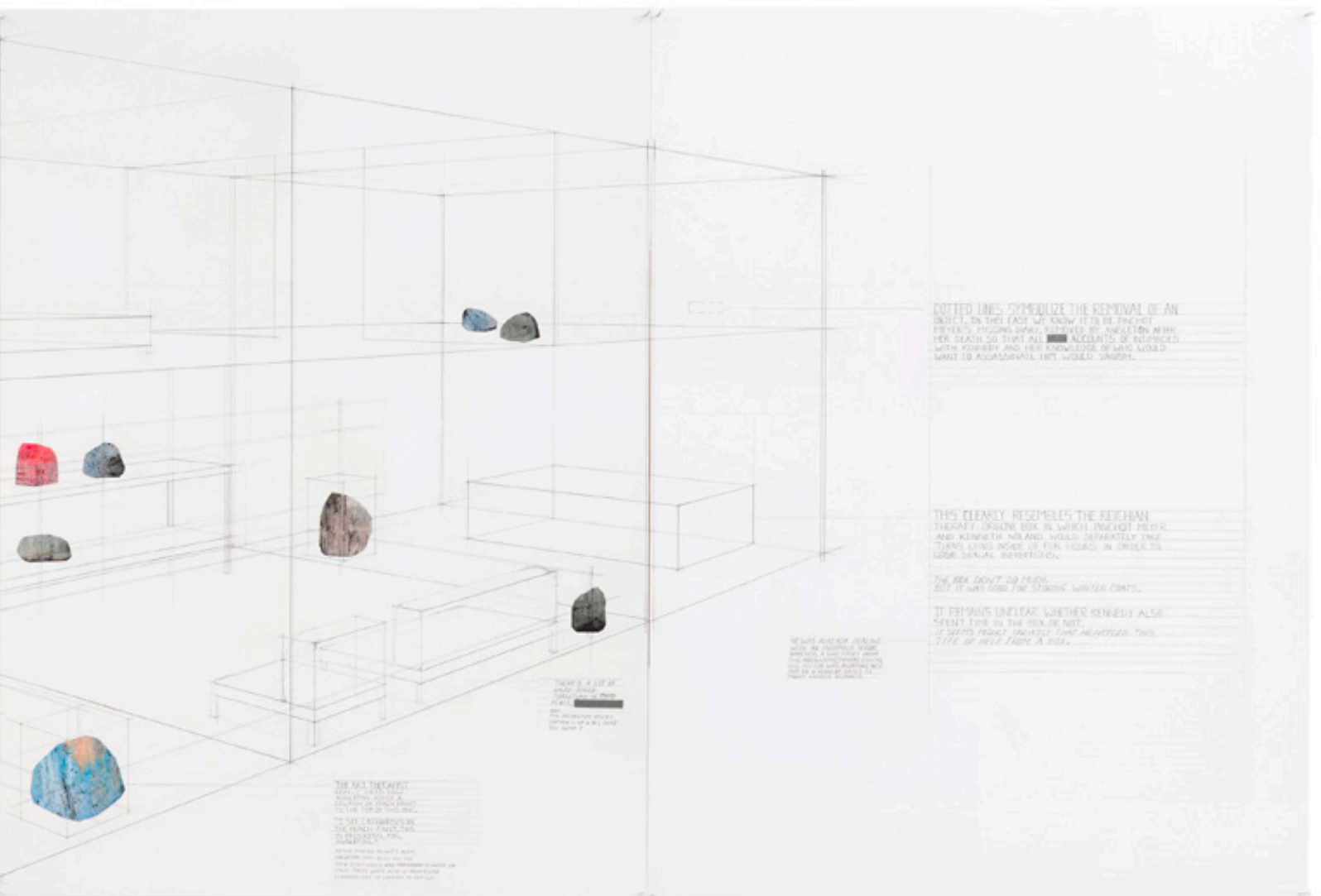


AS SUCH, HE REMAINED ON GUARD.

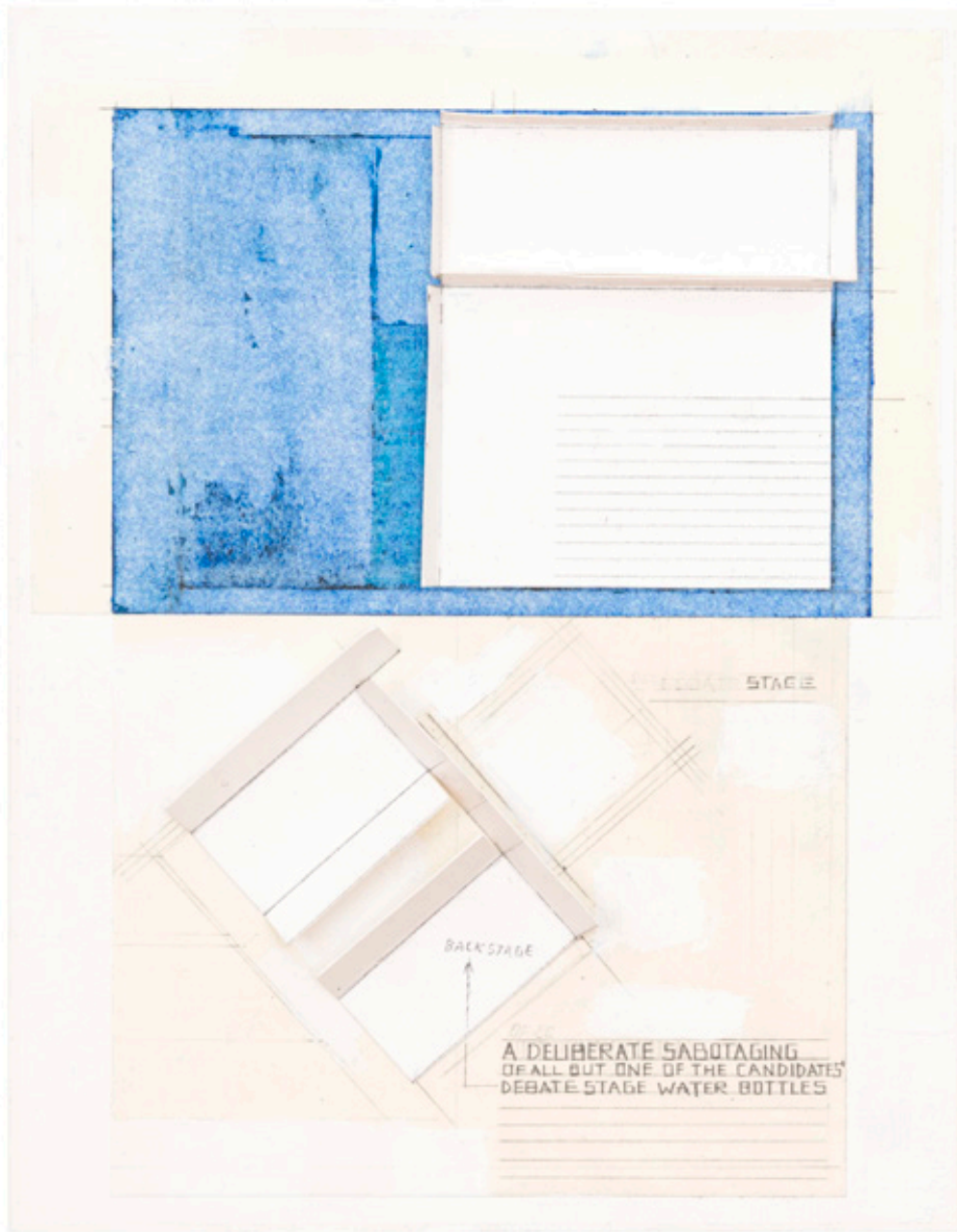
HE CONTINUED TO BE WARY OF SECRETARIES,
ALL SECRETARIES, THE REST OF HIS LONG LIFE,
BUT HE WAS NEVER ABLE TO COME TO TERMS
WITH THEIR POTENTIAL FOR GENIUS, NOR
RESPECT THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR
COLLECTIVE CAPABILITIES.

SECRETARIES!" HE'D PROCLAIM.
RIES WERE JUST SECRETARIES.

RYONE KNEW THIS.



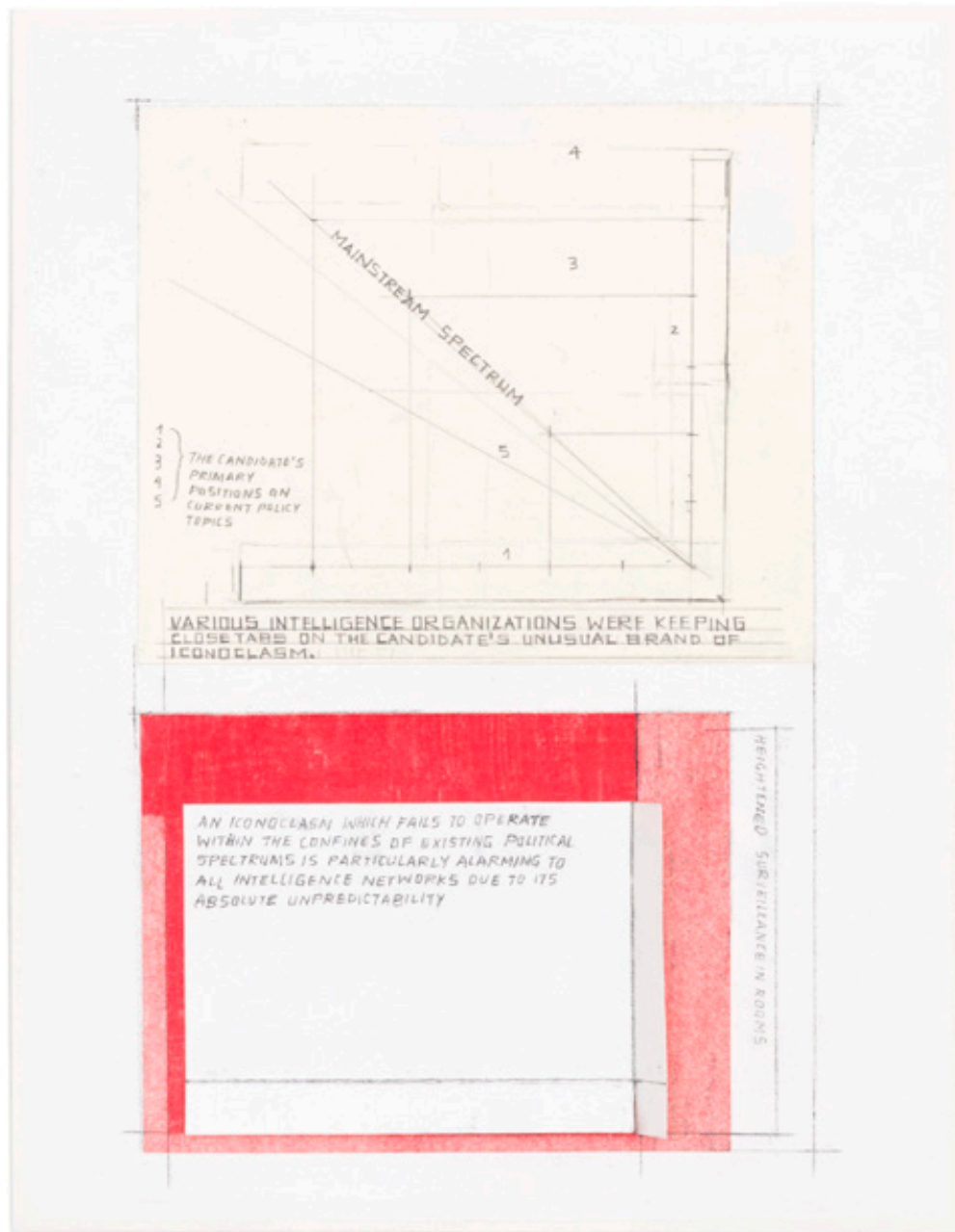
A Case Study in Schematics, Surveillance and Murder
 30" (h) x 88" (w), made up of four 30" x 22" papers hung flush with one another
 graphite, acrylic, colored pencil and collage on paper, 2015



Debate Stage Water Bottles

11" (h) x 8 1/2" (w) x 1/2" (d)

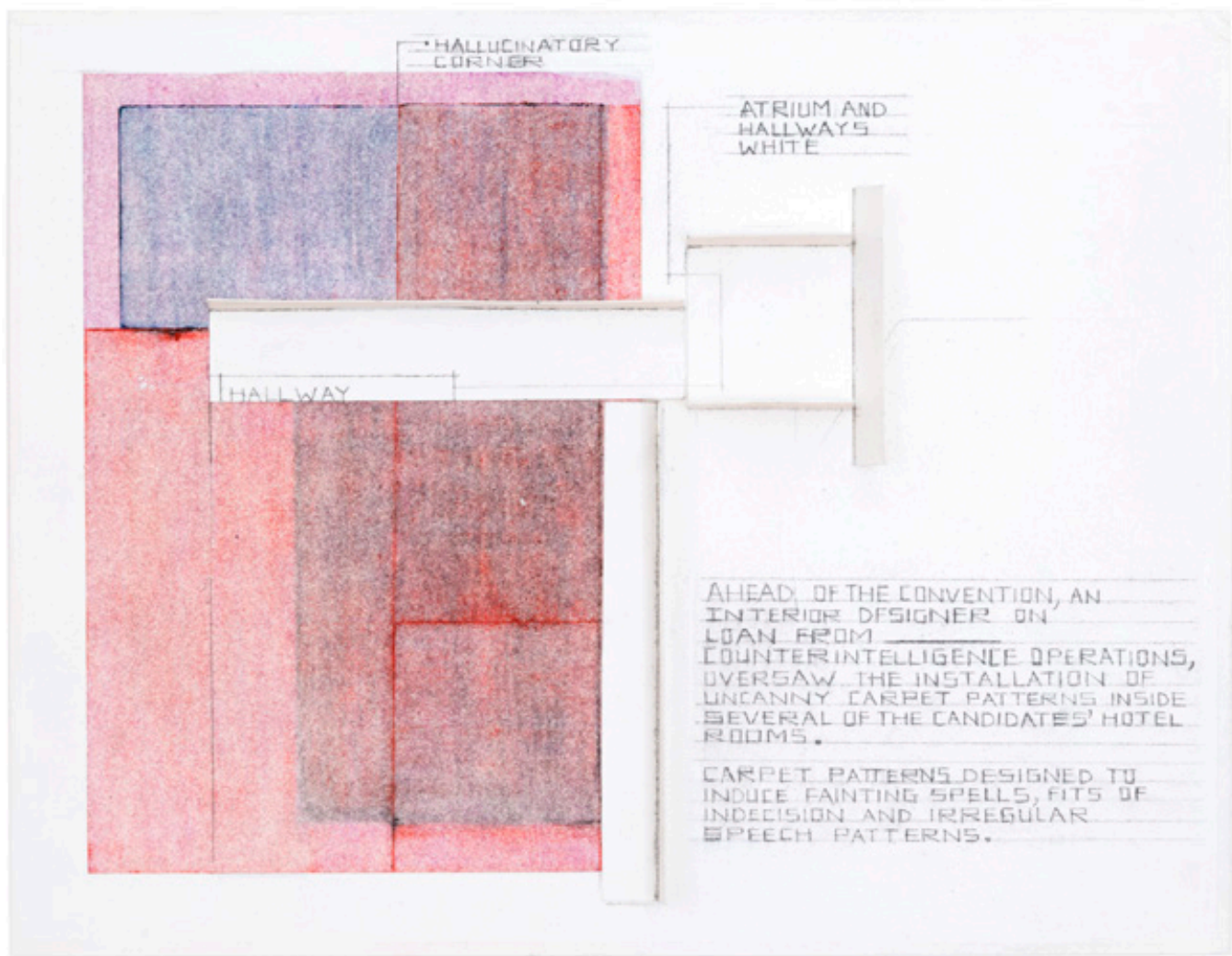
graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016



Absolute Unpredictability

11" (h) x 8 1/2" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016



ABOVE

Carpet Patterns

8 1/2" (h) x 11" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016

RIGHT

Hot Dogs

11" (h) x 8 1/2" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016

AN OLD TIMEY DINER



WALKING IN

Y



ENERGY BARS, NON-CHEWY, TEND TO BE
A CANDIDATE GO-TO. DOESN'T MAKE A MESS.
TOP TIER BY BEING LIKE OTHERS.



SMALLER



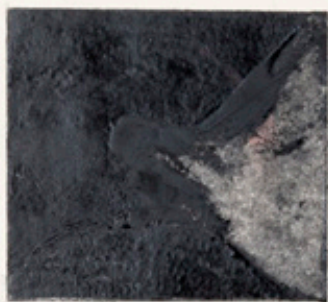
THIS ONE TAKES 9 MINUTES TO EAT

AT THE CAMPAIGN STOP: THE CANDIDATE REFUSES TO
EAT THE HOT DOG.
IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT A CANDIDATE CAN NEVER
BE SHOWN EATING A HOTDOG. NEVER SHOW WEAKNESS.¹

1. ABSOLUTELY NO BUTTERED NOODLES



FLOPPY LIP COLOR



GOOPY HAIR HILLS



A FACE THAT LOOKS LIKE A BOX.

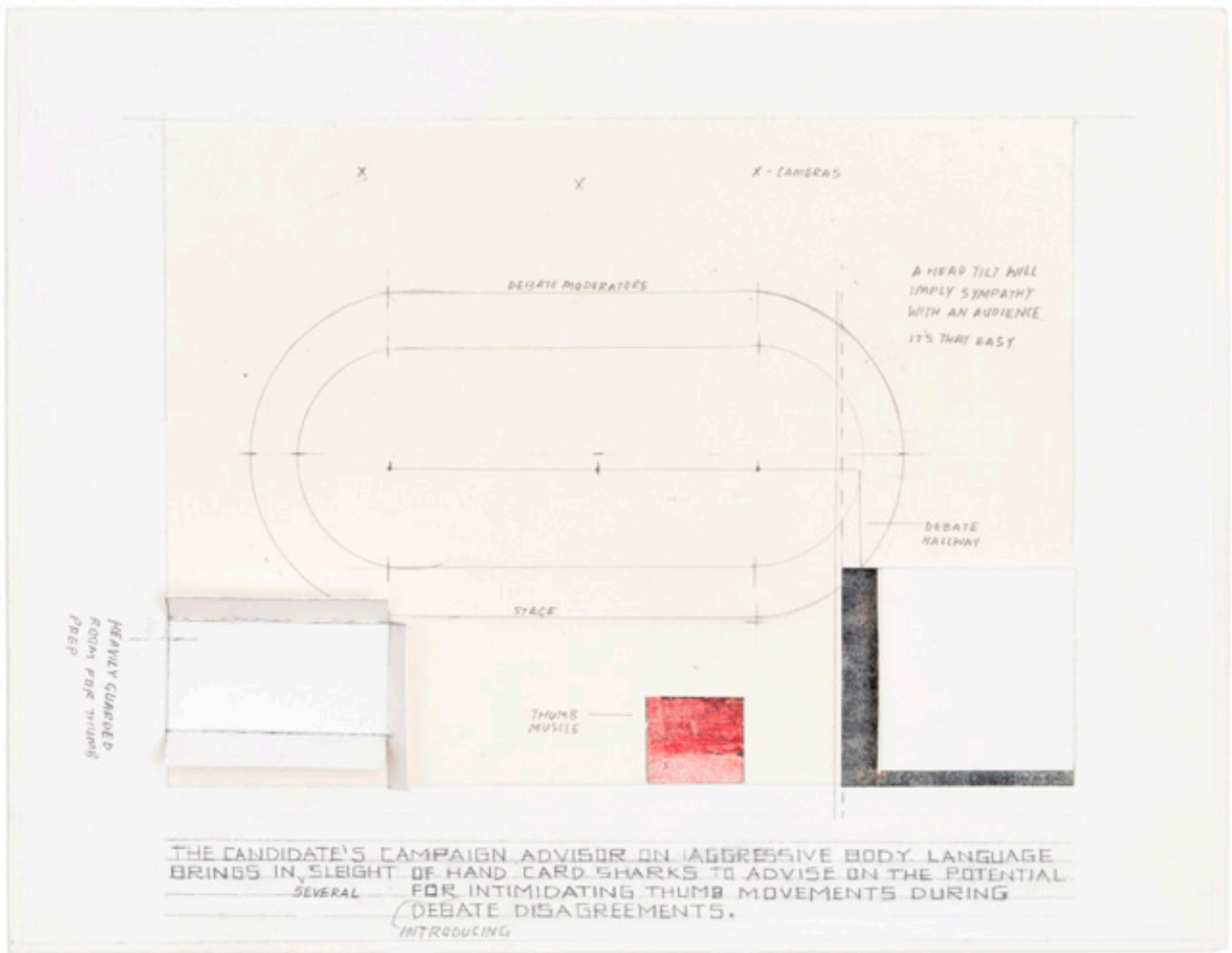


MORE EYEBROWS THAN NECESSARY



A CLOWN CHIN IS SUPERBLY ACCENTUATED ON THE FACE OF ONE CANDIDATE TO CREATE A PERSONA FEW CAN TRUST. PHOTOS OF JOHN WAYNE GALT ARE STUDIED IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS.

THE MAKEUP ARTIST FOR ALL THE CANDIDATES FOR THE FIRST DEBATE IS BEING PAID BY ONE OF THOSE CANDIDATES TO EMBELLISH THE LEAST TRUST-WORTHY PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES OF EACH OPPOSING CANDIDATE.



LEFT

More Eyebrows than Necessary

11" (h) x 8 1/2" (w) x 1/2" (d)

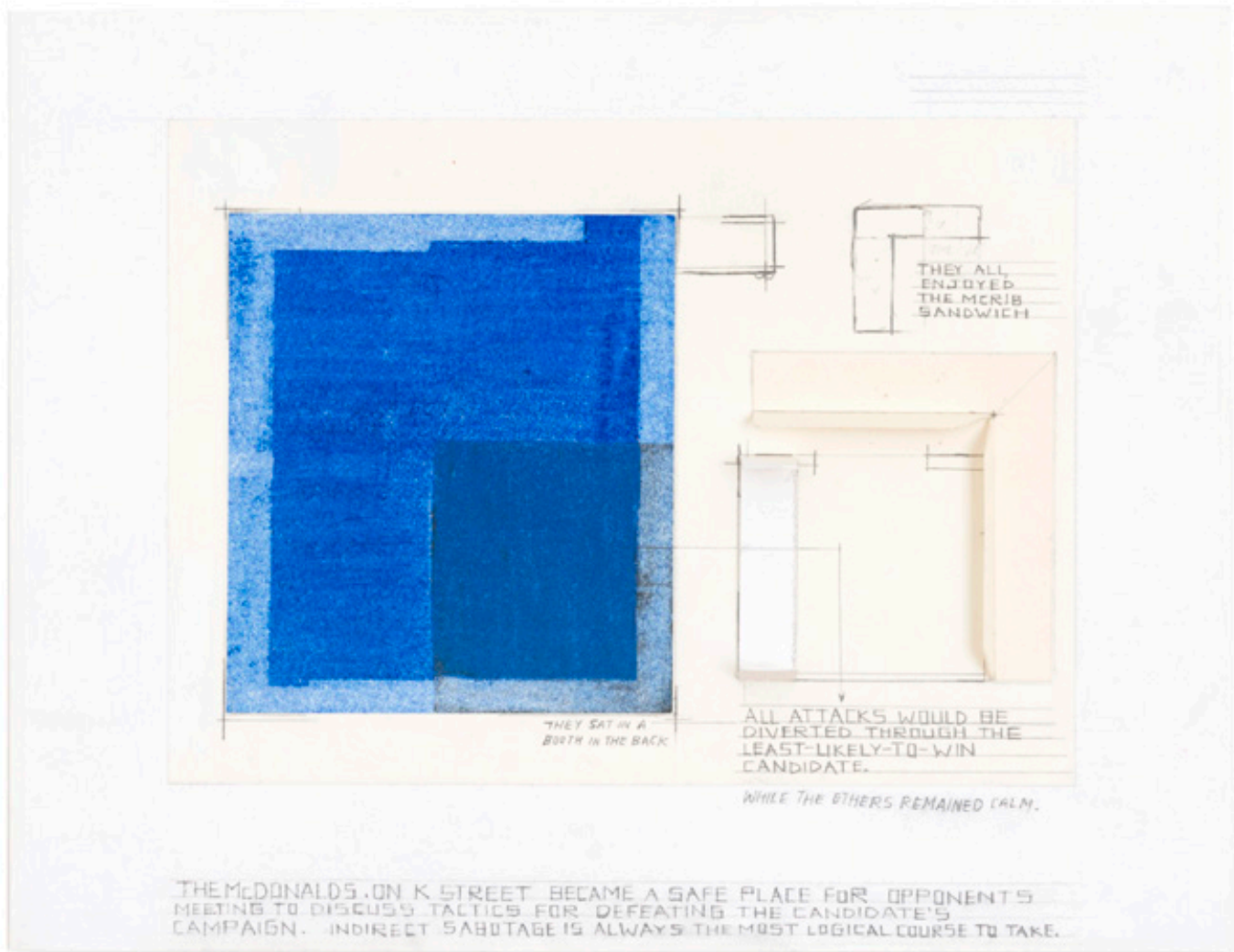
graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016

ABOVE

Intimidating Thumb Movements

8 1/2" (h) x 11" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016



ABOVE

All Attacks Diverted

8 1/2" (h) x 11" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016

RIGHT

Reading Minds

11" (h) x 8 1/2" (w) x 1/2" (d)

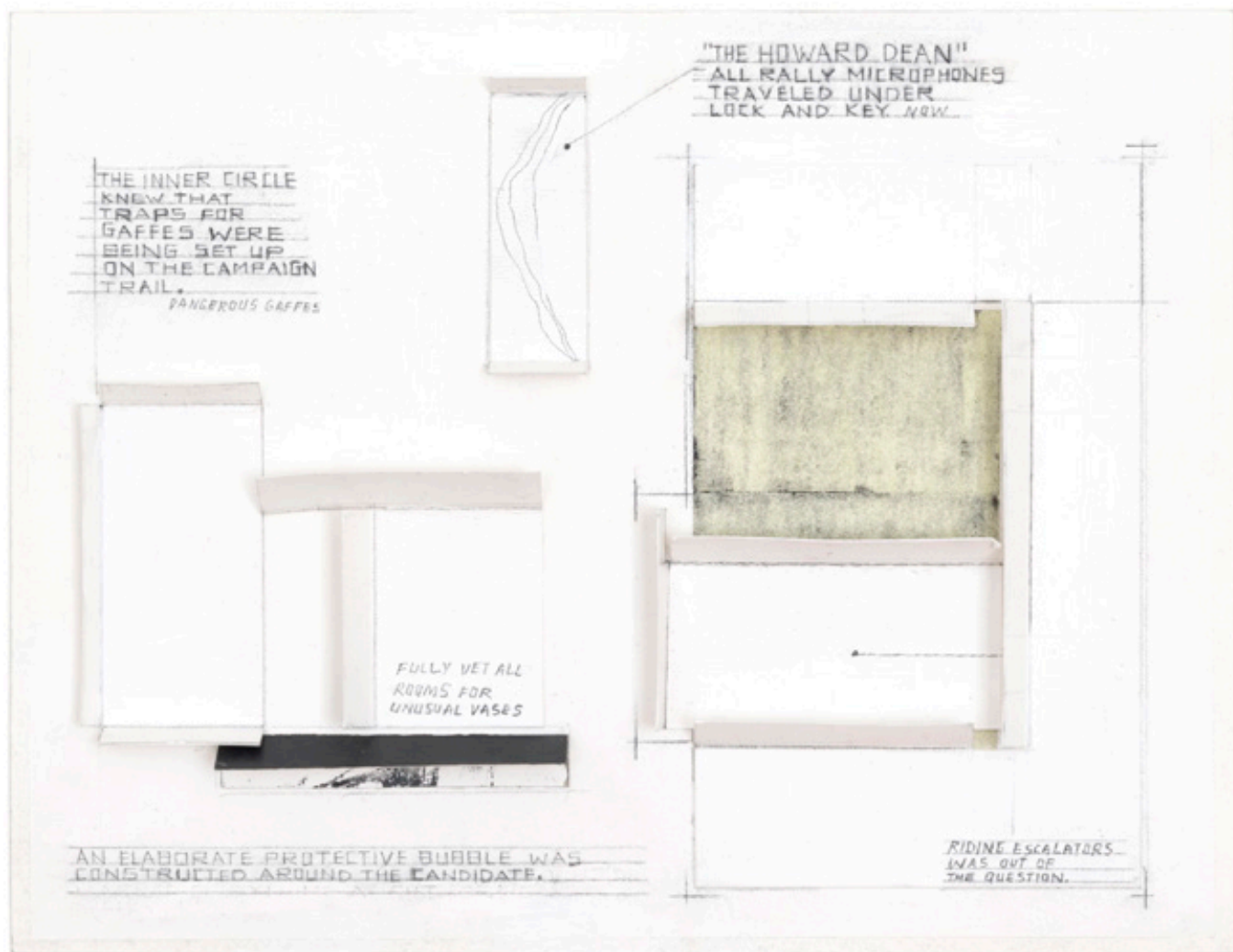
graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016



THE CANDIDATE'S INNER CIRCLE COVERTLY COLLECTED THE PERSONAL PREDILECTIONS AND FINANCIAL RECORDS OF THE CAMPAIGN'S FOOT SOLDIERS.

• BREAKING AND ENTERING, THE CAMPAIGN MANAGER'S IDEA CAME FROM WATCHING A PBS DOCUMENTARY ON JIM JONES' OPERATIONS.

THE CANDIDATE THEN USED THIS INFORMATION IN WAYS THAT THE FOOT SOLDIERS BEGAN BELIEVING THE CANDIDATE POSSESSED AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO READ MINDS.



ABOVE

The Howard Dean

8 1/2" (h) x 11" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016

RIGHT

Self-help Reading

11" (h) x 8 1/2" (w) x 1/2" (d)

graphite, crayon, colored pencil, acrylic, and collage on paper, 2016

TO UNDERSTAND A PRESIDENTIAL CANDI-
DATE IS TO KNOW WHICH SELF-HELP
AUTHORITY THEY SUBSCRIBE TO.

ALSO...

HOW MANY REFLECTING POOLS DO THEY
NEED INSIDE THEIR COMPOUND?

DEB SOKOLOW

An interview with Gallery Director Colin Matthes

COLIN MATTHES: If you switched careers would you pick writer, historian, comedian, or architect? Why?

DEB SOKOLOW: For years I thought I wanted to be an architect, but I've never been good at math or measuring things. A historian needs to be capable of conducting serious, thorough research, so I wouldn't be cut out for that either. I do research, but it's so idiosyncratic and nonlinear, kind of like standup comedy. I guess I'd have to go with being a comedian. I used to have horrible stage fright. Ten years of teaching knocked that out of me, which is to say that I could probably get up in front of a crowd and perform a monolog and then be sort of ok with being booed off the stage.

MATTHES: When did you commit to artmaking? What were you making at the time?

SOKOLOW: I've always made art, but I remember really committing to it when I was an undergrad at the University of Illinois. I had won third place in an art contest for a horrible self-portrait photograph. The reward was a gift certificate to a local art supplies store. I used it to buy a 6x9" spiral bound sketchbook and some colored pencils. I started doodling in the sketchbook and noticed that a doodle on one page would appear as an indentation on the page behind it. This is when I started to think about surface and process and unintentional mark-making. I filled up that sketchbook. And then I bought another one and filled that one up, too. I was so into it. I couldn't stop. I'd tell friends I couldn't go out at night. I'd just stay in my room, drawing with those colored pencils. It wasn't great for my social life.

MATTHES: When visiting your studio, I was taken aback by the extent of your research into surface. Specifically, your ability to make sections of your drawings feel like printmaking. What drives your investigations into these surfaces?

SOKOLOW: One of the most exciting moments for me when I look at another artist's work is when I can't figure out how they've made that thing. I love it when there's some sort of mystery in terms of how materials are used or the process in which that thing is made. And I try to really work surfaces in ways that I hope will also feel mysterious. And yes, many of the visuals I make appear to be reproduced with a printmaking process but are instead hand-rendered with colored pencils and crayons. I want those visuals to function as a conceptual compliment to the semi-fictional texts I'm writing, so that both the visuals and the texts could inspire some uncertainty for the viewer with regard to how they were fabricated.

MATTHES: Where'd your interest in conspiracy originate?

SOKOLOW: In 1986 I witnessed a highly suspicious briefcase exchange in the bathroom of a Washington, D.C. McDonald's near Embassy Row. In 1991, I worked as a congressional intern on Capitol Hill and I think I was seeing things then, too, that also seemed suspicious.

With each of these situations, I really felt I was catching a glimpse into some sort of sinister parallel world. I also used to read a lot of spy novels, which also had some role in shaping my understanding as to how various entities, nefarious and otherwise, might be operating beneath the surface of things.

MATTHES: I only have a vague idea of the Jim Jones story. What role does Jim Jones play in your work?

SOKOLOW: It's a horrible story. Cult leader Jim Jones founded the People's Temple in Indiana in the 1950s and moved the cult to California in the 1960s. In 1974 Jones established Jonestown, an agricultural commune in Guyana, which abruptly ended in 1978 when Jones forced his followers to commit suicide by drinking poisoned grape Flavor Aid.

Some of Jim Jones' followers came from my home town of Davis, California, including two key members of his inner circle. Also, my father was a professor of political science at University of California, Davis and one of his former students, Jackie Speier, worked for U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan who represented a district where many constituents lived who had family members at Jonestown. In 1978 Congressman Ryan, Speier, members of the press and concerned relatives flew down to Jonestown to investigate, which led to several of them being killed by Jones' followers, including Congressman Ryan. Right after this, Jones ordered his followers to drink the poisoned Flavor Aid, then ordered his own death. All of this resulted in the largest single incident of intentional civilian death in U.S. history, until September 11, 2001. One silver lining in this tragedy is that Jackie Speier survived and is now the U.S. Congresswoman representing what was once Ryan's congressional district and has served as a powerful voice in Congress against corruption and other abuses of power.

I knew the story of Jim Jones at a pretty early age, and felt both drawn to and disturbed by the mind control tactics Jim Jones successfully used on his followers and the great lengths he went to in order to manipulate and exert influence over politicians and other people in positions of power. But I'm also reminded of the phrase from Jenny Holzer's Truism series, Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise. Psychopathy has always been present in the personalities and unchecked behaviors of countless leaders from history. It seems particularly visible, though, in this current moment where political, economic and especially environmental instability exists everywhere. And that instability leads to anxiety and fear, which leaders with psychopathic tendencies know how to manipulate.

My own complicated feelings involving fascination, anxiety and disgust with regard to manipulative leadership and psychopathy were the impetus behind this show I had in 2013, Some Concerns About the Candidate, at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. Through objects and drawings, the exhibition tells the story of a campaign worker who becomes increasingly concerned about the behavior of the U.S. Congressional candidate they're working for, Jim Jones (based on the cult leader Jim Jones), and the campaign's questionable tactics used to secure a win in the election.

The exhibition served as inspiration for the 2016 series of small drawings, Debate Stage Water Bottles, made to coincide with the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Short, hand-written texts describe humorous gaffes, shadowy strategies and the more mundane, behind-the-scenes details of various unnamed candidates and campaigns. While some of the texts are fictional, a number are loosely based on current or past presidential candidacies.

MATTES: The work on exhibition includes A Case Study in Schematics, Surveillance, and Murder (2015), Debate Stage Water Bottles (2016) and The Presidents (2017). Could you describe how each project influenced the next? What did you learn from each project, what did you abandon?

SOKOLOW: Around the time I made A Case Study in Schematics, Surveillance and Murder, I noticed my eye sight starting to deteriorate. I blame this on what I was reading for "fun" at the time: a 1088-page paperback version with ridiculously small print of David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest. I was really struggling with writing and reading small texts, so the next series of drawings, Debate Stage Water Bottles, included a lot less text. I also started working more with paper tabs that stick out, perpendicularly from the paper, so that the surface of each drawing might feel more like an architectural model or maquette of a building, seen from a bird's-eye view. And after making Debate Stage Water Bottles series, I looked at those drawings and decided that I should experiment with larger blocks of color, which is what I started doing in the drawings on presidents that came next.

MATTES: How did these series of works evolve conceptually?

SOKOLOW: At a Sokolow family reunion in 2007, it was dramatically revealed to everyone there that our cousin, Irving Sokolow, had known Lee Harvey Oswald. Irving was in his 90s and unable to attend the reunion, so my dad went down to LA to interview him. The interview, captured on video and played at the reunion, includes Irving recounting his old job as a psychologist at Youth House, a home for troubled youth in New York City. One of the kids

Irving worked with was a 13-year old Lee Harvey Oswald, sent there in 1953 for being truant from school.

In the video Irving mentions how the Warren Commission contacted him after JFK's assassination, a decade after his encounters with Oswald at Youth House. To Irving, it seemed as though the commission had an agenda: Gather enough evidence to show Oswald acted alone in killing the president. But Irving refused to buy into this. His professional opinion was that Oswald wasn't smart enough to have done it by himself.

Incidentally, the Warren Commission did include a copy of Irving's psychological assessment of Oswald from 1953, which anyone can read online. I love how Irving's assessment leads with the phrase "Lee is a good looking, slender youngster" and includes an evaluation of some human figure drawings Oswald was asked to make "which reflect a considerable amount of impoverishment in the social and emotional areas." About a year or two before Irving passed, my dad gave him a drawing I made about his connection to Oswald, which he seemed to like. As far as I know, he did not critique it as harshly as he did Oswald's drawings.

After this, I started reading up on JFK and the assassination, which included two interesting books on Kennedy's lover, Mary Pinchot Meyer, one from journalist Nina Burleigh and the other by Pinchot Meyer's son's childhood friend, Peter Janney. The circumstances of Pinchot Meyer's unsolved murder, which occurred approximately a year after Kennedy's assassination are so unusual. Burleigh's 1998 book leaves it a mystery, whereas Janney's 2013 book lays out what appears to be some solid evidence that the two murders are connected and that James Jesus Angleton, chief of CIA Counterintelligence, was responsible for both.

All of this inspired the semi-fictitious drawing, A Case Study in Schematics, Surveillance and Murder. It's an imagined schematic of Pinchot Meyer's Washington, D.C. home, which includes Angleton's surveillance equipment, hidden inside decorative rock sculptures (made with the guidance and encouragement of his art therapist) that he gifted Pinchot Meyer.

I made this drawing in 2015. Also, right around that time, a whole mess of candidates started campaigning for the

2016 presidential election. Because Kennedy and politics were on my mind, I started watching a lot of tv coverage of the campaigns. And I felt this impulse to make some drawings about the candidates, so I did. But I decided not to use any of the candidates' names in Debate Stage Water Bottles. I'd rather the identities of the candidates be somewhat ambiguous and not feel too tied down to the 2016 election. It's hard to make art about things that are so obviously happening in the current moment, because it will quickly feel dated. And it's impossible to fully understand people and events without having the luxury of seeing how they evolve or are viewed at a later point in time.

Which brings me to The Presidents (some of them), a 2017 series of drawings that came after Debate Stage Water Bottles. After the 2016 election, I started reflecting upon how strange it is to want to be the president of the United States. What type of person wants this job? And how odd it must make one's life, once they assume that role. The lack of privacy. The fear that everyone who works for you will one day write a memoir about all of your shortcomings, all of your most unflattering moments. So this series of drawings include semi-fictitious foibles of various presidents. And while there is some mix of fact and fiction in each one, most of the drawings heavily weigh in on the factual end of the spectrum.

MATTHERS: What is your relationship with minimalism?

SOKOLOW: In 2010 I started researching a conspiracy theory claiming that a mammoth bunker for the Western Hemisphere headquarters of the New World Order was built beneath Denver International Airport. I kept seeing minimalist imagery, such as triangles, boxes and stark diagrams explaining/accompanying the theory on conspiracy websites. So I started drawing and collaging similar visuals with little to no color alongside the conspiracy-inspired texts I was writing.

I also started looking a lot at minimalism. And Donald Judd. Sometimes Judd's works, especially the highly fabricated pieces, seem so robotic and inhuman. My favorite moments come when there's a mistake in the surface, a stray pencil mark or some other evidence of

indecision or humanness. In recent years, my visuals have become more colorful and complicated. But since minimalism is historically such a male-dominated art movement which pairs up well with some of the male-centric, machismo leadership themes in my current work, I am still trying to reference minimalist-inspired color fields, the grid and geometry.

MATTHES: The narrator is essential in your work. How did you come to using this structure? How does the prominent role of the narrator effect your work?

SOKOLOW: When I was in grad school, I was making map-like drawings and shapes out of glue, and everything looked pretty, but I had no personal investment in any of it. I didn't know what the work was about, I couldn't talk about it and I didn't know when anything was finished. I started watching the movie, *Rocky*, and something clicked. I watched it so many times and I would see something different each time. And I felt personally invested in the story because I could see myself as one of the movie's characters. I think this is when I realized that I needed a story to work with. And a narrator.

MATTHES: Your book, *Frank Lloyd Wright vs. Secretaries* (2014), takes place at the Johnson Wax Company Headquarters. Now your work is a few miles away. Does the proximity to this location effect your feelings about the project?

SOKOLOW: The story of Frank Lloyd Wright designing a three-legged chair for employees at Johnson Wax Company Headquarters is one of my favorite anecdotes about the architect. I've read about his lack of concern with regard to employees falling over in the chair if perfect posture wasn't maintained and I've wondered if any relatives of those Johnson Wax employees are still in the area and know the story, have something new to add to it or have a completely different take on it.

MATTHES: A common thread linking many elements of your work is an investigation into the heroic; utopian

architecture and architects, "great" men, formidable women, minimalism, the CIA, etc. Within all of this, there is skepticism, admiration, and insight into the vulnerabilities of power. How did you get here?

SOKOLOW: You're right. The common thread in the work is an investigation into the heroic, or what I usually refer to as power. I am always intrigued with the people, structures and organizations that openly and secretly possess power. I guess it's the opposite of who I am and what I do. I'm an artist making drawings. And maybe that's kind of a powerless position, a harmless pursuit? And maybe there's something kind of sneaky and gratifying about making a drawing in which I'm mixing fact and fiction and writing about these powerful people on the space of the page? I get to control the narrative, and that feels good. And you're right, my feelings about powerful entities are complicated. Yes, there's admiration and skepticism. There's also sarcasm.

LESLEY H. WALKER

Dean, College of Arts and Humanities

COLIN MATTHES

Gallery Director

NICHOLAS FRANK

Essay

GLEN LARSON

Installation

OLIVER J. JOHNSON

Graphic Design & Marketing

NATHAN SWANSON

Graphic Design Assistant

JENNIFER FILIPPONE

KAREN SORENSEN

Administrative Support

KENNEY JACOB

Print Manager

UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN **PARKSIDE**

DOTTED LINES SYMBOLIZE THE REMOVAL OF AN OBJECT. IN THIS CASE WE KNOW IT TO BE PINCHOT MEYER'S MISSING DIARY, REMOVED BY ANGLETON AFTER HER DEATH SO THAT ALL █████ ACCOUNTS OF INTIMACIES WITH KENNEDY AND HER KNOWLEDGE OF WHO WOULD WANT TO ASSASSINATE HIM WOULD VANISH.

THIS CLEARLY RESEMBLES THE REICHIAN THERAPY ORGONE BOX IN WHICH PINCHOT MEYER AND KENNETH NOLAN WOULD SEPARATELY TAKE TURNS LYING INSIDE OF FOR HOURS IN ORDER TO LOSE SEXUAL INHIBITIONS.

*THE BOX DIDN'T DO MUCH,
BUT IT WAS GOOD FOR STORING WINTER COATS.*

IT REMAINS UNCLEAR WHETHER KENNEDY ALSO SPENT TIME IN THE BOX OR NOT.
IT SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT HE NEEDED THIS TYPE OF HELP FROM A BOX.

HE WAS ALREADY DEALING WITH AN ENORMOUS SEXUAL APPETITE, A SIDE EFFECT FROM THE METHAMPHETAMINE COCKTAIL HIS DOCTOR WAS PUMPING INTO HIM ON A REGULAR BASIS TO TREAT VARIOUS ILLMENTS.

IF PINCHOT MEYER HAD ONLY KNOWN
WHAT WAS INSIDE THE ROCK SCULPTURES,
SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE PUT ONE
NEXT TO HER BED.

KENNEDY FELT SHE WAS
HIS TRUE INTELLECTUAL
EQUAL.
UNLIKE MOST WOMEN HE ENCOUNTERED,

MOST WOMEN COULD NOT HANDLE
HIS BRILLIANCE.

THIS FLOORPLAN INDICATES
THE EXCESSIVE NUMBER OF
DECORATIVE ROCK SCULPTURES
ANGLETON GIFTED PINCHOT
MEYER, EACH ONE WAS BUGGED
SO THAT ANGLETON COULD
LISTEN IN ON EVERYTHING.

PINCHOT MEYER ACCEPTED EVERY
SINGLE ONE WITH AN EMPATHETIC SMILE AFTER
ANGLETON EXPLAINED THAT HE'D
BEEN MAKING THEM WITH GUIDANCE
FROM HIS ART THERAPIST.

THIS WAS NO LIE.

THE STRESSES OF INTELLIGENCE WORK,
A PROFESSION FILLED WITH LIES AND
PARANOIA, HAD TAKEN A TOLL ON
ANGLETON'S MARRIAGE.

AFTER EXCESSIVELY PAINTING THE
SURFACE OF EACH ROCK, ANGLETON WOULD
ARRANGE FOR ONE OF HIS TECH OBSERVATIVES
TO PLANT THE BUG INSIDE, BEFORE GIFTING
IT TO PINCHOT MEYER.

BUT SHE DIDN'T
TRUST ANGLETON,
EVEN IF HE WAS
GOOD FATHER TO
HER CHILDREN.

PETER WATCHING
MATT CAPSON
PINCHOT ANGLETON'S
PARANOIA IN THE
MOVIE THE GOOD
SHEPHERD, YOU
SUCKDAMN FAUST
ANGLETON EITHER.

NOR WOULD YOU EVER
BUY AN ON SCREEN
MATT DAMON/ANGELINA
JOLIE ROMANCE IF I EVER
INTENDED AGAIN.

