

The Electric Pencil

Emily Janowick is the Vine
Wells Chandler
July 30. 2024



Installation view of Chevron at International Waters, Brooklyn, New York
(courtesy of the artist and International Waters, photo Olympia Shannon)

Undulating verdant surrogates feel their way through the dark. Emily dances with their daughters in the moonlight. Imbued with fecundity, the gourd swells. Together they defeat the downward trajectory of gravity. Climbing higher and higher under a blanket of stars, the crop plants thrust themselves over the fence. A permeable protective barrier marks the site of home. Moving in unison, they are in it together. The gourds are many. Hollow vessels connected generationally, they grow, move and expand.



Video Still Chevron at International Waters, Brooklyn, New York

Almost every culture has musical instruments made of gourds. I sit with Emily on the fresh cut wooden steps in their exhibition. We listen to the score that they collaborated on with their daughters. We stare out together observing life moving along in their backyard on two video monitors, each monitor representing both children. We are serenaded. Handmade poetry books are nestled next to plants in pairs of two. The vines pandiculate conducting Shiloh's polyphonic hymnal.

During the last forty nights that Shiloh lived at home before she went to college, Janowick recorded the gourd vines in their backyard growing in the darkness while their daughter slept. Two years later, as Jaden prepared to move out, they grew the gourds again, repeating the ritual.



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Our visit lasted over two hours. Tears were shed upon numerous occasions as we talked about pain, family, recovering from narcissistic abuse, queer identity, motherhood, healing, being stuck, fertility woes, separation anxiety, compassion and embracing love. The slanted floor of the gallery at International Waters creates two intersecting V shapes, the symbol for infinity, with a duet of wooden stairs. Chevron is the earth angel kin to Daniel Bozhkov's Cosmic Cucumber Carousel. Both works explore themes centered around the viability of life in the face of uninhabitable conditions.

The experience of the installation echoes the function of a Quaker meeting house. We speak when the spirit moves us, pausing to listen and take in our tendriled neighbors. Their daughter's bedroom mirror punches a portal in the windowless gallery. We look out by looking back in. Stripped of light show theatrics and an escape hatch, the shadow work that transpired reminded me of the opposite phenomena gleaned from the experience of James Turrell's similarly contextualized work. We crouch and recline on pews. Two rows of parallel wooden bleachers extend from the sky like a Jacob's ladder domestic remix. I feel like I am on the front porch but looking out the back. Depending where I sit, I am over and under. My orientation is queered in this perceptual twist, like a double helix DNA strand compressed by time and space. Dwarfed by the cascading support, our bodies are soft notes that punctuate a page of sheet music. The way memory, home and care locates itself recalls the installation work of Robert Gober, but Janowick allows us to go inside rather than observe a world that we cannot enter.

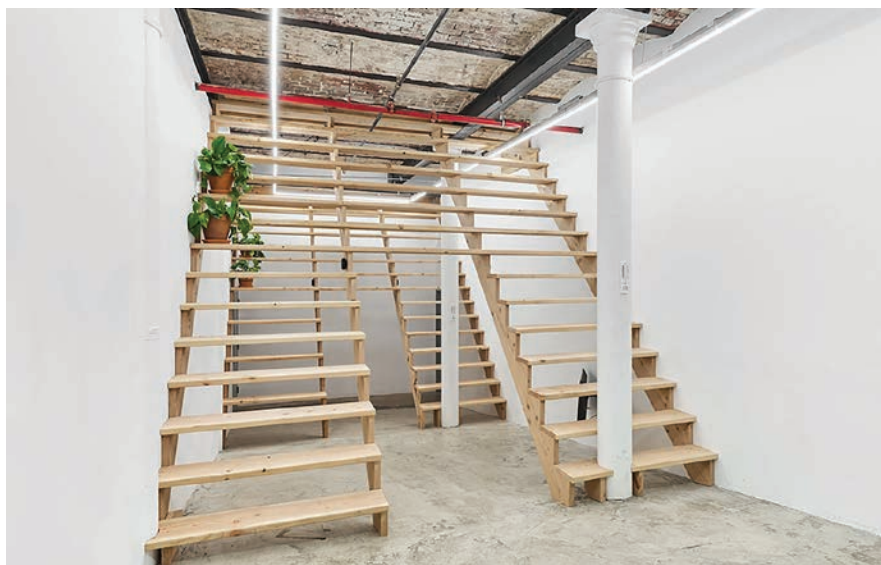


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Two thermometers on supportive pillars keep temperature. In unison, I am reminded of Felix González-Torres' 1991 work *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*. Felix González-Torres' words reflecting on time, written to his partner Ross Laycock after his diagnosis, feel like they could have been written by Janowick to their daughters,

Time has been so generous to us. We imprinted time with the sweet taste of victory. We conquered fate by meeting at a certain time in a certain space. We are a product of the time, therefore we give back credit where it is due: time. We are synchronized, now forever. I love you.

Janowick constructs secular spiritual sites where we can commune, heal, experience wonder and reflect. Chevron invites us to witness a love ritual and be active participants in it. Remain in me, for I remain in you. Remain in love.



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