



*Between Instances*, installation view

Artists Lisa Pressman and Krista Svalbonas live in different parts of the country—Pressman in New Jersey and Svalbonas in Chicago—but they periodically find ways to collaborate with one another. *Between Instances* is a site-specific exhibition that combines photography, painting, and text, documenting their year-long meditation on memory, place, and the passage of time.

This is the fifth collaborative project the artists have undertaken, but the first incorporating a year of preparatory work. Building on the success of a previous collaboration in Illinois that used photography as a starting point, they each agreed to take a photograph at 3 PM (EST) every Tuesday for an entire year, no matter where they found themselves at that particular moment. Unsure where the process would ultimately lead, they came together for one week at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in January 2017 to create a site-specific installation with this raw material.

Adhering to the discipline of a shared daily practice was a challenge and a commitment. Using calendar notifications and the cameras in their smart phones, both artists stopped whatever they were doing at the appointed time and took pictures in response to their respective environments. It was a meaningful way for them to stay connected as collaborators while physically separated. When they reunited at the Art Center, they considered many ideas for the installation, but together they decided to make the fifty-two pairs of weekly photographs the central focus.

Pressman and Svalbonas responded to the space in Studio X by painting lines that extended the gridded pattern of the ceiling tiles onto the gallery walls, dividing them into squares. Approaching this pattern like a wall-sized calendar grid, the artists arranged their photographic pairs in a chronological sequence moving clockwise from the gallery entrance. The photographs create a visual timeline that is part travelogue, and part diary, highlighting the places they visited and what caught their eyes. The internal conversation between each pair of photos—Pressman on the left and Svalbonas on the right—contributes to a larger dialogue and speaks to their longtime shared vocabulary of aesthetics.

They also accentuated the passage of time by painting twelve colored blocks on the walls—one for each month in the year. The artists used these squares to record the kind of notations they made on their personal calendars—monthly tasks, deadlines, and other things they were thinking

about while taking the photographs. Pressman and Svalbonas whitewashed over these blocks and the lines of the grid, making them recede like memories grown hazy over time.

The square format of the photographs not only echoes the formal structure of the exhibition, it also references Instagram. Artists are increasingly using social media sites to share images of their own and others' artworks, as well as what they observe in the world. Both Pressman and Svalbonas are active on Facebook and Instagram, so this project seemed a natural outgrowth for them. Svalbonas explains, "Lisa and I already photograph our surroundings regularly. I'm using the photographs as reference points for paintings and also using them to create physical collage pieces. Lisa uses photography almost as a diary, inspiration for composition, color, light, and imagery. Although she doesn't directly reference the photographs in her paintings they become part of her collected unconscious."

There is little room for ego in a successful collaboration, and each participant must willingly learn from the other. This was not a stretch for these two artists, as their initial relationship was that of student and teacher (Svalbonas learned encaustics from Pressman, and in turn taught her bookmaking.) From the Latin verb, *laborare*, to collaborate literally means "to labor together." Labor is often considered a strenuous or difficult activity, but one that usually produces something of value—such as a child. By laboring together, with open minds and just enough humility, Pressman and Svalbonas have produced something greater than any of its individual components.

-Mary Birmingham, Curator  
Visual Arts Center of New Jersey

(We should illustrate one of the photo pairs here—maybe a different one.)



*An installation of this complexity would not have been possible without the assistance of some dedicated volunteers. The artists thank: (TBD)*

*Special thanks to Katherine Murdock, Assistant Curator, for coordinating all of their efforts.*