



Weinberg/  
Newton  
Gallery

# RETURN TO THE EVERYWHERE

2020

Published on the occasion of  
*Return to the Everywhere*  
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An exhibition by  
Weinberg/Newton Gallery

Artists  
Gwyneth Zeleny Anderson  
Jesse McLean  
Sayward Schoonmaker  
Sonnenszimmer  
Sadie Woods

Curator  
Kasia Houlihan

Cover:  
Jesse McLean, *Relations* (video still),  
2010/2020, courtesy of the artist

## Introduction

A radio is a kind of transmission device, sending sound through the air and into the everywhere—kitchens, living rooms, supermarkets, cars, front stoops, and park benches. It is undiscerning. As long as one has a radio to pick up a signal, one can listen. This exchange between sender and receiver could be characterized as a one-way transaction, a passive audience taking in the broadcaster's message. But what if that relationship allowed for dialogue between both sides? What if the role of listener was understood to be an active one? Whose voices would be heard then? Which questions would get asked? Which stories would be told? And who would listen?

These artworks insist upon the power of the listener to affect the narrative by inviting us to actively engage with them. We must decide if and exactly how we want to participate when we are encouraged to turn the knob of a radio, rearrange a meandering sequence of papers, or take a stroll with a mysterious talking box. It is our physical presence and movement

through the space that activates each piece. In turn, these works create the conditions for empathy, opening us up to understanding and compassion.

The founders of National Public Radio were similarly aware of the potential for its programming to open listeners' minds to worlds beyond their own when writing its original mission statement in 1969, as they asserted:

*The programs will enable the individual to better understand himself, his government, his institutions, and his natural and social environment, so he can intelligently participate in affecting the process of change.*

Fifty years on, these words can embolden all of us who are working to navigate today's media landscape, constantly parsing fact from fiction, truth from belief. As the dizzying news cycle clamors to catch our ears and eyes, this exhibition reminds us that we can choose where to focus our attention while listening along with everyone, everywhere.

— KASIA HOULIHAN



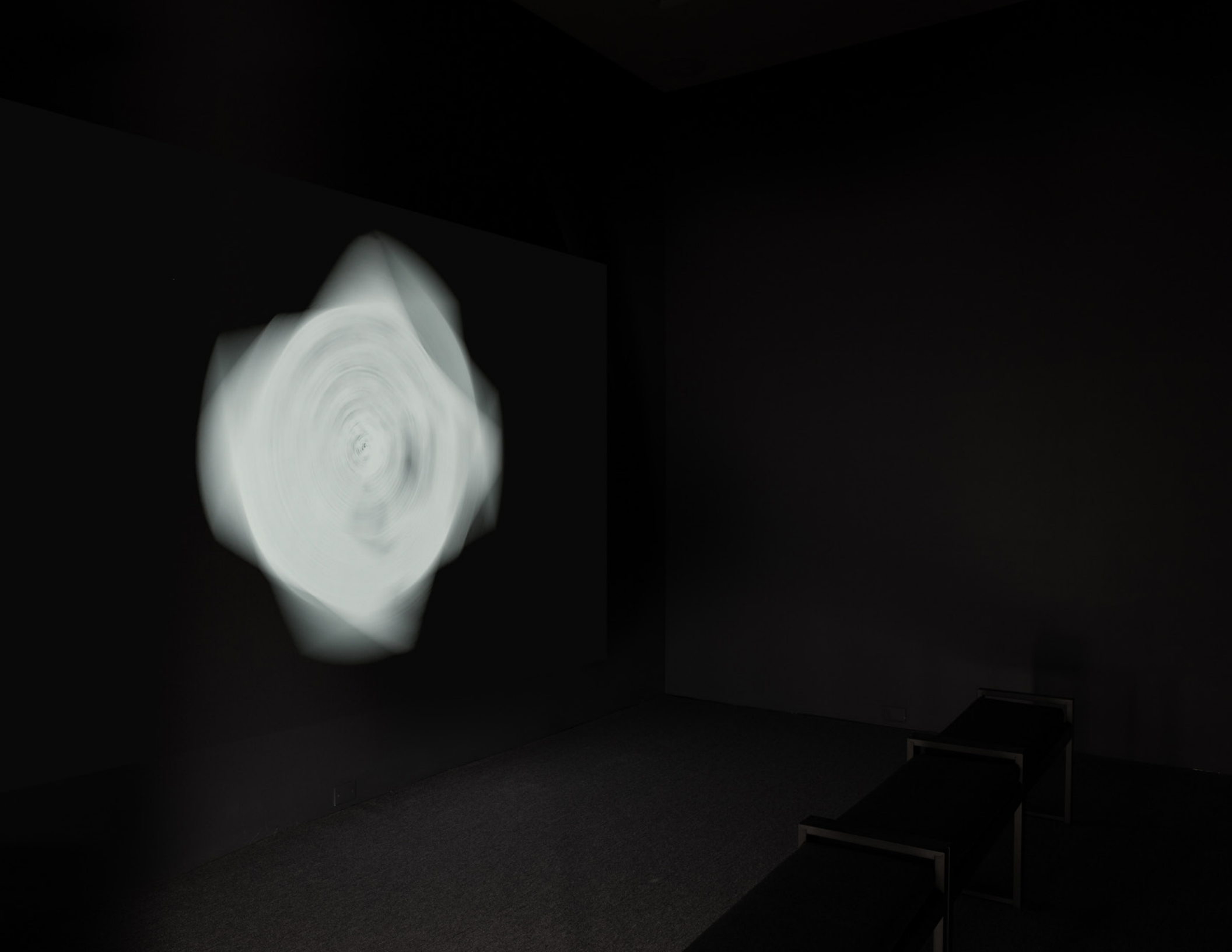
Installation views:  
*Return to the Everywhere*, 2020











## Dialogue

Gwyneth Zeleny Anderson (**GZA**)

Jesse McLean (**JM**)

Sayward Schoonmaker (**SS**)

Sadie Woods (**SW**)

Sonnenszimmer (**SZ**)

Weinberg/Newton Gallery (**WNG**)

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These questions were posed in late March 2020 as news of the ongoing, rapid spread of the coronavirus across the world dominated the airwaves.

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(**WNG**)

How would you describe your relationship to the media?

(**GZA**)

In general, I pay attention to the media consistently and a little at a time, across a few sources, and I go through phases of paying more and less attention. Earlier this year I was listening everyday to the New York Times's The Daily, I often listen to WBEZ while working in the studio, I get emails from Democracy NOW with headlines and interviews that I'll read through, when I had a smartphone I checked Al Jazeera America everyday, sometimes I read through the Chicago Reader, and in general I stumble on lots of articles from various papers and magazines through my usual internet usage. I've had a subscription to the

physical New York Times paper for a year, and I go through phases of taking a week to read through it, or only reading articles in the NYT magazine while riding the train. And there's the situation of a friend or family member mentioning something that happened, and I'll Google it and read whatever articles pop up.

Clearly I'm taking in media that leans left, but I try to avoid news sources that feel like they're antagonistically feeding a left/right political binary. I think getting caught up in that binary often means ignoring the events that are most critical to peoples' well being—I'm thinking of how the Mueller investigation dominated the news for so long, like a sports show of Republicans vs Democrats, but violence towards migrants weren't making the headlines as much. I try to avoid sources that take on a blamey or condescending tone, like with a lot of TV news. I try to remember every human is biased and journalism isn't immune to that. And I try to remember that there are always going to be stories that I'm not hearing, thanks to the same old destructive factors: we are often reading/hearing the stories from news outlets catering to

white people in positions of power, catering to American interests, catering to college educated audiences. With the most recent NYT magazine, there are 6 entire pages filled with advertisements for luxury homes.

When I listen to the news, I want to listen to people whose experiences are different from my own, especially those who are forcibly removed from society. Listening to the radio, I physically resonate with another person who is far away, in space and sometimes in time. It's telekinesis: they vocalize, and it moves my body, ear drum, inner ear hairs, synapses.

(**JM**)

I'd describe it as invested, dependent and conflicted. I've used material and/or references to media forms (from films, to television, to journalism, etc.) and sometimes call myself a "media artist.". Part of my interest in media is in breaking it down, looking for its tropes and devices, wanting to see the cracks in the facade. Yet, I'm also consuming news, social media, entertainment, all of it, on a regular basis. I hate that the far-right popularized the notion of "fake news", because I believe in journalism and reporting,

but I have always been a believer in "flawed news." A flaw doesn't make something false, it just reveals the subjectivity. Being objective in journalism is an aspiration but considering media, especially news-related journalism, as an all-seeing truth-teller is fraught. How much information people consume, and what that then generates into action or empathy, is also worth mentally wrestling around with.

Philosophy aside, what the Trump administration has been doing and continues to do in response to the pandemic crisis, by which I mean speak with authority without regards to science or expertise, is absolutely criminal. People are desperate to know what to do. To adopt a paternalistic, anecdotal-evidence based pretense of reassurance while providing false or misleading information only leads people to do crazy things like drink fish-cleaner and hoard medical supplies rather than be sensible about staying home and practicing social distancing.

(**SS**)

Critical and cautious. I think the media is a structural device that we build and it builds us.





Sadie Woods listens to her artwork, *It Was a Rebellion*, 2018–20

**(SW)**

Media is a tool that I engage with for various reasons: connection, community building, interactivity, news, entertainment, social research, marketing and promotion, teaching, production, etc. It can also be a powerful platform for real time reporting, social organizing and mobility. My relationship with it is multidimensional.

**(SZ)**

When we see the word media, we think of the physical. Like paper, ink, books—a substance, mediums. Our relationship to substance is that we are floating in one at all times. The same could be said for

“mass media.” It is a collective substance, not oxygen or ether, but one we’re all soaking in. Tuned in or tuned out, it’s a rolling boil. Our social media is connected to the mass media through our devices and at times they are interchangeable, as we gather our information from the steam of both. The condensation that collects on our face and hands permeates our entire bodies making it all physical once again.

**(WNG)**

What were the driving forces behind your efforts when making the piece you have in the exhibition, *Return to the Everywhere*?

**(GZA)**

The initial driving force was just the desire to create a radio that consisted only of stations with breathing sounds. As I dove into the WBEZ archives, I was carried by the glee of hearing people make messy sounds while trying to sound confident and articulate. When I’m working on an art project, I’m usually driven by some force that feels outside of me, like I’m just here to help the idea become focused and physically formed. So while spending hours listening to voices from the WBEZ archive, I was driven by the absurdity and honesty of all of us having human bodies that vibrate with sounds, the struggle of communication, and the rhythms that emerge when lining up edited sounds. That rhythm involved balancing the kinds of stories being told: a station of somber “um”’s next to a station of more animated “and, like”’s next to a station with screeching laughter and weird synth music.

Charlie Manion digitally fabricated and audio engineered Um Radio. His devotion to the project, and profound support and love, was a driving force as well.

**(JM)**

This was a piece I’d made in 2010 and I reconstituted it for 2020. The concept and material were the same, I just remade it using better video technology so it would be crisper. I was happy to return to the project because I do think its conceit of an ever-streaming, always arriving threat of news was prescient.

**(SS)**

Feels strange to say it now while we are all cast into a reality as threatened/threatening beings, but my primary feeling inside making *Authoritative Forms* was the body and the media inextricably formed of and by each other by the simple gesture of raising a paper to light, reading, reshuffling, stacking, spreading the sheets. I wanted every material component of the piece to slightly dissolve the boundary between a person and the object, material, media, and offer the possibility for reordering.

**(SW)**

I’ve been researching a series of “riots” throughout America in the ’60s, pulling ephemera from various sources like news broadcasts, films, music and sound.



I began to develop narratives of these experiences through a Black cultural lens, a critical perspective that has not been included in mass media coverage of “riots,” on these insurgencies to give proper context to the social conditions that lead to rebellions. In this process, it has been important for me to question the perspective of each research source, who is represented in history, who has authorship and who provides the context. To connect the work with a more personal approach, I decided to focus on my hometown Chicago and the rebellion in April of 1968 following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Music has been an integral part of the research as much of the history and perspectives have been canonized through audio recordings.

**(SZ)**

There was an urge to produce something tactile and touchable, something that made an audio/visual experience also a hand held experience; objects whose visuals ring in tandem with how they sound, images that behave like low-hanging fog. We wanted to create physical tension through music, a clear but invisible boundary

through the aural. We wanted to dictate movement to cut through the defined space like a sharp knife.

Of course it was all an experiment. Some ideas transferred and transmitted from the completed work, others didn’t. In the end, we’re happy that all the components of the installation rhyme.

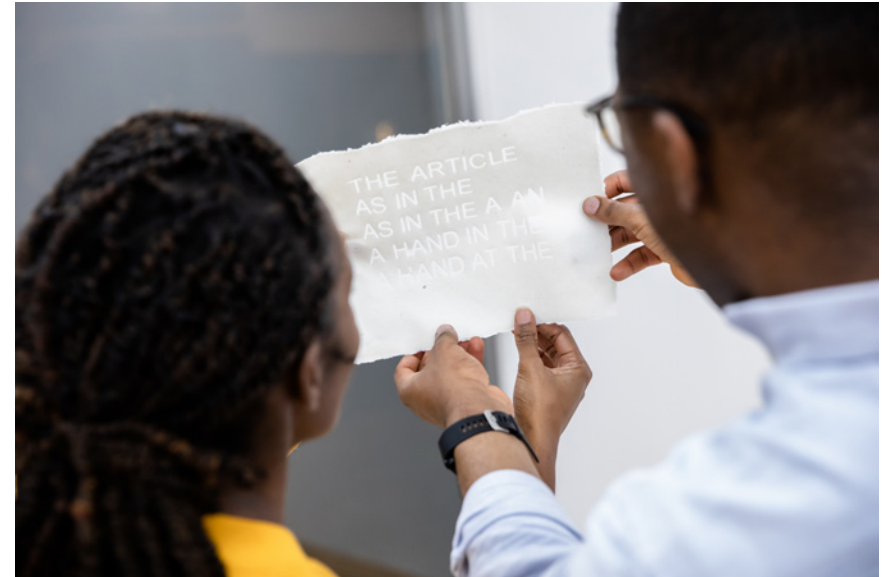
**(WNG)**

Have recent events reframed that specific artwork, and perhaps even your overall practice, in your mind?

**(GZA)**

Not particularly, other than showing that isolation—whether that’s willful, like with an art practice, or mandated—can be freeing when I’m able to listen to people telling stories.

In terms of my overall art practice, I am thinking about people spending more time alone outside, and how that solitude can provide more quiet, focused moments. For the past few months I’ve been making sequential sculptures that are meant to be left outside to rot, so I’m thinking more about people stumbling on those pieces while alone and dazed from social isolation.



Sayward Schoonmaker's *Authoritative Forms*, 2019

**(JM)**

Not really in terms of *Relations*, because I’ve been thinking about these kinds of issues and have made many other works that reflect my interest in the vulnerability of our conflicted relationship towards media forms.

**(SS)**

The process of making watermarked paper dramatically slowed the writing process of *Authoritative Forms*. In other words, because each fragment of the poem watermarked into paper required cutting and laying out each letter onto a screen, pulp pulverized, suspended in water, sheet made,

dried, and peeled from a piece of fabric. As the poem emerged in the paper, my reading process slowed and the prominent feeling was one of quiet panic and love. Many of the papers call out for MOM! and DAD! A kind of deep associative intuition moved the making of this piece, and what emerged, quiet panic, is now.

**(SW)**

What immediately comes to mind is caste and class divides that become more prevalent during times of crisis. Through this level of public health pandemic, it provides more context and deepens the meaning of the work regarding

racial injustice, and economic and geographical inequity.

**(SZ)**

There's been an ongoing slippage away from physical production for us. The pandemic has sped that up. What does physical mean when the modes of creation and distribution have fundamentally changed? Is the medium important or the content? Can you remove the content from the medium and still hand it to someone?

The pandemic has not changed our relationship to the work itself, the static physical objects that sit alone in the gallery. But it has taken away the audience whose participation is key to activating and experiencing the work. Physical objects rely on physical presence. What do we have left if presence and object are kept at a distance?

**(WNG)**

How has the reality of having to physically distance yourself from others affected your sense of self? Your sense of place? Community? Communication? Family? Citizenship? Accessibility? Boundaries?

**(GZA)**

Well, it's granted me the extra time to sit and be honest with my thoughts and feelings. Three weeks into the shut down my partner and I broke up. We had the time to have long, hard conversations beforehand.

Other than processing the end of an exceptionally loving relationship with someone I still respect deeply, the main thing is that I'm feeling my privilege. Which isn't new, but it's especially evident right now, it's at the front of my mind more often than before. I'm thinking about all the folks who are being held indoors against their will, in prisons, immigrant detention centers, and their total vulnerability, being at the whim of a system that is already violent to them. I think about people in abusive relationships in their home, and about all the people who are more at risk of violent enforcement of shelter in place orders. And there are the folks who have to continue to go to work in high risk environments, and the people who are staying home without an income and desperately needing support. And here I am, feeling safe and loved by friends and family, still getting

paychecks while working from home, while social distancing. I feel very free. I walk to the lake everyday in Rogers Park, and haven't received any warnings from police. This pandemic amplifies the hypocrisy and injustice we're already steeped in.

Much of my identity right now is about being a teacher. I'm teaching multiple art programs online, mostly for teens here in Chicago but also one for youth in Baltimore. I'm grateful to have a job teaching them, to have fun being creative with them—it helps my own mental health, and they enjoy connecting with each other. I'm grateful that many of them are getting paid to participate, too. But I'm concerned about all the students I'm still not in touch with. I want to connect with them, I'm ready to be a support, but the reliance on internet/phones/computers for that connection to be made is a major barrier. I miss meeting up after school and talking and drawing with them.

I do notice a big shift in the sense of freedom I used to get from popping into stores to buy fun snacks. I can still do it, but that extra effort of disinfection-mindset prevents me from going as much,

and maybe it's not worth the risk? (The other week, not wanting to open a Snickers bar with my contaminated gloves that touched the keypad at checkout, I absent-mindedly used my teeth to tear the wrapper.)

In terms of sense of place—I'm extra attuned to this spring happening. I check in on the same trees and flowers and mosses everyday, and stand at the same crop of rocks by the lake. Bringing focus to a small area appeals to a core part of how I already try to engage in the world.

I will say—being a depressive person, I've spent a lot of my adult life working hard to recognize my own enoughness and the enoughness of my external world. That work is really paying off right now.

**(JM)**

I've never experienced anything like this pandemic before and it's hard to know what to do with all the feelings and lack of motion. I'm teaching online from home and I miss my students and my community at UWM. Parts of the documentary project I'm working on are on hold until I can resume shooting. I'm trying to reach out



Throughout the dialogue:  
Visitors experience artworks by  
Sayward Schoonmaker (pp.15,18-19);  
and Gwyneth Zeleny Anderson (p.20)





Gwyneth Zeleny Anderson's *Um Radio*, 2019

to people and have been enjoying catching up with old friends and keeping in touch with family and friends. So much phonetime! I'm doing that daily routine of wanting to read everything I can, then feeling totally dismal and dejected and having to log off. The situation is scary and sad. So many inequalities are thrown into sharp relief. I am aware that I am healthy and safe and that many people are not which is heartbreaking and unjust. Everyone deserves a sense of security.

**(ss)**

What keeps coming to my mind is how every object's subjectivity

has been brought into high, alarming relief. I am somewhat of a worrier by nature, and often I'm suddenly struck by the immense infrastructures on which our daily lives are draped—everything from roads, water and energy systems, fiber optic cables to the grandesses and intricacies involved in a seed sprouting; to meeting a kindred spirit. My repeated revelation swiftly evokes awe and then a kind of awful dread. Of the delicacy of being alive, of how swiftly everything is lost, of the labor of making. The distances currently imposed, the delicacy and caution propelling our every move and contact with person,

place, and thing, expose the fallacy of boundaries. We are porous and inextricably part of each other and everything—a sublimity.

**(sw)**

There is a clear pandemic caste system being practiced and I have been doing my share to stay informed, but I am also taking care not to be overwhelmed with the media and be present in my daily life. I am separated from my Chicago family, friends and community temporarily to keep more vulnerable members safe. I have immediate family members working in the medical field putting themselves at risk daily to take care of others. There is a range of emotion—anger, grief, sadness, hope, longing, etc.—all of them valid. I take my time to move through them and process with others when I have the capacity to do so. This is a situation that requires tenderness, compassion, empathy, grace, gratitude, responsibility and accountability through action without fear—not just for others but also for yourself. It is sobering.

**(sz)**

Our life has not changed drastically in a physical sense. Our daily

activities are practically the same as before the pandemic. There are now just a few extra feet between ourselves and other people. Thinking back to before makes that “everyday” life feel quite isolated. But I suppose that was the point in some way, to minimize contact, to remain in contact with our work and our livelihoods, which is dependent on our work.

The real changes are more mental, more fluid. Our communication has laxed, motivation has waned. The pressure to keep the ball rolling has lightened up. In a way, it's a nice break from “ambition” for the future. We are now doing more living in the moment. When the superstructure of exchange has been put on pause you can more easily see that structure for what it is, a grind, and to what end?

When our self-imposed isolation is put at odds with a forced one, the friction melts the point of it all in some ways. So many artists are reaching out to new uncharted territories and embracing what art has always been, absolutely ephemeral. The “art” happens between a viewer and an object. Art is not the object, it is the interaction between the viewer and the object.

**(WNG)**

What is the most unexpected thing you've learned about yourself and/or others during this experience of "social distancing"?

**(GZA)**

I've been surprised at how focused I am while working a bunch of jobs from home. I struggle with accepting workloads that require staring at a computer screen, but I think that since it's the only way right now to connect with my students, I'm more able to accept it. I'm also surprised that, even post-breakup, the social distancing hasn't aggravated my depression. I'm still able to get out of bed in the morning—with difficulty, for sure—but I'm able to keep a momentum going, I don't get stuck. The day before yesterday, for the first time in my life, I actually wanted to go for a run, and did.

**(JM)**

An experience this enormous always shows the best and worst of people. I try to linger longer on the unexpected and amazing acts of togetherness and kindness. I already knew I was something of a hermit so that's no surprise. Thank god I have a dog, though!

**(SS)**

I can't seem to eloquently articulate that my surprise is no surprise: I find that everybody (including me) to whom I am close remain the same yet augmented selves in grief.

**(SW)**

I've spent the quarantine recalibrating priorities and spending time connecting with people over texts, voice calls and video. It has been a moment of conversation, reflection and observation—a lot of processing. What I've found is the need for slowing down and not feeling pressured to engage in hyperproductivity and feel good distractions, but rather taking the time to retreat and move through the experience of what it means to be living through a pandemic.

**(SZ)**

We both grew up in small towns. The only thing that was happening was the thing you were doing *right then*. Right now, there is a strange comfort in knowing that we aren't missing out on anything.

Also, we've always felt in control of our drive and ambition, but with a big portion of it gone through external factors, it seems to be

controlled by something else.

**(WNG)**

Any other thoughts, observations, ideas, questions you'd like to include, either for a particular artist/individual or in general?

**(GZA)**

Um Radio plays the involuntary, messy sounds people make as they try to talk. Each station broadcasts um's, stutters, laughter, sobs, and loud breaths of WBEZ Chicago journalists and interviewees from the last 70 years.

Many of the sounds in Um Radio come from people responding to questions. Questions are disarming, and can lead to messy inarticulate sounds because they touch a vulnerable place, where it's honest. And it's often obvious when a person reacts with defensiveness or sidesteps giving an honest answer. Questions are powerful tools for change, along with listening, and journalism embodies both.

There are only a few stations where I included voices speaking whole sentences. The oldest program on Um Radio, a fairy tale from 1949, ends with the host saying "... and now it is time for you to return to the everywhere,"

implying that "everywhere" is our normal, everyday reality where the fantasy realm we've just visited doesn't exist. The station following that one is of Joe White reciting a poem about being free. He had been imprisoned and forced out of "everywhere" for life, and instead needed to return to the imagination.

Working on this project made me think a lot about the necessity of storytelling—stories of truth, and stories of fantasy. We need both, and we need to know which is which.

I think the more a journalist or news organization is questioning, listening, and transmitting a whole nuanced story, the more they're trustworthy. And we clearly need to be able to trust them so we can know and begin to understand each others' realities. The news has the power to enact change, and literally free people—like Joe White and the other inmates profiled in the Wild Room episode about Angola prison. If it weren't for that broadcast, the governor of Louisiana wouldn't have been pressured by thousands of listeners to release them.

**(JM)**

I just wish everyone the best and

hope they are healthy both in mind and spirit. And I hope for a change in leadership!

**(sz)**

It's been awing to feel a TSA vibe kick in everywhere. A no man's land with a lack of natural movement. It has made us think that this must be what dogs feel like. But perhaps it's just us connecting to the natural world because we are forced to. When society moves to the edge, it pushes the people that have lived on the edge over the edge. And right now, we can somehow feel more immediately intertwined with all things being.



Sayward Schoonmaker interacts with  
Sonnenzimmer's *Vertical Slice*, 2019



## Dialogue

Justine Tobiasz (JT)

Weinberg/Newton Gallery (WNG)

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Justine Tobiasz is Media Archivist  
at WBEZ Chicago

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(WNG)

How would you describe your relationship to the media?

(JT)

Can you share some of your thoughts on the experience of working with the artists for the exhibition, *Return to the Everywhere*?

I came to the archival profession from being an artist, frustrated by how difficult it was to gain access to archival collections for both research and reuse. Archives are not for collecting dust; they are meant to be used. As an organization, WBEZ has only started creating the framework to archive our audio content recently and at this time it is not open to the public, due to copyright issues. While we are open for individual requests, working on this project has created an excellent precedent for how we share the material that's been created at the station and encourage its creative reuse in current contexts.

(WNG)

How have current events influenced your relationship to your role as WBEZ's Media Archivist?

(JT)

It's hard, or impossible, to feel the parameters of this period of time. Normal now feels uncertain. Often in history there are these defining moments that radically shift our reality, and broadcasts/news media archives can be very telling to how our society responds. Looking at how the media responds to and covers events—or doesn't—shows us a mirror for ourselves. At this time, I'm constantly fielding requests from our newsroom for WBEZ's coverage of different health pandemics (avian flu, ebola, AIDS, etc.). The way we are communicating what is happening around the world right now will surely be referenced in the future.

(WNG)

What do you think are some of the most noteworthy things to preserve during this moment of global crisis?

(JT)

Local reporting. We live in a world where most news is big business,



Mary Ann Hoxworth, whose *Lady Make Believe* program aired on WBEZ in the 1940–50s

with news outlets constantly merging, rebranding, cutting costs by slashing newsroom staff...one of the biggest casualties of this is a significant loss of locally focused journalism. Each country, city, region, is responding to and dealing with this crisis so differently. The only way we'll know exactly what happened is if there is a focus on making sure the news we are reporting locally is preserved for study in the future.

(WNG)

At a time when it feels like history is getting made in the present, will you approach the task of archiving media that's produced in the

coming days, weeks, months any differently?

(JT)

As an archivist, part of my core belief is that every day is just as important, bizarre, and wild as the next. While we are in an unprecedented state, on a global pause, so much in life is still moving forward. Elections are still happening. Babies are still being born. Spring has hit Chicago. My approach to media archiving is the same as it was six months ago: every day matters.

(WNG)

Can you think of any particular

components of WBEZ's archive that influence the way in which you're processing the current moment?

(JT)

Radio has a long history for providing information in times of crisis. In Chicago, a polio epidemic hit in 1937 and closed schools. Radio provided remote learning and educational instruction for those children isolated. Though the polio crisis slowed, radio remained a teaching tool in Chicago. The Chicago Board of Education applied to the FCC for its own radio station, WBEZ-FM, and by 1943 it was the only station to offer regularly scheduled educational programming. This tradition carried on until we became part of National Public Radio in 1970. Nearly all of the audio for our early educational programming has been lost, with the exception of the six transcriptions that are on exhibition as part of *Return to the Everywhere*. It's these pieces of the archive that remind how history is cyclical in ways that you cannot predict perfectly. For me, there is great comfort in that.

#### Weinberg/Newton Gallery

**David Weinberg**  
Executive Director

**Kasia Houlihan**  
Director

**Nabiha Khan-Giordano**  
Director

**Christian Ortiz**  
Gallery Manager

**Weinberg/Newton Gallery is a non-commercial gallery with a mission to collaborate with nonprofit organizations and artists to educate and engage the public on social justice issues. Through artwork and programming, the gallery provides a vital space for open discourse on critical contemporary issues facing our communities. Connecting artists with social justice organizations, we work to drive change and cultivate a culture of consciousness.**

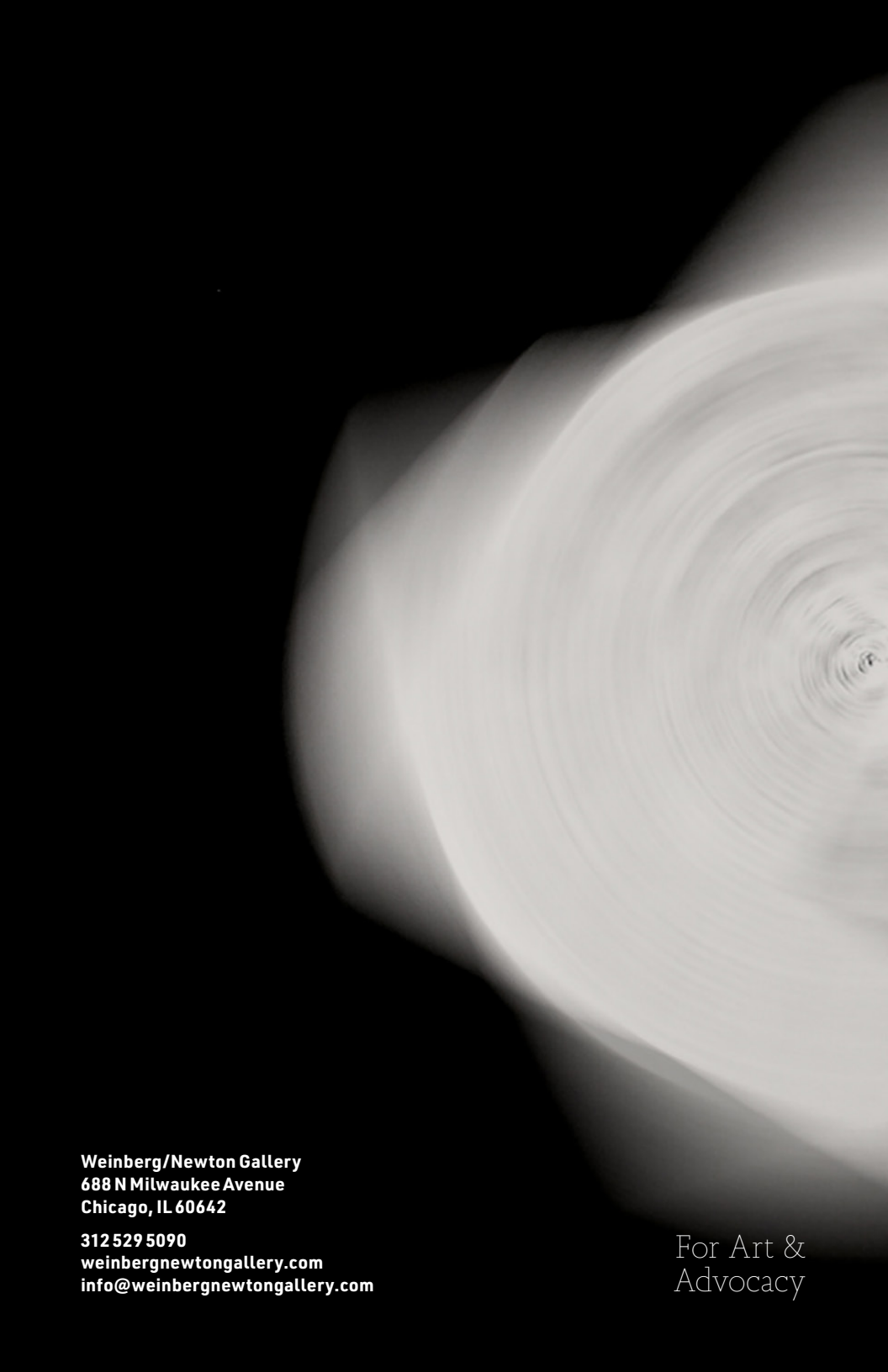
**The Weinberg/Newton Family Foundation underwrites the efforts of the gallery and has been led jointly by David Weinberg and Jerry Newton since 2009.**

#### Nonprofit Partner

**WBEZ, Chicago's NPR news station, serves the community with fact-based, objective news and information. WBEZ's award-winning journalists ask tough questions, dig deep for answers and expose truths that spark change and foster understanding. In addition to its local and national news programming, WBEZ Chicago is home to a growing portfolio of popular podcasts, including the "Making" series of *Making Obama* and *Making Oprah*; a new investigative series, *Motive*; *16 Shots*: A podcast about the fatal police shooting of Laquan McDonald; *Nerdette*; and *Sound Opinions*. WBEZ Chicago has a legacy of innovation as the birthplace of nationally acclaimed programs such as *This American Life*, and *Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!* and the ground-breaking podcast, *Serial*.**

*Photography:*

Kyle Flubacker (pp.12,15,18-19,20,25,27)  
Evan Jenkins (pp.2-7)



Weinberg/Newton Gallery  
688 N Milwaukee Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60642

312 529 5090  
[weinbergnewtongallery.com](http://weinbergnewtongallery.com)  
[info@weinbergnewtongallery.com](mailto:info@weinbergnewtongallery.com)

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