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ARTISTS SPACE

Jana Euler

Uniform

Constructing eccentric pictorial fabulations, Jana Euler's myriad of image-making techniques examine and exaggerate the functions of both depicting and viewing. Conceived over the past three years, the works in *Uniform* extend many of Euler's painterly investigations of the dynamic interrelations of sentient forms and their surrounding space—institutional, domestic, and perceptual. *Uniform* stretches and complexifies the nature of painting itself, renewing its energy in confronting the conditions that inform identity and self-perception. Responding directly to the renovation and character of Artists Space's new exhibition space, Euler's paintings include both conventionally-stretched canvases and expansive structureless forms that operate as autonomous beings and architectural elaborations: new painting-objects in the form of oversized slugs. Eschewing fidelity to any consistent style, Euler manipulates the forms of figurative representation to delineate new ways of looking at social and cultural confinements, as well as those rare catalytic moments of change or realization—be they emotional or institutional—where unforming leads to reforming.

Uniform begins, clockwise from the gallery entrance, with five new paintings by Euler, each of which renders themes of containment, frustration, and stasis, using the physical and dimensional constraints of the stretched canvas to summon broader questions of self-determination and the creative immunities of artistic expression.

In *Under Distraction*, a single face appears from a mélange of familiar sources of procrastination and escape, with eyes and eyelashes stretched into an impossible 360-degree glare of screens, and lips burrowed with holes for ingesting alcohol, cigarettes, junk food, and drugs (both recreational and pharmaceutical). The face of the painting's subject is distorted and deconstructed by its own vices through a kaleidoscope of pleasures, coping mechanisms, and the ubiquitous lubricants of life in its social surroundings.

Close Rotation (Right) and *Close Rotation (Left)* face each other across the gallery. Painted in a realist figurative style, they both feature the same male body mirrored in opposite rotational orientations. The figure is contorted awkwardly to the square dimensions of the canvas, his body boxed-in and captured in a posture of discomfort. The change in the figure's position within the two works conjures the idea of movement between the two paintings, but any perception of motion is created by the viewer, with only a minor adjustment in the painting's compositional arrangement. However, the paintings diverge in material (one in oil, the other airbrushed acrylic) and in dimension, with a four-inch difference in the length and width of each painting's surface.



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Between these paintings is *Circling the Horizon*, whose composition is designed to be viewed on any right-angled rotation, its male model repeated four times in distinct poses in the same canvas: outstretched as Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, and also standing aloft, kneeling down, and lying by the painting's edge. In *Circling the Horizon*, these repeating bodies coexist and even leave room for the negative space of raw canvas at the painting's center. With handles protruding from the painting as a signal of the work's constant repositioning throughout the exhibition, the fixed perspective of the painting is left open to change. The rotational mechanism of the painting can provide only limited modulations within the stable confines of its square format.



On the wall facing the gallery entrance is *Folie à Deux*, in which two green figures merge on a sofa, their bodies impossible to distinguish apart, submitted to a roughly rendered and alien singular form. The title (*shared madness* or *madness for two*) refers to a rare mental disorder where two people have an identical delusion, a shared psychosis transmitted from one to the other. These two blended figures could symbolize the conjoined fates of artist and institution, two bodies suspended into something messy: either in erotic union, a joint hallucination, or in a process of reciprocal psychological examination on the couch. The couple coalesce within a frenetic scene, perhaps an effort to transcend the confines of their individual borders, yet they are constricted, melded into a dense blur of tightly enclosed connection. Across all these five paintings is a sense of the artist locating herself both within the arena of the painted image and in external relationality with the host institution. Disparate painting techniques are used between the paintings, but when considered together, they reveal Euler's diagrammatic exploration of the various interpenetrations and diffusions that take place in the very act of exhibiting.



At the physical center of *Uniform* are paintings-cum-sculptures of slugs, which Euler uses to fuse the format of painting with objects that also serve as avatars for her playful address of how artist and space can make contact, and how stasis can "uniform." These invertebrate slug forms provide a literal spine for the exhibition when considered from plan view, re-emphasizing the prominent architectural feature of the supporting columns in an apparent contagion of adaptive forms. The already slow-moving creatures are frozen into a variety of distinct arrangements with the columns, each performing an articulation of how individual expression might engage its containing environment. Particularly notable is the fact that Euler was invited to make this exhibition at a time of significant institutional transformation for Artists Space. Over the course of multiple site visits to New York, Euler saw (and even participated in) the design and construction of our new space from a relatively untouched 1860s industrial warehouse to its present renovated form. Euler's works directly absorb this process of modeling the architectural and psychological conditions for Artists Space, in which institutional reform and rethinking has emerged from an interval of decreased public activity and collective deconstruction.

The slug has featured previously in Euler's works, such as in *Global Warnings!* (dépendance, Brussels, 2017), in which Euler included two photo-realistic paintings of individual slugs moving along the earth, each depicted with a change in depth of field, creating a sense of uncertainty whether the slug or its observer has somehow changed speed.

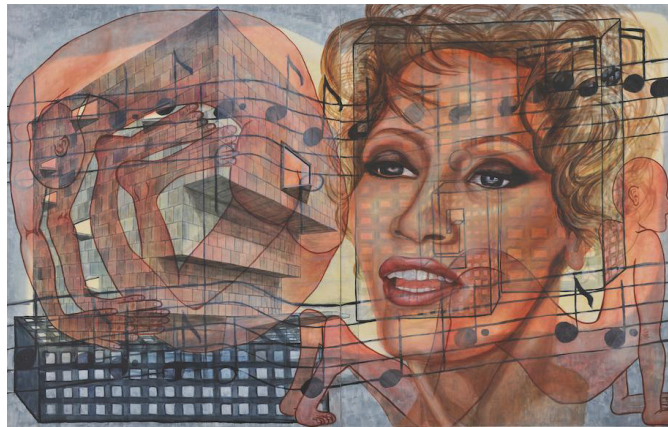


Slug speed of background, 2018
Oil on linen
35 ½ × 82 ¾ inches



Slug speed of slug, 2018
Oil on linen
35 ½ × 82 ¾ inches

Euler also utilizes snail-like forms as narrative articulations of the dynamics between artist and institution in her painting *Whitney*, exhibited in *Outside Inside Sensibility* (with Stewart Uoo, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013), another work that addressed an organization in a moment of profound transition, in which she painted the Whitney's former Breuer building alongside a portrait of Whitney Houston. Layered



Whitney, 2013
Oil on linen
75 × 119 inches

under the museum and famed singer are two echoing compositional structures in the form of human snails. One figure's shell is a skyscraper while the other figure is coiled upon a horizontal building. Euler repeated the structure of this contrasting pair in her exhibition *IN* (dépendance, Brussels, 2014), with the vulnerable soft organism and hard protective shell once again switched from body to building—in this case a scale model of the presenting gallery. A sense of comical uncertainty underlies Euler's interrogation of the idea that an institutional boundary might be both a home and an obstacle for the artist, or a burden and a muse of endless fascination.

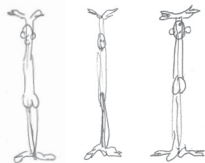


Human snails dépendance I, 2014
Foamboard, metal, foam, resin
24 × 6 ¼ × 18 ½ inches



Human snails dépendance II, 2014
Foamboard, metal, foam, resin
16 ½ × 13 × 25 inches

The shell-less and shapeshifting mollusk is an indication of nutrient-rich terrain but also corrodes and spoils the formal design of a garden or landscape if left to roam free and multiply—a function possibly analogous to the task of the artist in an organization such as Artists Space. Euler has created eight distinct configurations of the slugs and columns, from which the viewer can interpret specific tactical patterns familiar to how artists might approach or defend themselves from institutional containment:



Unstretched, reform on / as column going underground

Unstretched, reform on / as column 1

Unstretched, reform on / as column 2

In these three examples, the slugs have independently engorged each of the three columns, dominating and digesting the architectural form but, nevertheless, repeating the phallic form of the eaten object. One slug is alone in the basement level, burrowing downwards, while the other two face the opposite direction, almost touching the ceiling of the institution. Through wholly absorbing the system, the remnants are regurgitations of the potentially hated form.



Unstretched, leaning, relaxed

The supine slug is not seeking to change the column, instead using it for casual support and lacking the desire to transform its environment.



Unstretched, ramming force

The slug takes on a column-like form as a horizontal axis, utilizing the vertical strength of its supporting columns in a new way to find a kinetic lunging movement and performing a repetitive sexual thrust. The ramming action would be an effective way to break down walls, but the slug is strung-up, its range limited, and therefore destined to perform only a harmless gesture.



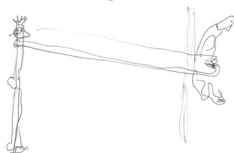
Unstretched, bound, relaxed

The relaxed slug is strapped to the column, imagining itself to be freed from the authoritarian structure while bound, dependent, and well-fed.



Unstretched, masturbation on column

The slug is strained into a circular form in order to avoid contact with its host column, thus putting it at risk of devouring itself through joyful insatiability and locked into masturbatory position.



Unstretched, bound, outside mission

On the façade of Artists Space, the slug is tied to a column with rope in flexed connection to another column inside the gallery. This relation to the inside of the gallery licenses the slug to venture into the world outside, with the potential for freedom and possibility of harm.



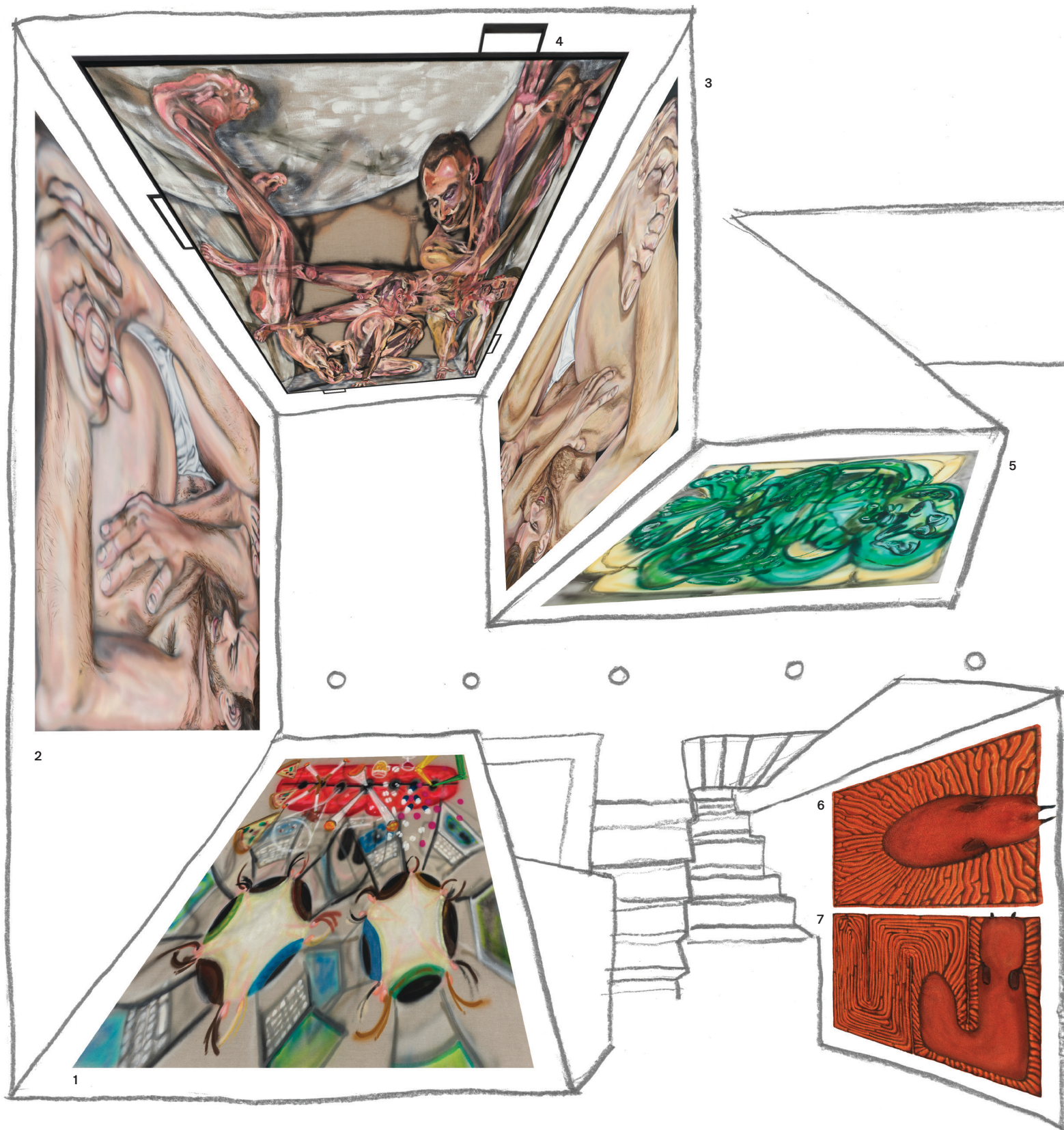
Unstretched, on couples

A slug is in ring-form around two columns. The slug, static and stretched to its maximum length, is tightly tethered around this couple of columns.

The lone two-dimensional canvas in the larger gallery is ***gwf 9, Richter / Baselitz***, a new work that is a continuation from Euler's recent exhibition *Great White Fear* (Galerie Neu, Berlin, 2019). Euler presented a series of paintings depicting single sharks ascending bolt-upright through the ocean, the bodies of each elongated and embellished to also connote a human penis. In this painting, a shark is rendered with Gerhard Richter-like technique and painted upside-down in the style of a Georg Baselitz painting. This is the only shark in Euler's *gwf* series to dive towards the ocean's floor rather than rising erect into the air, though its direction is reversed in its installed orientation. The shark's rigid stance evokes male martyrdom in its crucifixion-like shape, immersed and probing in pursuit of unobservable depths and states of "uniform."

(JS)





1
Under Distraction, 2019
Acrylic on linen
78 ¾ × 86 ¾ inches

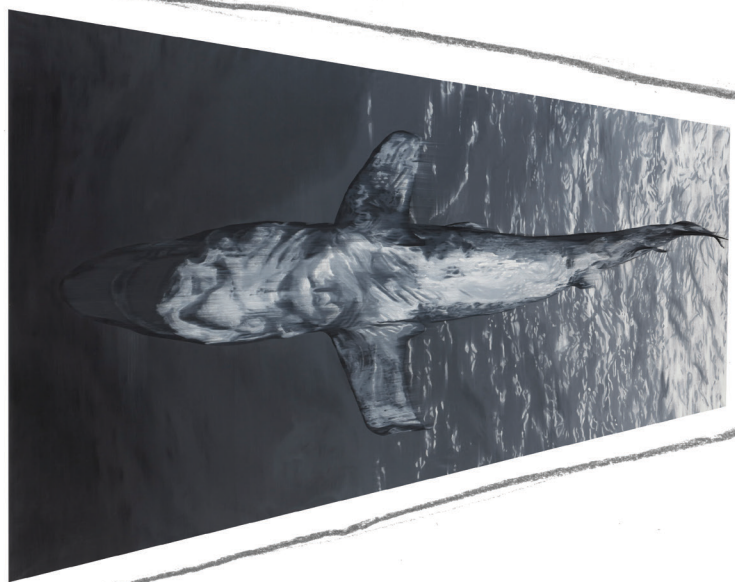
2
Close Rotation (Left), 2019
Oil on linen
78 ¾ × 78 ¾ inches

3
Close Rotation (Right), 2019
Acrylic on linen
82 ¾ × 82 ¾ inches

4
Circling the Horizon, 2019
Oil on linen, framed
82 × 82 inches

5
Folie à Deux, 2019
Acrylic on polyester on linen
55 × 63 inches

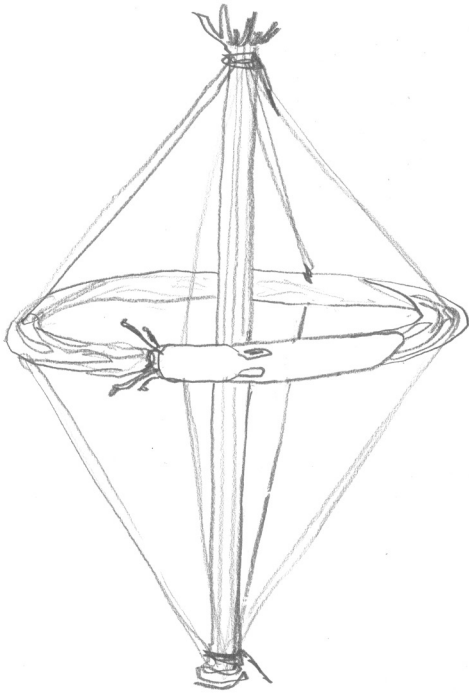
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Uniform 1, 2019
Acrylic on linen
78 ¾ × 63 inches



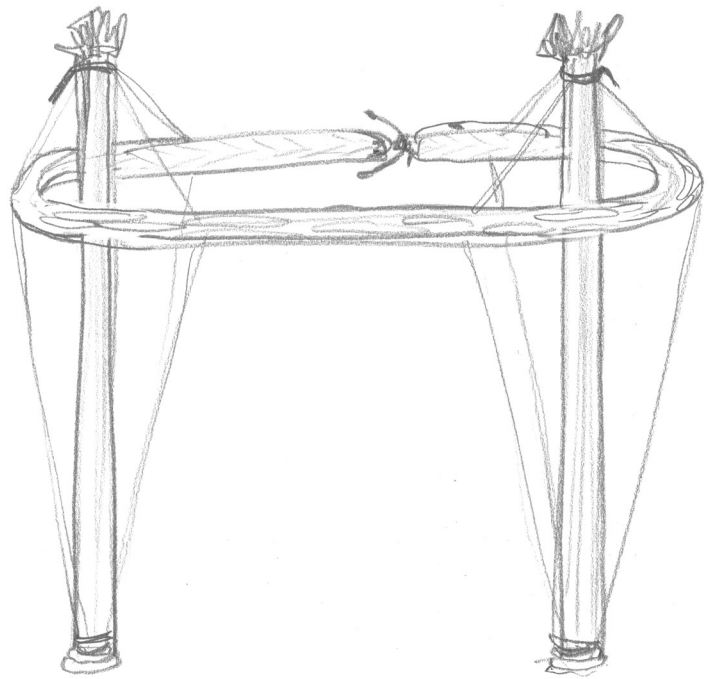
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7
Unform 2, 2019
 Acrylic on linen
 78 ¾ × 63 inches

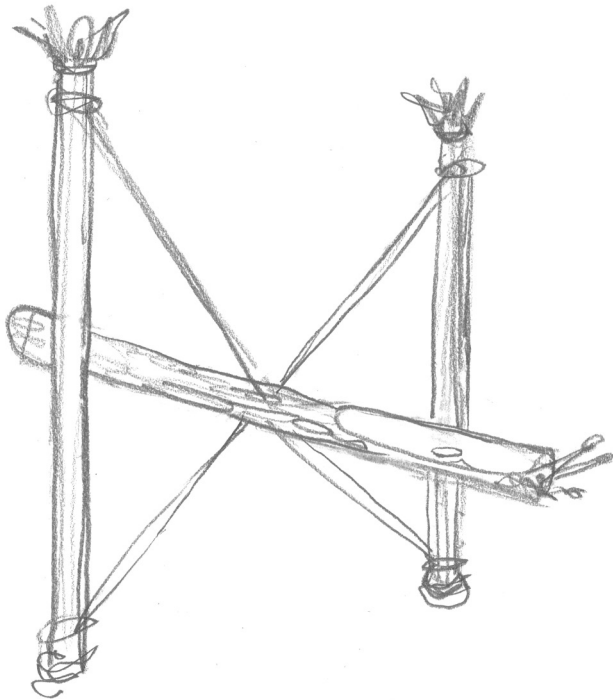
8
gwf 9, Richter / Baselitz, 2019
 Oil on linen
 118 × 78 ¾ inches



Unstretched, masturbation on column, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, metal, elastic cord, ratchet strap
Dimensions variable



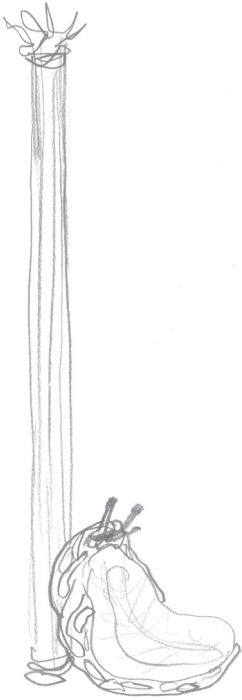
Unstretched, on couples, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, metal, elastic cord, ratchet strap
Dimensions variable



Unstretched, ramming force, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, wood, elastic cord, ratchet strap
Dimensions variable



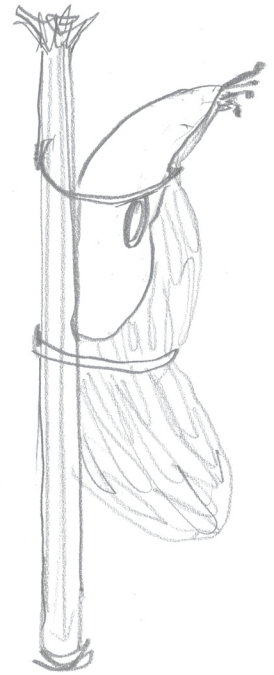
Unstretched, reform on / as column 2, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, straps with plastic clamps
Dimensions variable



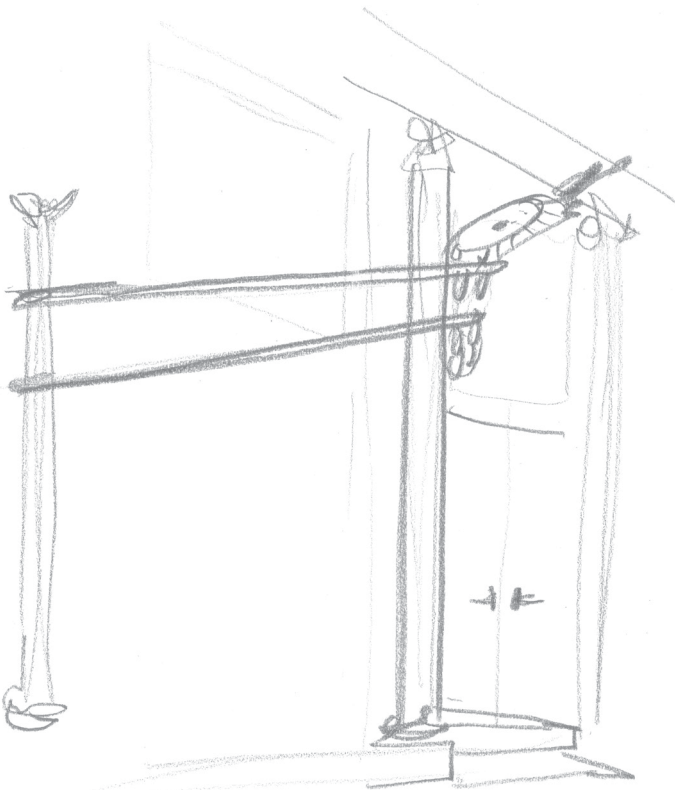
Unstretched, leaning, relaxed, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap
Dimensions variable



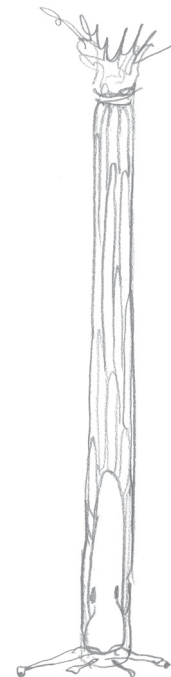
Unstretched, reform on / as column 1, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, straps with plastic clamps
Dimensions variable



Unstretched, bound, relaxed, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, straps with steel clamps
Dimensions variable



Unstretched, bound, outside mission, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, ratchet strap, chicken wire
Dimensions variable



Unstretched, reform on / as column going underground, 2020
Acrylic on linen, bubble wrap, straps with plastic clamps
Dimensions variable

Jana Euler: *Uniform* is on view at Artists Space from February 21 – April 19, 2020.

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