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Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon  
*Variation in Mass 1-3*

Various Small Fires  
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by Jody Zellen



The outdoor entryway to *Various Small Fires* is a narrow corridor often used for sound installations. This long passageway opens up into a large gravel back yard perfect for exhibiting sculptures. In “*Variation in Mass 1-3*,” Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon creates an experience that permeates both spaces. Viewers are first attuned to the aural component, a soothing melody, before confronting Gordon’s three bulbous inflatables, gracefully oscillating in the courtyard. Gordon’s sculptures call to mind Paul Chan’s “breathers” from 2016–17, fabric sculptures attached to fans whose wild, frantic movements suggested animated bodies. While Chan’s pieces were frenetic and created for interior spaces, Gordon’s outdoor sculptures move in slow motion and are elegantly choreographed, inflating and deflating in conjunction with the minimal sound composition and the whirl of the industrial fans powering the work. Part of their appeal is the fact that they are presented outside, independent of the confines of walls and ceiling, alive in relation to the surrounding man-made and natural elements, be it the hum of passing traffic, the sound of the wind or the contrast to the sunlit or cloud filled sky.

The three works, *Variation in Mass #1*, #2 and #3 (all 2020), display different personalities as they expand and contract. Although the dark gray pieces are monumental—more architectural than human scale— their motions are personified. Each work is comprised of a vinyl form, a blower, a speaker on a stand and audio. As the blowers fill the sculptures, they are buoyed into the air as erect forms, only to slowly deflate, coming to rest momentarily on top of the speaker. As the sequence is repeated, an implied relationship forms between the works. It is as if they are performing for one another.

At full volume, *Variation in Mass #3* extends skyward as if were an elephant's wide trunk that ends in an alligator's snout, its size approaching the height of surrounding walls. Yet, as soon as the form reaches maximum density, it immediately begins to sag, cascading forward, supported from falling to the ground in a heap by the speaker and stand placed in front of the work in the position of a lectern. *Variation in Mass #1* is more architectural than animal, taking the shape of an arch that ebbs and flows, never reaching its full potential. *Variation in Mass #2* is a bit like a long tongue extending and contracting in plain view.

These vinyl works are bulky and awkward, yet also weightless. They have both human and animal qualities— that of predators as well as dancers— taking breaths that fill them with life only to exhale and partially collapse. Though not menacing or threatening, they are ambiguous forms that command attention, captivating audiences with their unexpected and uncanny movements that contrast with the soothing soundtrack. Though occasionally in sync, the forms move haphazardly. This discordance is echoed by the repeated whirl of the fans abruptly turning on and off creating an unsettling atmosphere that mirrors our current mindset.

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