

LAURIE ANDERSON'S *FOUR TALKS*

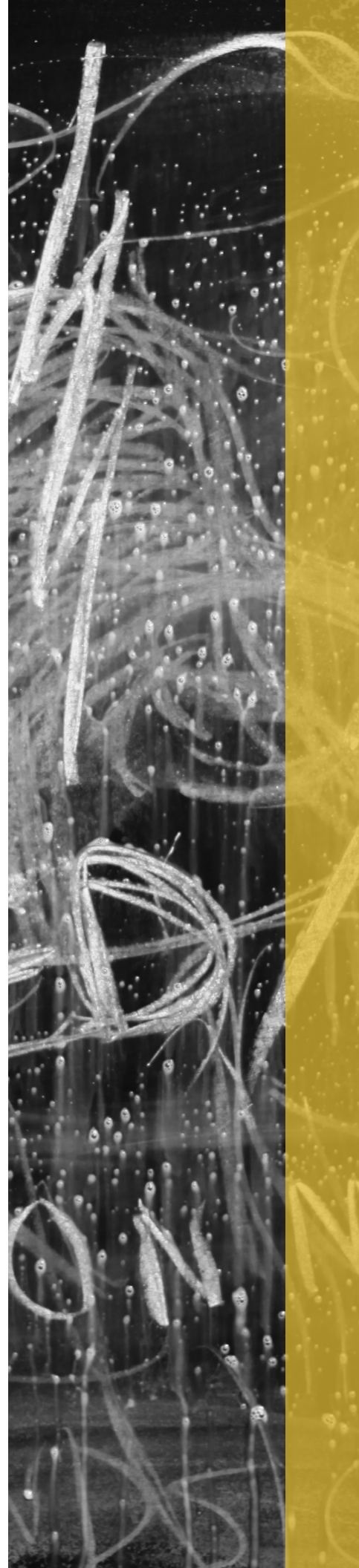
ACCESSIBILITY BROCHURE

Sound and Visual Descriptions

HIRSHHORN



Smithsonian



Laurie Anderson Four Talks

Wall Text:

Laurie Anderson is one of the leading multimedia artists of our time, and her innovative work in performance, music, technology, and visual art has profoundly influenced popular culture for more than forty years. In 2021, as part of *The Weather*—her largest US exhibition to date—the Hirshhorn invited Anderson to create a new work on site. She worked ten-hour days at the Museum for more than two weeks to paint directly on the walls and floor of this large gallery, covering nearly every inch with stories, song lyrics, quotations, jokes, and commentary on current events. Painting in a stream-of-consciousness manner without preparatory sketches, she created an enveloping and intensely personal installation that takes viewers on a journey through her mind. The installation's title, *Four Talks*, refers to the four sculptures—a raven, a parrot, a canoe, and a shelf—at its center, each accompanied by a pithy story or text passage. Monumentally scaled, conceptually rich, and visually captivating, *Four Talks* represents a key achievement in Anderson's career.

Four Talks

Four sculptures and site-specific wall painting

Sound description:

Ambient sound plays in the gallery. A gong strikes, followed by inaudible chanting. There are sounds of thunder and rain. Anderson's voice repeats, "Bird, bird, bird." Another voice echoes in the background. The music then shifts to sounds of water flowing and birds chirping, followed by a soft, electronic buzzing noise. The melancholy sound of a violin enters, followed by a piano. Bird songs return, intermingled with electronic sounds and the strike of a gong. Clanging metal suggests a train passing by. There are sounds of crickets chirping, a small animal yelping, cars passing by on a road, and mechanical thumping. After a short pause, the piano returns. The music quickly shifts to electronic sounds, cymbals, and bells. Anderson speaks and sings phrases, only some of which are audible, such as "the common raven." There are sounds of a cello, followed by ethereal ambient noise, rain, and thunder.

My Day Beats Your Year (The Parrot)

2010/2021

Foam, metal stand, electronics, and sound

Courtesy of the artist

Sound description:

The parrot speaks in a low, computer-generated voice, with periodic pauses.

Full transcript:

Her voice . . . Her voice was like an old rusty pump that sent the words very very very very slowly up a long pipe, then, when they got to her open mouth, the words came out like rusty wire that had been in the cold clay for a long time. I've been seeing dragons again. Yes, it's true. I don't like giving a nude woman a dollar. It's just my policy. So shoot me. That's just the way I see it.

The Hirshhorn Museum is located in the nation's capital. Our building may still be closed, but the power of art to bring people together, to offer inspiration, and to respond to history in real real real real time remains stay connected through your device, or bring your mask don't forget to bring your mask and explore our outdoor sculpture garden to meet our two new monumental monumental sculptures.

#HirshhornInsideOut is our ethos: We believe art is for everyone, all the time, even here and now. Make art part of your routine. Sign up for one of our newsletters and follow us @hirshhorn on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is located at the intersection of Independence Avenue and 7th Street, Washington, DC 20560. Let me repeat that . . . it is Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, located at the intersection of Independence Avenue and 7th Independence Avenue and 7th Independence Avenue and 7th. Let me repeat that . . . Independence Avenue and 7th Street, Washington, DC 20560.

The Hirshhorn is a government institution, and you probably know what that means . . . am I correct? Part of the US government. Isn't it amazing that the US government funds things like this absolutely magnificent exhibition?

Pi is a mathematical constant. It is defined in Euclidean geometry as the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter, and it also has various equivalent definitions. It appears in many formulas in all areas of mathematics and physics. It is approximately equal to 3.14159.
3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419

71693993751058209749445923078164062862
089986280348253421170679.

Ah, yes . . . shall I repeat that? Beauty in all its forms. Funny how hatred can also be a beautiful thing. When it's as sharp as a knife. When it's as hard as a diamond. Perfect.

And when we die, our bodies turn to diamonds, to teacups, not just to chalk and carbon. Too many people are taking Prozac. That's what I think. This fake cheeriness that's everywhere now is really getting me down. I mean, can't we simply walk around and be ourselves?

Funny how human males can get so excited by pornography. When they see a picture—it can even be black and white—they can get excited. Is this simply a case of poor eyesight? Is it feeble-mindedness? Or is it their amazing imaginations? . . .

They say that if you think technology can solve your problems, then you don't understand technology and you don't understand your problems.

Twiddledee dee. Twiddledee dum. Twiddledee dee. Twiddledee dum. Twiddledee dee. Twiddledee dum.

My hindsight just isn't what it used to be. The eyes in the back of my head. Zero the counter. Zero the counter the counter the counter, please. Zero the counter. Zero the counter. Zero the counter.

I keep telling my problems to people I don't even know. What is that all about? I'm a stranger in your town. Like a meatball in a wine glass. Like an ostrich in cleats. A dog with honey on his nose eats everything he sees.

These are some things that make me really sick. Just so you know. Stop me if you've heard this before. Hey—hey—OK, OK, OK. Hey—hey—OK, OK, OK. Hey—hey—OK, OK, OK. Ya got me there, pal!

A midnight swim in a petri dish. Dancing in the moonlight with her wigwam hair. O oooooooooo ah ha ha ha oooooooooo yes. Oh, yes! What can I say? Do you remember? I do. I do.

Her eyes were shining like two very old lucky dimes. The city was in bits. The years 1959 and 1960. I remember them well. They were like two little girls wearing twin clothes. You could hardly tell them apart. And I—and I—my heart—my heart was broken. And it was . . . it was . . . just broken. Just completely broken. Broke broken. As in heartbroken.

Other broken things . . . broken homes broken codes broken dreams broken records . . . broken English broken rules broken legs broken spirits broken horses broken promises . . . broken broken all broken . . . all broken. . . Sit right down and write yourself a letter a letter a letter try to know yourself and feel better.

Cook and eat your own head. That's what I say. Death, that jerk, that crook, what a creep. Showed up in the new machines. Get the new machines . . . maybe you know what I mean by this. Maybe not. Maybe you do. On second thought on third thought on fifth thought. . . .

Death, that jerk, that crook. What a creep! Oh, yes. Yes. Oh, yes. What can I say?

Today I'm too depressed to do anything at all. I talk for myself and other strangers.

Of shipwrecks, palm trees, beaches littered with rotten coconuts.

What? Come closer. Here, darling. It is so good to see you! It's been ages! How was your pandemic? You know, we really must have lunch one of these days. Call me! Don't forget!

I mean, I'm stranded in this room with all these drawings and it just gets so claustrophobic! Stuck here with this nutty psychotic raven the size of a small Volkswagen. And I'm telling you the days are

OK but the nights . . . the nights . . . the nights . . .
They turn off all the lights and for twelve hours it's completely dark. I mean, this is no picnic! Then again, picnics are rarely picnics, with all those ants and the mayonnaise in the chicken salad going bad and Uncle Al complaining like he always does. Kvetch kvetch kvetch kvetch kvetch kvetch yaddah yaddah yaddah yaddah. . . . Kvetch kvetch yaddah. Yaddah. Yaddah.

"Deaf ears" doesn't even begin to describe the profound silence between them. Goodness is just an idea that we carry in our hearts. How heavy it is sometimes, don't you agree? Thanks for listening. Thanks a lot. Just one more thing, I myself never need help. Even when everything is going terribly, I say, everything's fine. I'm a liar. When someone calls in the middle of the night and says, "Oh, gee! I hope I didn't wake you!" I say, "No, you didn't wake me. I was up. I'm always up up up up up up up up that's me. Wake me. You can never wake me. Wake me. You can never wake me."

Smoke . . . smoke . . . mister, want some smoke?

In North America every road leads to a phone. The number you requested . . . four two three . . . three five . . . zero . . . zero . . . can be automatically dialed by saying the word yes or the word zero, zero . . . zero . . . one. . . . Callers using a rotary phone, please hold and an operator who will assist you, will assist you. WWW dot com /// period // asterisk ampersand / dot dot dot, interspecies communications . . . WWWWWW dot com.

Where there's smoke, there's fire. What is the smell of sadness? Smoke gets in your eyes. Smoke gets in your eyes. Smoke gets in your eyes. What is the color of cold for you? Smoke gets in your eyes.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

These are strange times . . . very strange.

The republic for which it stands fall for me fall for me fall for me fall for me.

The excited states of America. The delighted states of America. The benighted states of America. The indicted states of America. The ignited states of America. The blighted states of America. That just about covers it.

There are so many flags, and everyone's carrying one. . . . And our current national anthem? Just a series of questions written during a fire. But hey! Hey hey hey hey look look the fire is still raging the sun on the East Coast is red from the fires on the West Coast. Pick up this flag and . . . what? Wave it?

A flag is a warning . . . the red in the morning. Pick up a flag. Don't let it drag. There are so many flags. There's not just one flag. . . .

The sides come together. The blue and the black. The black and the blue. The same to you . . . Yeah, all the same to you.

I call her pohcahandtis. I mean, where did she come from? Did anyone invite this person? Not me!

Ten reasons this country is really great . . . Number one. It's wider than it is tall. . . . Number 2, it's a young country. . . . Like Gertrude Stein said, may I quote, "The United States is the oldest country in the world because it's been in the twentieth century the longest." Unquote. Number 3, we invented superheroes. Number 4, everyone is rich. Or at least potentially rich. Number 5, we love speed. We love love love love love love love love love love speed, the faster the better. Let's get it over with is what we like to say. We love love love love love love love love love love love speed.

Citizens! We live in a fantasy land. . . . Um um um um um um um um I cannot think of any more reasons we are so great. OK OK OK yay yay team. Yay team. Good for us! Uncharted unprecedented uncharted unprecedented uncharted unprecedented.

Change, in all its forms. Coins of bright water on the sidewalk. The look in the eyes of a newborn junkie. Formication, the definition of formication is the sensation of being covered with ants. . . . Oh, God, I've lived in England and I've lived in hell. I'm a bachelor. How you say? I myself am a bachelor. Say! What if you could talk to your dog! Wouldn't that be a handy thing? I think so. . . .

So many things haven't been invented yet, like a micro machine that can climb up the ends of your broken hair and repair the split ends. Presto! Perfect hair. What do you think? Self-cooling clothes and self-heating clothes. I mean, if all those billionaires are going to Mars, then why can't we have a little R&D money for these things? Asking too much? I don't think so, mister.

The future. The future. The future is full of so many incredible perfect things. Complications, implications, imperfections, injections, infections. There are six million other words too. Certainly enough to say whatever you feel like saying at any given time. *Guten tag. Wie gehts?*

East. The edge of the world. West. Those who came before me. I dreamed I was a dog in a dog show and my father came to the dog show and he said, "That's a really good dog. I like that dog."

Sometimes we want what is too far away. Sometimes when I'm talking to someone, we run out of words. Like a hand grenade in a lady's glove. Like an unpredictably long silence. Sometimes I think and think and think and think and then when I try to talk, only a few words come out and they're the wrong words. They're just warm air with a random sound in them. Meaningless.

Take a word like "oh," for example. . . . "Oh" can mean a million times a million times a million different things. "Oh" can mean "Oh, yes, my love, I know." "Oh" can mean "Oh, no, never." "Oh" can mean "I never liked you. And I never will." The word "Oh" is empty. A zero. A nothing.

So many things in nature are very empty. Take a shell. Or a hollow cactus plant. Empty. Empty. Very empty. Zero the counter. The counter, please. Zero the counter. Death, that jerk, that crook. What a creep. Showed up in the new machines. Get the new machines. Maybe you know what I mean by this. Maybe not. Death, that jerk, that crook, what a creep. OK, now I'm going to say the word elegant one hundred times as fast as I can . . . elegant elegant elegant elegant elegant elegant elegant elegant elegant elegant. OK, that was only twelve times. People who talk to their computers are seriously fooling themselves. In my opinion, you might as well be talking to your electric pencil sharpener. Know what I mean?

The time is now eight o'clock pm and one second. The time is now eight o'clock pm and two seconds. The time is now eight o'clock pm and three seconds. The time is now eight o'clock pm and four seconds. And so on.

When you read the newspaper to yourself, do you hear a voice? Or are you just moving your lips and reading in total silence? Or, let's assume for a second that you really do hear a voice. Is that voice your own voice? Or is that the voice of someone else? For example, your uncle Alf, or President Roosevelt, or Bette Midler? Your fortune, one dollar. One dollar, please. . . .

You know there are lots of things that are just by nature impossible. Like trying to take a walk with a library. This is an impossible thing. Futile. You can run, but you just cannot hide. Sorry. Sorry. I'm thinking back to the golden days, when I was never sorry.

When there's an argument between a human and an angel, the human will win every time. Why? It's because humans are capable of having many contradictory ideas all at once. And angels can have only one thought at a time. They're simplistic, that's it. Say! How much does the earth weigh?

Exactly. Got any idea? Any idea at all? A guess? Even a wild guess? I didn't think so. It's a tough one.

Dreams are the music of the pause. The pounding of my heart, of clockwork. As in tick tick, and so on. Did you know that 123456789 divided by 123456789 equals one? Yesterday I heard the blood beating in my wrist! Boom boom. Boom boom. Man, that was creepy! Somebody's going to end up crying.

And by the way, I'm dragging around. My passion? Gone. Your fortune? One dollar. You know? OK OK OK . . . hum, dee dum . . . hum, dee dum . . . dum diddy dum diddy, hey . . . la dee da, hum dee dum, hum dee dum. God, I love that song.

Damn, damn, damn. The destination disk is full. The hard drive is full. The apps drive is full. Please check the scratch disk on your hard drive. I'd like to go back into history and meet cave people. They made their clumsiness into an art form. . . . But, so what . . . But, so what . . . But, so what . . . But, so what . . .

I'm a little teapot, short and stout, tip me over and pour me out. Did you know that Edgar Allan Poe wrote that song? God, I love that song. Written by the same guy who wrote the stuff about the raven.

I believe that if animals have rights, they should also have responsibilities. Why should they get away with things like stealing each other's eggs, and ripping off each other's antlers, when they have no real survival need to do these things? When they're just doing really mean things for sport, for the fun of it. Life in wartime. A walking shadow.

Did you know there's a certain kind of crow in Japan and they live with deer and what they do is so strange. I'm in the room as that one can you believe it? I hope so. What am I doing dum dum. Dum, diddle dee dum . . . Dum dum. Dum, diddle dee dum. Diddle dee diddle dee diddle dee diddle dee diddle dee . . . dum. . . I'm feeling good. I'm feeling fine. Why? Because God is my boyfriend. . . .

I'm having a very bad day today. Yes. Yes. What is the purpose of panic? Should I sacrifice a goat? I'm thinking back to the golden days when I was never sorry. . . . My mind's a blank. Like, blank . . . blank . . . blank . . . blankety blank blank.

And books are the way the dead talk to the living. . . . But here's the truth—and you can take it from me—not even a cowboy will shoot someone who's already dead. Thank you. Thank you. Ma'am. Thank ye kindly. Much obliged.

The future belongs to crowds. Your name here.

In a book. On an old scrap of newspaper. And written all over it was your name . . . this is the bitter price of your fame. Like Balzac said, "Fame is the sunshine, the sunshine . . . of the dead."

Oh, oh, oh. Look, look, look. Look. Love Dick and Jane walking in their book. See Jane run. Run run run runrunrun. Run run run runrunrun. Run run run runrunrun. Run run run runrunrun.

Love is a detective . . . An introspective detective.

Now I'll read from my address book. Here are all the Bobs in my book. Bob Davis, Bob Ezrin, Bob Fitzgerald, Bob Hurwitz, Bob Isherwood, Bob Jason, Bob Ludwig, Bob Manning, Bob Stein, Little Bobby T, Bob Telson, Bob Thurman, Bob Westrop.

Despotic as all get out. There are so many hearts looking for the new world. It's staggering. Unbelievable. Too too too much. Too too too much. Too too too. Too too too.

In the postmodern world, there is no such thing as changing the subject. A sideshow. A smoke screen. A passing landscape . . . And this town, where is it? It's a day's ride in a child's toy. You are out of memory. You are out of memory. You are out of memory. You are out of memory. You are out of memory.

Crazy loners rocked my cradle. Never got much sleep. You know, sometimes when you hear people

screaming, as in eeeeeeeek! Eeeeeek! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ouch ouch ouch eeeeeek. It goes in one ear and out the other. And sometimes when you hear people screaming, it goes right into the middle of your head and stays there, forever. Did I drink some poison that I don't remember now? Did I? Did I? Did I? My mind's a blank. A blank piece of paper.

The purpose of art is to provide what life cannot. Do you actually believe this? I repeat: The purpose of art is to provide what life cannot. As if it had a purpose! Hahahahahahahahahahahah ah ha hahahahahahahahahahahah ah ha hahahahahahahahahahahah ah ha hahahahahahahahahahahah ah ha.

Fast forward to the swamp. Cut to the restaurant. Cross fade to long train. Cut! Cut! OK! Action!

When you eat a steak, did you know that you are shredding the equivalent of one hundred billion copies of the Encyclopedia Britannica? Here's a question. And here's another question . . . what the heck am I doing in this room with a canoe and a big dumb raven? I mean, a raven that just sits there! What a joke . . .

What is fashion? The tight clothes of the Nazis, their love of black leather . . . No wonder the Maoist styles never caught on here in the States. They are so baggy . . . so unflattering. . .

So . . . What brings you here to the nation's capital? A vacation? Business trip? . . . Maybe you have a previously scheduled meeting with Joe Biden? Uncle Joe, as we call him now?

Why is everyone yelling? They are still very very very upset with the election results but that was a year ago and no they want to just keep talking about it—over and over over and over how they were cheated . . . always a topic that can take up a lot of mind space . . . how you were cheated out of your rightful dues . . . how someone cheated you.

I don't know why no one pointed out the meaning of the name of the vice president—or veep, as you might say. Even during the election, no one puh puh puh puh puh puh pointed out that the vice president and puh puh president of the Senate is named Kamala Devi Harris. . . OK OK, Kamala means lotus and devi means goddess . . . Can you believe it? We have Lotus Goddess as our veep! Madame Lotus Goddess to you, sir. Or Vice Potus Lotus Goddess. Only in America. Let me repeat: Vice Potus Lotus. Goddess Vice Potus Lotus. Goddess Vice Potus Lotus. Goddess Vice Potus Lotus. Goddess Vice Potus Lotus. Goddess.

Heavy-duty hombres, spin doctors, critics of all kinds. Zero the counter. Zero the counter, please.

Sometimes I just don't have a clue about who I really am. Know what I mean? Do you really?

OK OK OK. It started with money. It started the day Nixon took the country off the gold standard and money became just numbers floating out in cyberspace. Reaching a whole new level of abstraction. Then records disappeared. Then record stores and phone booths disappeared. Evaporated! Gone! Poof! Never to return. The streets became quiet because the children got sick because they hardly ever moved. All the children were fat and sick, sneezing all the time, choking on the air. They were prey to every disease.

Please make sure your mask is on and that you only remove it to take sips of coffee and then you have to put it back . . . Please make sure your mask is on. Please make sure your mask is on.

Pictures were everywhere and pictures began to replace things. Screens were everywhere you looked. Hey, mister . . . hey, you! . . . mister . . . the one in the shorts . . . you look like someone who would enjoy talking to a plaster bird. Am I right?

With a hey and a hey and a hey nonny no. With a hey hey hey hey hey nonny nonny. You know?

My background is kind of interesting. As a motivational speaker, I've learned to say certain things in certain ways. Most of my cassettes are available in the lobby at a reasonable price. I believe in cassettes, I really do. . . .

As I said, at NASA I worked on communications issues with Russians. We wanted them to use our satellites and our phones. But the Russians didn't want to use our phones because they were afraid of the bill. And good thing, too!

At NASA, the last guy I talked to had these large Byzantine eyes that never blinked. Unless, of course, our blinks were perfectly synchronized and I never saw them. I suppose that kind of thing can happen . . . what do you think . . . ?

Vee gates? Vee gates? Vee gates? Vee gates? Vee gates? Vee gates?

Ah . . . dead stars their light still trapped in time. The dark emotion that came a great distance to reach me. The sky. The land. The sky. The land.

Just please don't tell me about any more new ideas or introduce me to any more new people or new products or new colors because they're just going to remind me of the originals. They're just going to be crummy copies. Crummy copies crummy copies crummy copies crummy copies crummy copies crummy copies.

Then again the Dalai Lama said that artificial plants are A-OK since they remind you of the real ones. Ah. The state of things. And the things that keep disappearing. Pictures of things and things with pictures in them.

And then there's the audience, composed mostly of my relatives. Not particularly friendly ones. The rest must have just slipped out for a smoke. Maybe they'll never be back, and really do I care? Not a whit! Not a fig. Not a bit!

Iota iota iota iota iota iota iota iota iota.

But I live in an old warehouse down by the river. As a self-employed and self-motivated spy, I've been filing these reports for years now. So watch what you say or you could be an item in my report. Or a feature on my blog.

The only problem is that recently I've been running out of invisible ink. *Tant pis*, as the French are wont to say. I want to say . . . I want to say . . . I want to say . . . I want to say . . . I make speeches all the time to myself, but they are full of despair. This black Irish despair. You probably know exactly what I'm talking about . . . or do you?

You know in hotels it's funny how immediately possessive you can get about what's called quote unquote my room and how hard they try to convince you that it hasn't just been quote unquote vacated moments before your arrival. The pillows still hot. The air still vibrating with the sounds and smells—the voices, the aftershaves of the last guest. Quote unquote. Ah yes you emerge. Into a world filled with quote unquote crud . . . new plastics and new elastics.

And I always imagined I would be a troubadour walking around France, the haystacks in the background and the cattle lowing and lanes full of flowers. And at night robbers and sex in the air everywhere and perfumes to hide the reeking piles of offal. And so it was only a picture book really. That's all it ever was. Just a picture. Another picture. Or was it a figment? Was it a figment a figment a figment a figment a figment a figment a figment of my imagination?

The sky. The land. The sky. The land.

Visual description:

A rotund, almost cartoonish sculpture of a parrot, painted bronze with a greenish patina, sits on a metal perch about four and a half feet tall. The bottom part of the bird's beak moves up and down, as if it is speaking.

The Witness Protection Program (The Raven)

2020

Foam, fiberglass coating, and paint

Courtesy of the artist

Visual description:

A larger-than-life sculpture of a sleek, black raven, with a glossy, reflective surface, sits directly on the floor. It is four and a half feet tall and nine and a half feet long. The beak and head are depicted in a simple manner, with slight indentations indicating the eyes and a curve outlining the beak. The neck is smooth, giving way to more detail in the wings, where intricate linear patterning and deeper shadows indicate feathers.

To Carry Heart's Tide (The Canoe)

2020

Wood, resin, and paint

Courtesy of the artist

Visual description:

A gold-painted canoe sits on a low platform. The canoe appears to have been broken across the middle and mended with patches of wood. Where it has been repaired, the canoe is slightly wider, jutting out in a boxlike shape and breaking the sleek curve of the boat. Puddles of resin appear to seep out of the remaining cracks.

What Time Can Do (Shaking Shelf)

2021

Wood; plastic, ceramic, and metal objects;

electronics; and sound

Courtesy of the artist

Sound description:

The audio begins with a distant, repeated train whistle. The chugging of the train increases in volume as the horn sounds twice more. The clanking wheels, scraping of metal, and rhythmic thrum of the engine suggest that the train is getting closer. The plastic and ceramic cups on the shelf begin to shake and clatter as the sound of the train increases. The sound is now a chaotic din, creating an aural illusion of the train passing by the shelf. The sound of scraping metal ebbs and flows in volume as the cups shake.

Visual description:

A horizontal wooden shelf is mounted to the wall. On it are about twenty cups and other vessels of various shapes and sizes, including a champagne flute, two stacked champagne coupes, a metal creamer, and a ceramic teacup and saucer with a floral design. Over the course of a three-minute sequence, the cups and mugs vibrate and sometimes move slightly across the wooden surface, shaken by the recorded noise of an invisible passing train.