Order Against the Unraveling: Grids, Gestures, and the Slow Undoing of Time

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Terminal Creative Project
Master of Fine Arts in Art
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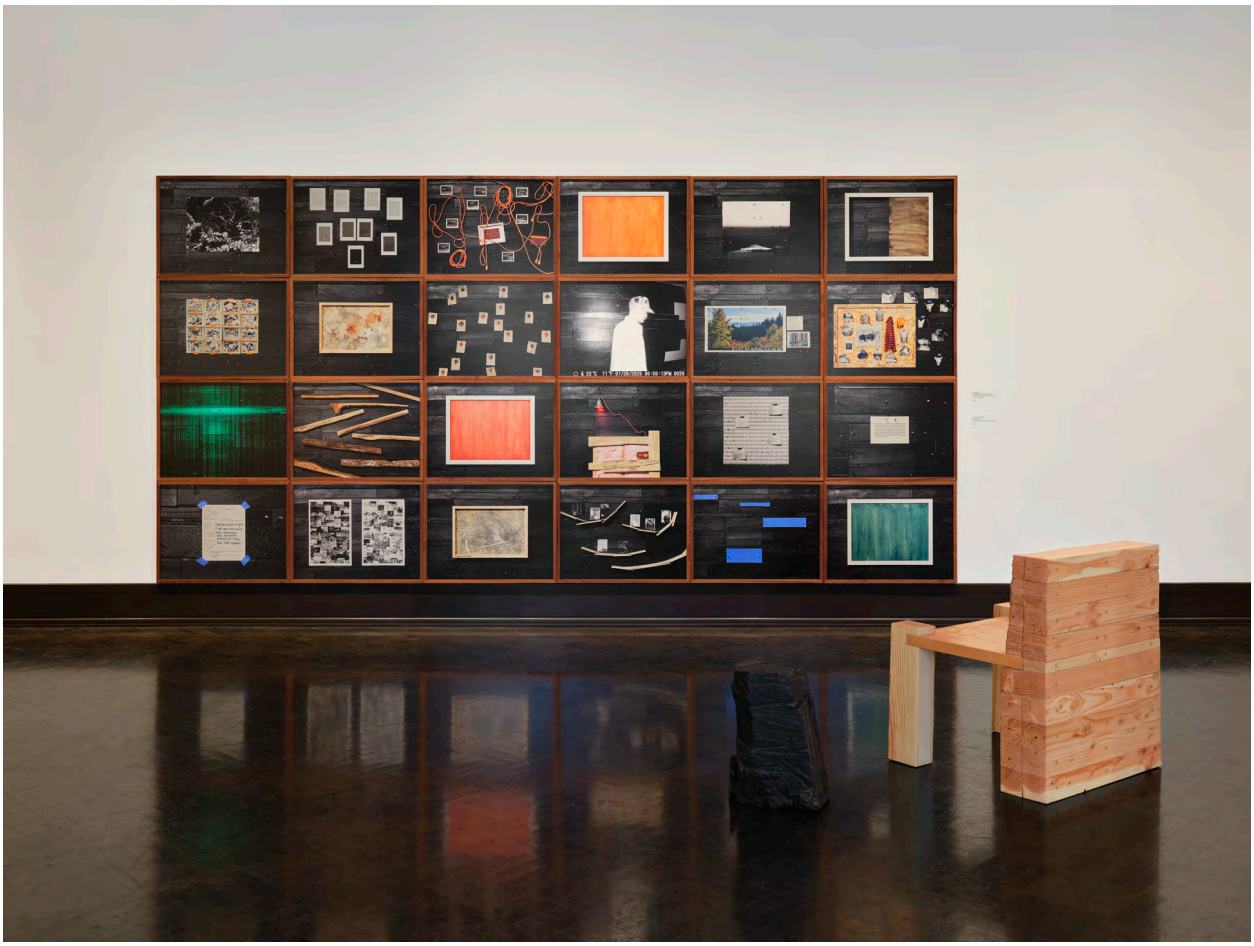
Thank you to Ron, Colin, and Jovencio for your support through my years here. Thank you Todd for teaching me so much throughout my life — your knowledge is invaluable. Thank you Lynn for teaching me to be a bit less lazy. Thank you Dylan for providing endless laughs. Thank you Gary for being a creative influence. Thank you Meg for the joy, love, and support as I was producing this show and in all other facets of my life. Thank you Sydney, Noa, Conner, Xinyu, Kate, and Gracie for your friendship these three years. Thank you Brock for being a perpetual sounding board (Go Leafs Go). Thank you Rex, my cute and crazy menace — so many kibbles are coming your way bubba.

Table of Contents

Report	4
Bibliography	34
Additional Photos	35

"What else can you offer the earth, which has everything? What else can you give but something of yourself? A homemade ceremony, a poem, a song, a made thing." — Robin Wall Kimmerer



Building Blocks of an Altered Earth, archival pigment prints, handmade sapele frames with birch dowel splines, 15 x 8 feet, 2025

Block Chair, Douglas fir, beech, birch, southern cypress, eastern white ash, 3 x 3 x 3 feet, 2025

Block Stump, reclaimed stump, shellac, 1 x 2 feet, 2025

MFA
This Side of Knowing

The smell of kerosene from the white heater turned mostly black would linger on our clothes for days. I am not sure if it ever really left the threads of our tattered work clothes. The heater would sit on the floor and keep the garage warm, at the expense of the smell and burning eyes. Through the haze of fumes and swirling sawdust, this is where I learned to build. At four years old, I was probably more of an annoyance than a help, but my dad never told me I couldn't be out there. I learned about making mistakes and doing it over until it was right, with no anger or disappointment from him. He already knew, from his own experience, that mistakes in woodworking were inevitable. Wood is a challenging material. It is not perfect and it will never be perfect. We worked by hand, and I learned what it meant to take care of material. I didn't know then that I was learning reverence for material and process. To a young me, it was just time hanging with dad. That is craft.

Craft is the underpinning of all of my work. It is the platform on which I build in my search for personal and ecological understanding. I never reach a final understanding, but I try. I try furiously. This project, this paper, and the years of inquiry during my time at the University of Oregon serve as evidence of that search. It is all a record of the fragments I've gathered and the meanings that emerge when they are held gently together.

All searches begin with a question. Mine begins with this:

How do we hold what slips away?

The scent of woodsmoke in the folds of a jacket. A deer caught mid-step by a trail camera. A forest altered by fire, then by memory. These are my materials, just as surely as wood or ash. Documentation of ephemerality becomes just as real as the splinters in my hands, or the chair in which someone can sit. My practice lives in the space between preservation and surrender. To burn wood for longevity or to photograph that wave that existed in only that moment. Born from the time spent in that kerosene-filled garage with hands learning fit from failure, I have come to understand making as a form of listening. To material. To land. To loss.

Craft, to me, is both conceptual and technical. I align my practice with Glenn Adamson's assertion that "material is concept," understanding labor, repetition, and decay as forms of thought. Adamson also writes, "craft exists in the interstices between thought and action, between the conceptual and the manual. It is not a mode of making alone, but a mode of thinking through making." Craft is not separate from theory; it is a mode of inquiry in and of itself. As David Pye suggests, it is an engagement with the

"workmanship of risk" as the "quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making."

Nina Maclaughlin, writing as a carpenter that is installing a fake wooden deck, reinforces the connection to material memory when she observes the natural decay of wood as a reflection of our own aging and softening over time.

> "To witness the decay of wood on a fence that lines a field, on a forest path's fallen trunk; to see it changing color, from rich brown-red, paling to gray to green, darkening to black; to see it changing texture, from solid and strong to flaking, chewed by bugs, softened by water, dissolved by time and moisture to a pulpy mess—it comforts us somehow, echoes our own wasting, our own softening and weakening over time. There is no existential comfort to be found in artificial wood, unchanged by time, none of the melancholy that paves our understanding and embrace of time and dying"

Wood decays and it also burns. Fire is both destruction and preservation, an elemental force that resists containment yet leaves its trace. Fire is a material event. Fire is a method of mark-making, a way to engage with time, transformation, and the fragility of matter. Fire is a paradox that both erases and extends the lifespan of living things. To burn is to intervene. A pencil writes on paper, and fire inscribes wood, embedding its own history of heat, touch, and change. The blackened surfaces of burned wood exist in a suspended state that is neither fully consumed nor fully intact. The char functions as a landscape that is textured, fractured, irreversibly altered. Fire serves as both gesture and record, an imprint of past action and an ongoing presence. Fire is ephemeral. A flame cannot be held, but the aftermath of the flame remains. Did the moment slip away, or is it saved in ash? This tension between presence and absence is what makes fire a radical medium. It does not allow return, only transformation. To engage with fire is to engage with entropy, with the inevitability of change. It is to work with time itself, understanding that what is burned is lost while also being made into something new. Standing at the edge of material and time, I watch as form breaks and reconstructs. Something once solid turns to ash. Something transient becomes mark, memory, and landscape. Fire is not just an end. It is a beginning.

"Fire and heat provide modes of explanation in the most varied domains, because they have been for us the occasion for unforgettable memories, for simple and decisive personal experiences. Fire is thus a privileged phenomenon which can explain anything. If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all that changes quickly is explained by fire. Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance. Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure for the good child sitting prudently by the hearth; yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation." - Gaston Bachelard

My desire to combine fine woodworking with fire and entropy, can be contextualized through contemporary artists working in similar ways. In describing the work of Bhuvanesh Gowda, Ariela Gittlen writes, “Gowda’s recent work investigates the relationship between new developments in physics and Eastern philosophy. Some of his wooden elements are finely carved, others left in their original state. Some are burned black, while others are painted, suggesting a confluence of opposing forces or a psychological narrative.”

Bhuvanesh Gowda, Born from Each Other, 2016.
Charred salvaged wood
31 x 5 x 16 inches

Another prominent artist working in the intersection of refined and burnt wooden forms is David Nash. “Nash had always found that whenever he looked at a wood sculpture he would be conscious, first, of the presence of wood, the material, before he saw the form. But in transforming the surface of the piece into a black, carbonized finish he found a change took place: the intense black had the effect of distancing him from the piece so that he now saw the form before experiencing the material” (Julian Andrews). Furthermore, Nash’s work also points to the relationship between objects in space and work on a wall, especially object vs. representation of material.

David Nash *Pyramids rise, Spheres turn and Cubes stand still* at Annely Juda Fine Art, 2005

David Nash, *From Nature to Nature*, charcoal on paper and charred wood, 1986

The beginning from fire acts as the background for all of the photographic work in *Building Blocks of an Altered Earth*. Utilizing traditional Japanese burning techniques on scrap wood accumulated throughout my years of grad school and from commission work that pays the bills and buys my dog his food, burnt boards were hand-nailed to my studio wall. I arranged things that I have collected, built new things, enacted temporal gestures. There is a part of me that must think that if I arrange things just right —lined them up, labeled them, gave them context—I might be able to hold onto something: a feeling, a place already gone. The installations come from that same impulse. I built a space to house fragments: photographs, scraps of notes, sculptures, paintings. At first glance, it looks orderly like an archive or a specimen drawer, but the materials inside are restless. The wood is split and blackened, the photos are already fading, the paper is starting to curl. What I'm really building isn't a record—it's a kind of elegy. Photography plays a central role, not as final truth, but as another gesture toward remembering. I use trail camera images, repetition, and grids of fleeting views. They're imperfect, partial, and that's the point. Every photograph is just one more attempt to hold still what won't stay still. I think a lot about entropy. About how every act of preservation contains within it the inevitability of loss. The color fields are moments where I let myself intervene to interrupt the quiet decay. They're not solutions. They're reminders that this archive isn't neutral. It's personal. It's mine.

"Remains trouble fixity. They are neither the thing itself nor nothing. They gesture. They gesture toward a body both present and gone, material and vanished." - Rebecca Schneider

This elegy — of small remembrances, of hopes made tangible — uses the grid as a conceptual device that points towards archiving and photographic history that is interested in repetition, seriality, and systematic approaches. These approaches are usually used to work towards uniformity.

Bernd and Hilla Becher and their typological grids of single subjects, photographed in flat, uniform light:

Photographs: Sprüth Magers

Roni Horn showing subtle differences in photographs taken moments apart:

Untitled (Weather), 2010-2011, inkjet/pigment color prints on paper, mounted on sintra, in 6 parts. Photograph: Mutual Art

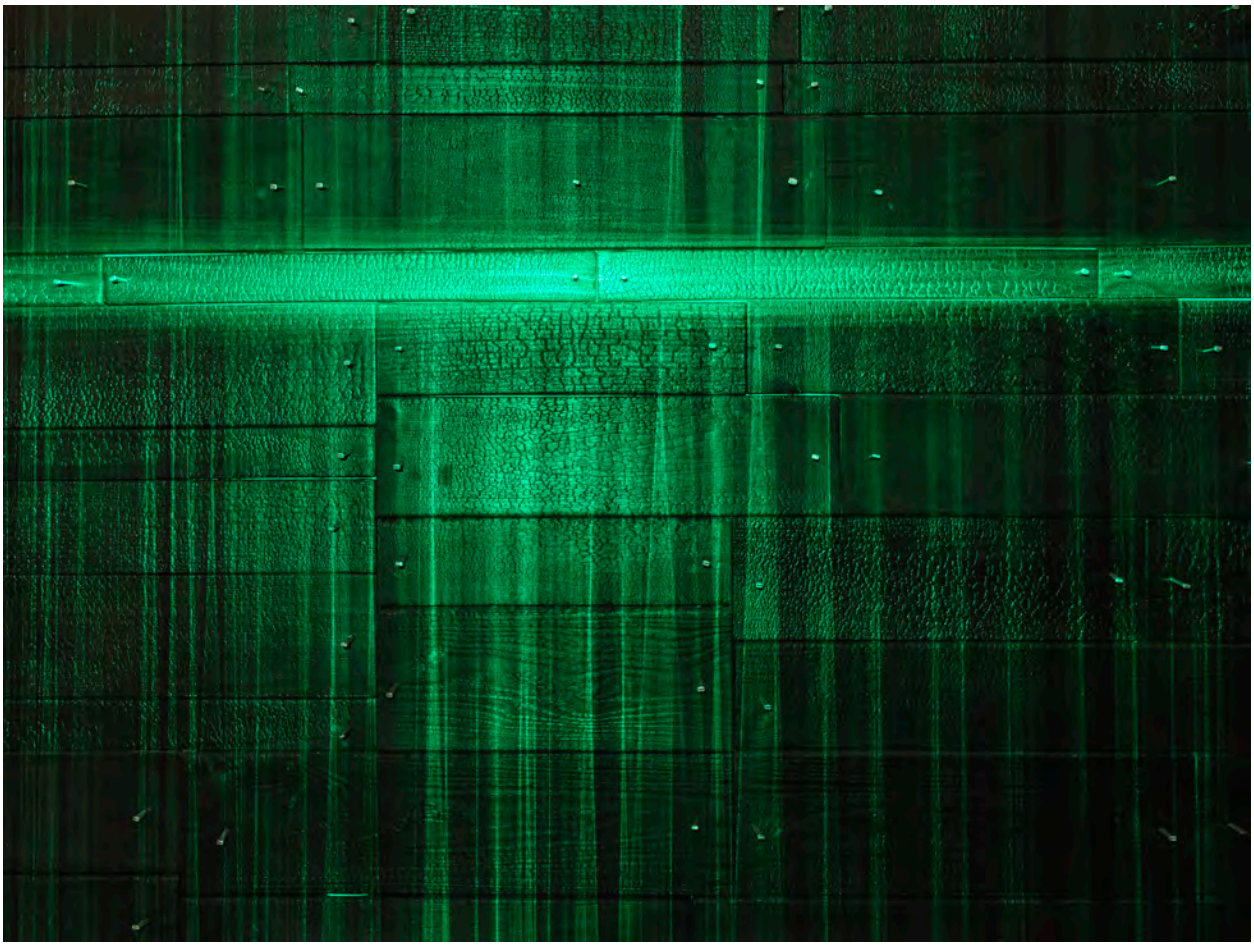
Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert), 2005-6. Installation view, Museum Ludwig, Colonia, 2024. Photograph: Genevive Hanson

Olafur Eliasson's time-based studies of landscape:

The volcano series, 2012, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 2012. Photo: Jean Vong

The Domadalur daylight series (north), 2006, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 2006
Photo: Fabian Birgfeld / PhotoTECTONICS

I utilize similar formal executions to these photographers, but let each photograph in the grid act on its own first, then entering a conversation with other images in the grid. They are placed in close proximity and all share the same background in my studio, yet I do not strive for uniformity in the subjects. I am interested in the ways in which photographs can speak to one another and create contradictions and similarities just by proximity. This grid does not strive for a singular narrative, which forces a viewer to engage intimately with each photograph while simultaneously comparing and contrasting to others in the whole. There is a complication that is achieved when moving beyond the typical use of the grid and systematic approaches outlined above.



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A burning flame
that feels like it will never die
yet the winter will come
and we will see
how funny it was
to believe that it would last forever.
But that's the thing about the cold
when we feel everything
and it becomes too much
we have to search for the flame again
finding that it will make us warmer
and more alive than it did
when we thought it would last forever.

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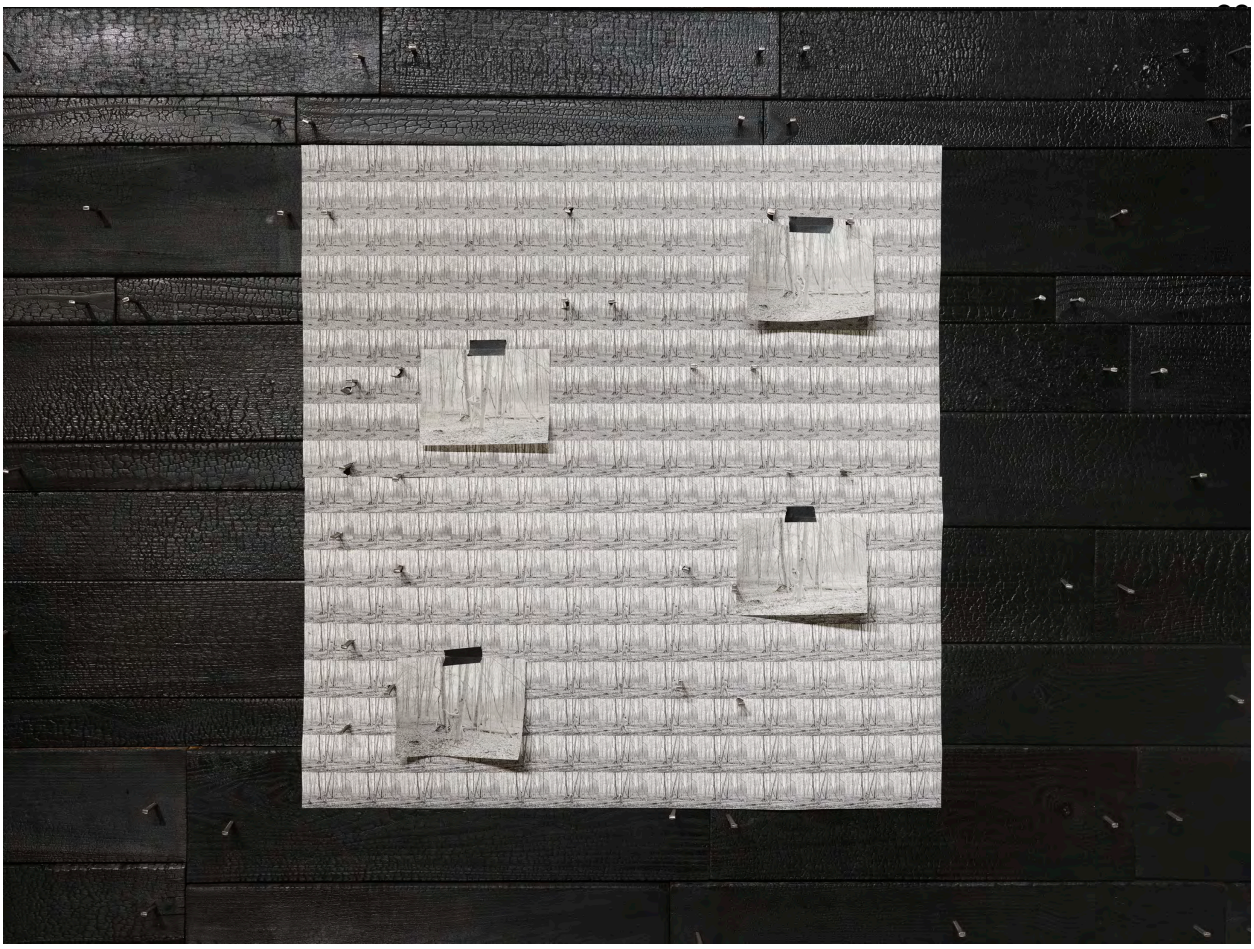

The photograph must be framed. The vehicle must carry the idea. I mustn't ignore anything in the whole. Craft is care for all material decisions.

"I want to think of making, instead, as a process of growth. This is to place the maker from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials. These materials are what he has to work with, and in the process of making he 'joins forces' with them, bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesising and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge. The maker's ambitions, in this understanding, are altogether more humble than those implied by the hylomorphic model. Far from standing aloof, imposing his designs on a world that is ready and waiting to receive them, the most he can do is to intervene in worldly processes that are already going on, and which give rise to the forms of the living world that we see all around us – in plants and animals, in waves of water, snow and sand, in rocks and clouds – adding his own impetus to the forces and energies in play. The difference between a marble statue and a rock formation such as a stalagmite, for example, is not that one has been made and the other not. The difference is only this: that at some point in the formative history of this lump of marble, first a quarryman appeared on the scene who, with much force and with the assistance of hammers and wedges, wrested it from the bedrock, after which a sculptor set to work with a chisel in order, as he might put it, to release the form from the stone. But as every chip of the chisel contributes to the emergent form of the statue, so every drop of supersaturated solution from the roof of the cave contributes to the form of the stalagmite. When subsequently, the statue is worn down by rain, the form-generating process continues, but now without further human intervention." - Tim Ingold

Each printed photograph in *Building Blocks for an Altered Earth* is precisely and deliberately framed to emphasize process and labor in relationship to the more slap-dash nature of the photographic content. Each frame is splined with dowels through the face in each corner—a small, but important decision amplifying a dedication to material importance. Splines tend to add strength, but here, it is purely about the form and content that they bring, with the joinery of the frame itself giving it its strength.

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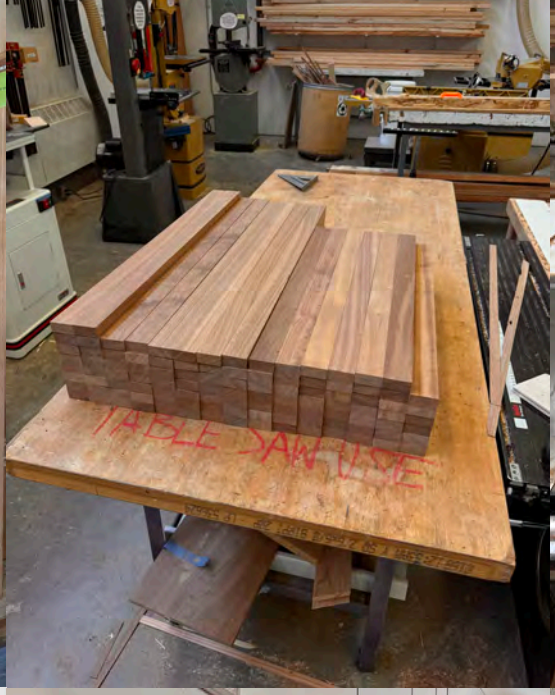
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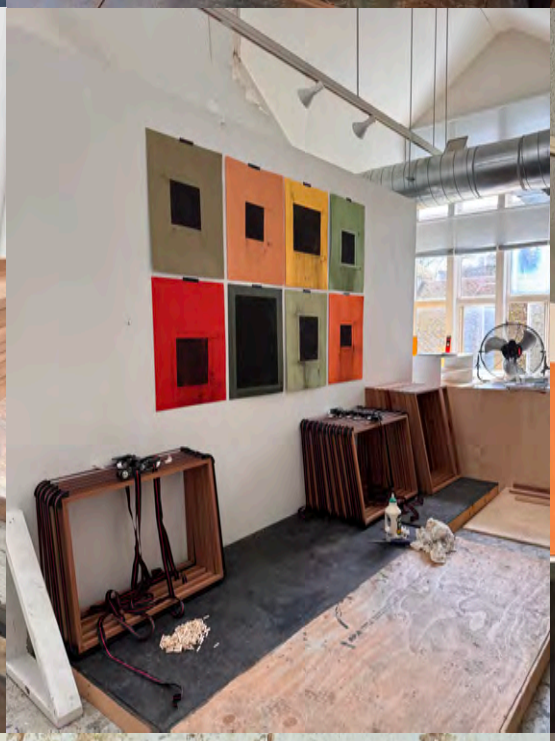
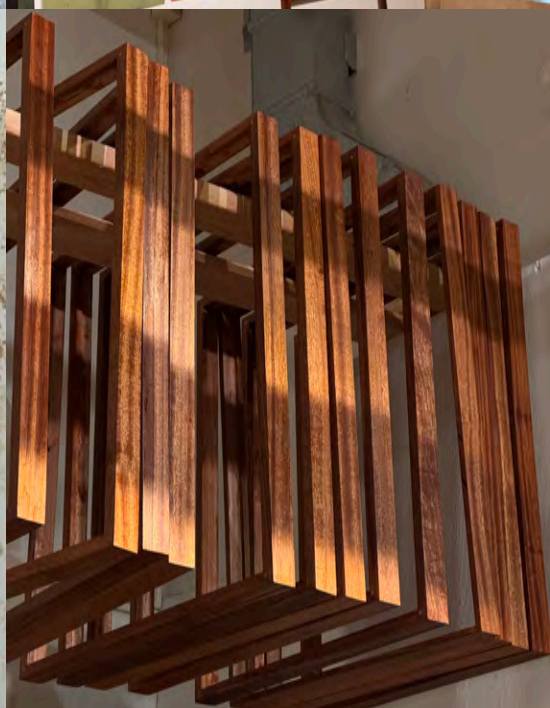
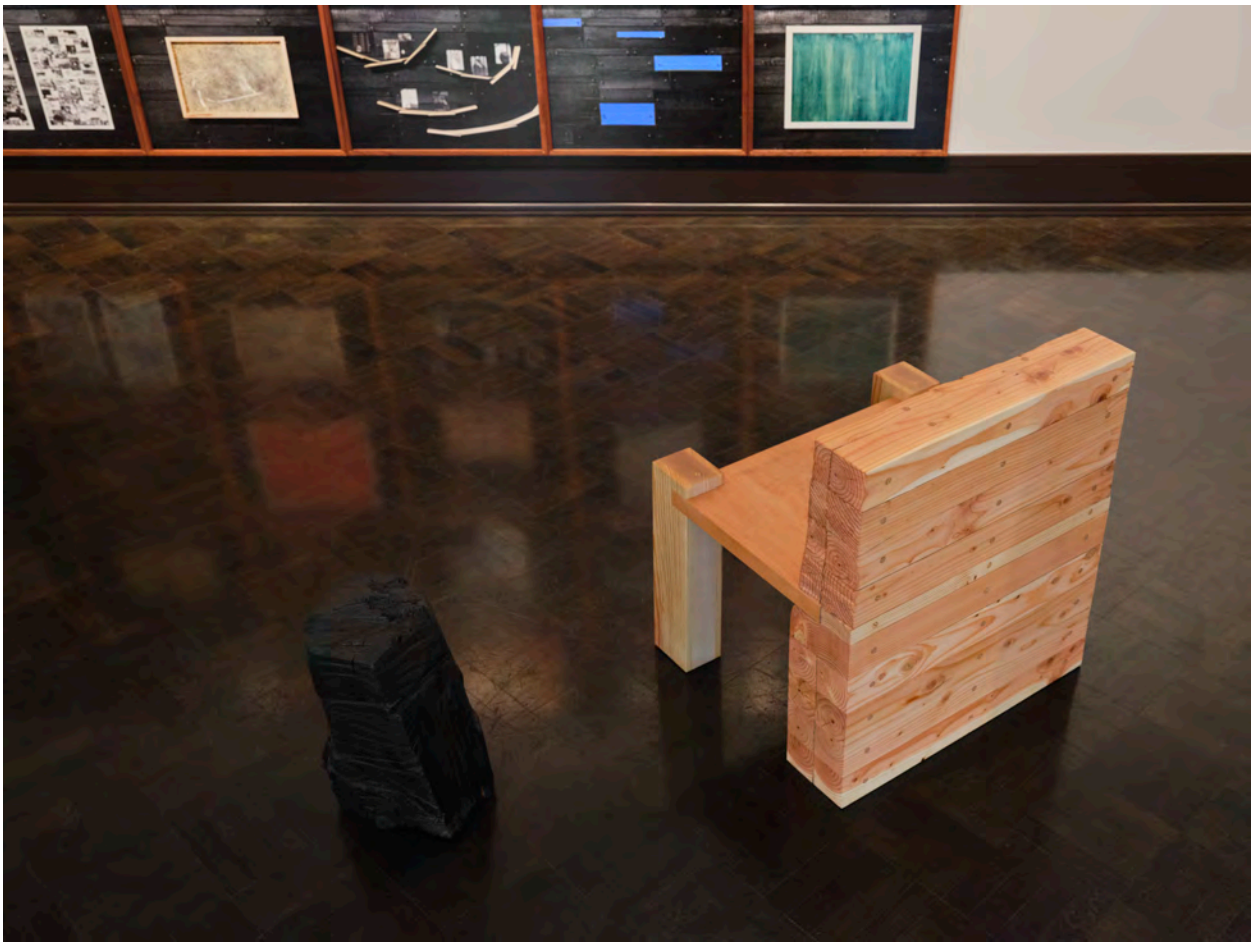




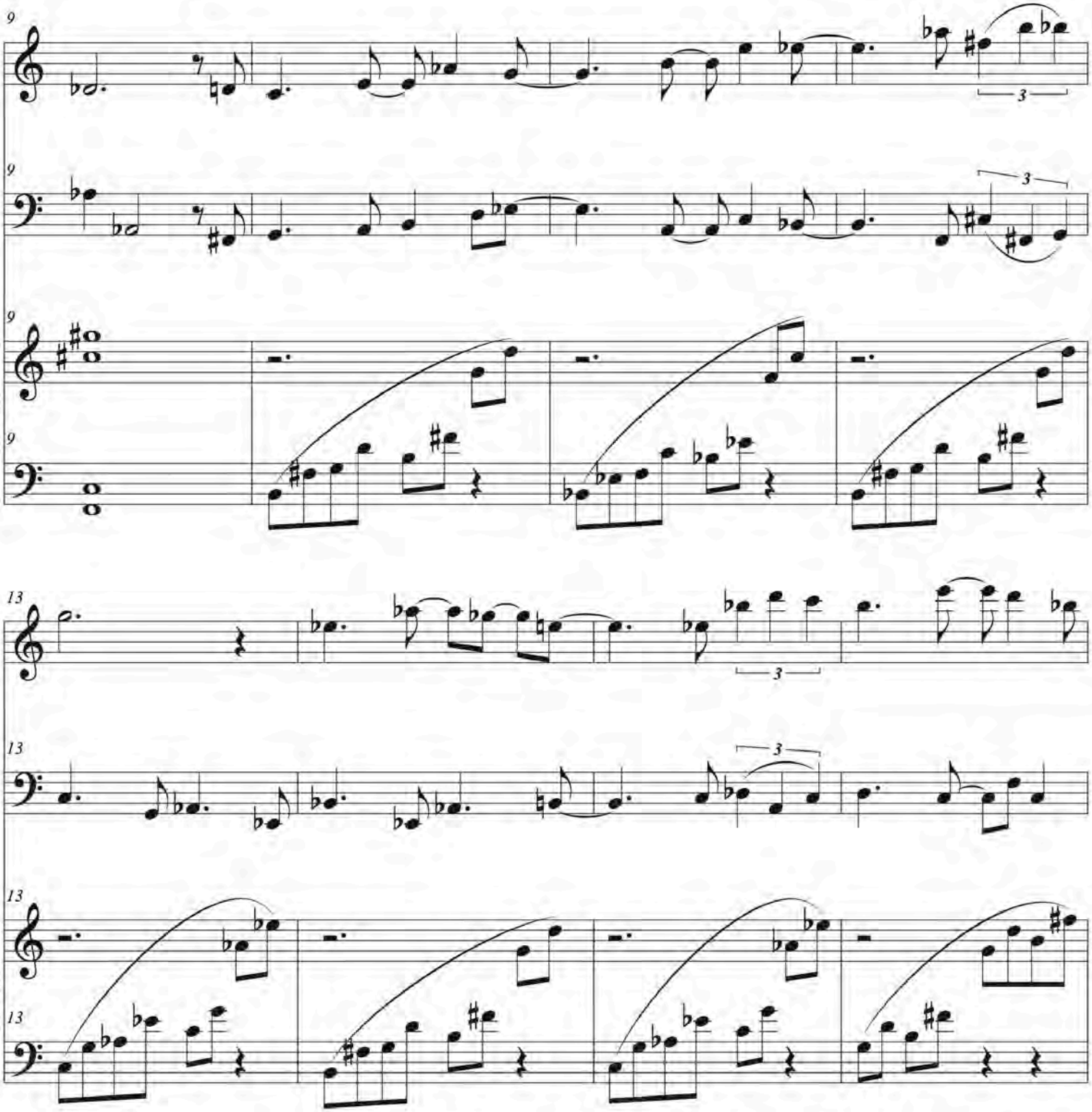
This attention to material and the layering of such material then extends into the chair made with my dad. This chair acts as a seat to hold a viewer experiencing the piece while also existing as a tangible object that holds the lineage of knowledge passed on to me. The back was made from wet Douglas fir 4x4s that cracked and split as they dried. This was a desired effect to demonstrate the strength of dowel joinery while also showing my desire to preserve things that decay, that want to move towards entropy. Woodworking, at its core, is about understanding wood to the point where you can prevent it from changing any further. Its a conceptual paradox that exists purely through necessity. The seat, carved from beech, is rough carved and sanded, but not fully polished, sitting between construction and fine woodworking. The legs, made from eastern ash and southern cypress, are highly polished. These woods also hold personal meaning. The juxtaposition between all of these materials enacts care as concept. Next to the chair is a reclaimed stump, cut with a chainsaw and burned and shellacked like the boards on the wall. All of these actions build on one another. They are each a block in the process of building some sort of understanding.



Max Lamb, furniture designer and artist, is an important reference to the chair that we built. His practice embodies an innovative yet materially reverent approach to contemporary design, bridging the tension between artisanal craft and industrial processes. His work often reveals the inherent qualities of materials through processes that embrace both traditional craftsmanship and experimental techniques. From stone, cast metal, or hand-cut wood, he displays the same level of care no matter the material. Lamb speaks of "material honesty" which shows through his work that is rather brutalist. These forms come from not over-processing the material and caring for durability. This approach resonates deeply with my own inquiry into the relationships between material, memory, and process, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the histories and inherent characteristics embedded within the materials I use. Throughout the chair and exhibition as a whole, the history and characteristics of common construction materials are present, which is a departure from other artists working with wood and ideas of craft. I want to combine the complexities and layers of different building modalities. Similarly to Lamb, I strive for material honesty.

Installation of 42 chairs. Photo: Claudia Zalla via The New York Times.

Max Lamb, *Wood, Stone* at Salon 94 Design, New York, New York, 2021.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Complimenting the physical objects in the space is a musical composition made by my uncle, someone influential to my life as an artist. He, along with my dad, *needed* to be in this exhibition. There is no me as an artist without them. The music provides a moment of respite, of solitude in the presence of abundance. The music challenges the listener, taking them on a journey that can be unsettling and hopeful at once. It hums in the background, acting as another kind of trace that is both ephemeral and real.

As the viewers (and myself) step back from the many elements of this work, we are left with the paradox that is at the heart of making. To build is to witness decay and make new from it. To preserve is to acknowledge loss, to acknowledge what we wish to save.

In the end, I know I can't stop time or fire or forgetting, but I can make a space to exist among it all. Everything is brief, yet everything lives on. This work isn't at its end. Maybe it's a beginning, maybe it's a fragment of something yet to come, maybe it will shift in the world's flux and my own uncertain self. Maybe it's just a record of now, or maybe it's what processing the world looks like in this moment. And so I keep making, guided by what remains unknown.

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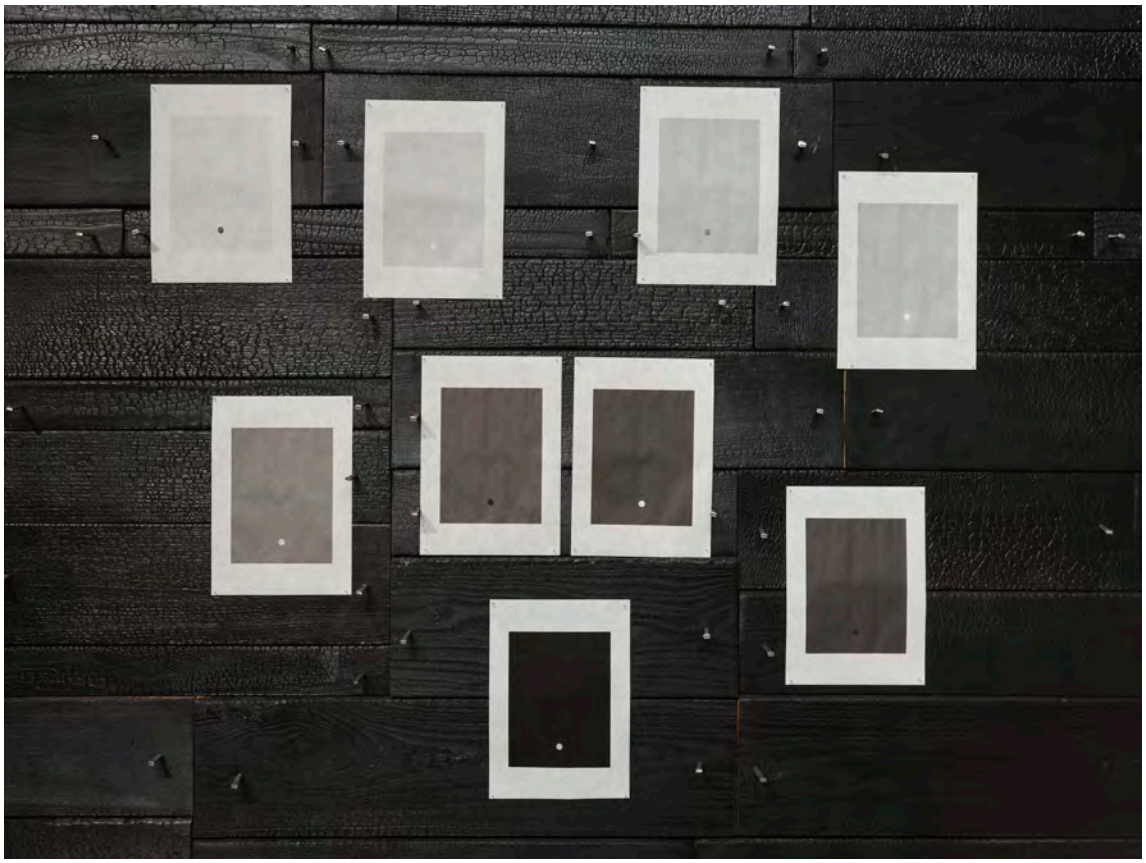

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A burning flame
that feels like it will never dim
yet the winter will come
and we will see
how funny it was
to believe that it would last forever.
But that's the thing about the cold
when we feel everything
and it becomes too much
we have to search for the flame again
finding that it will make us warmer
and more alive than it did
when we thought it would last forever.
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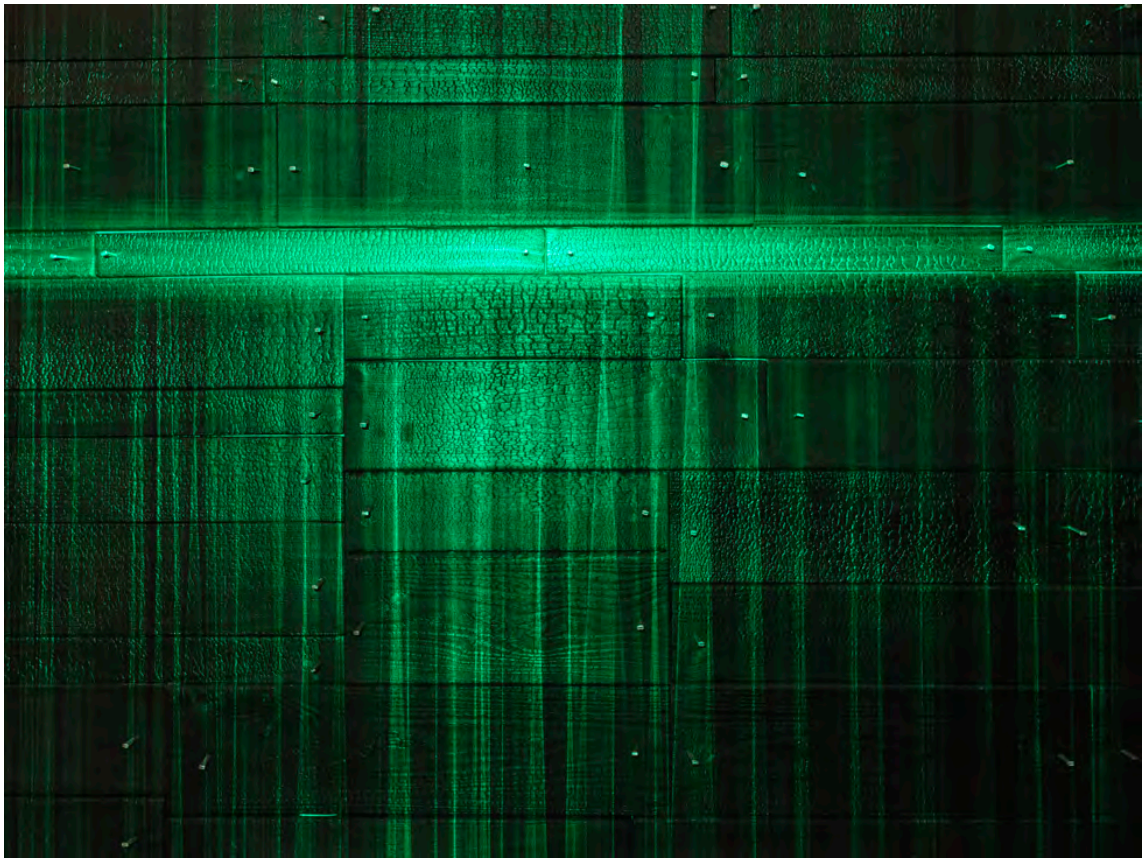
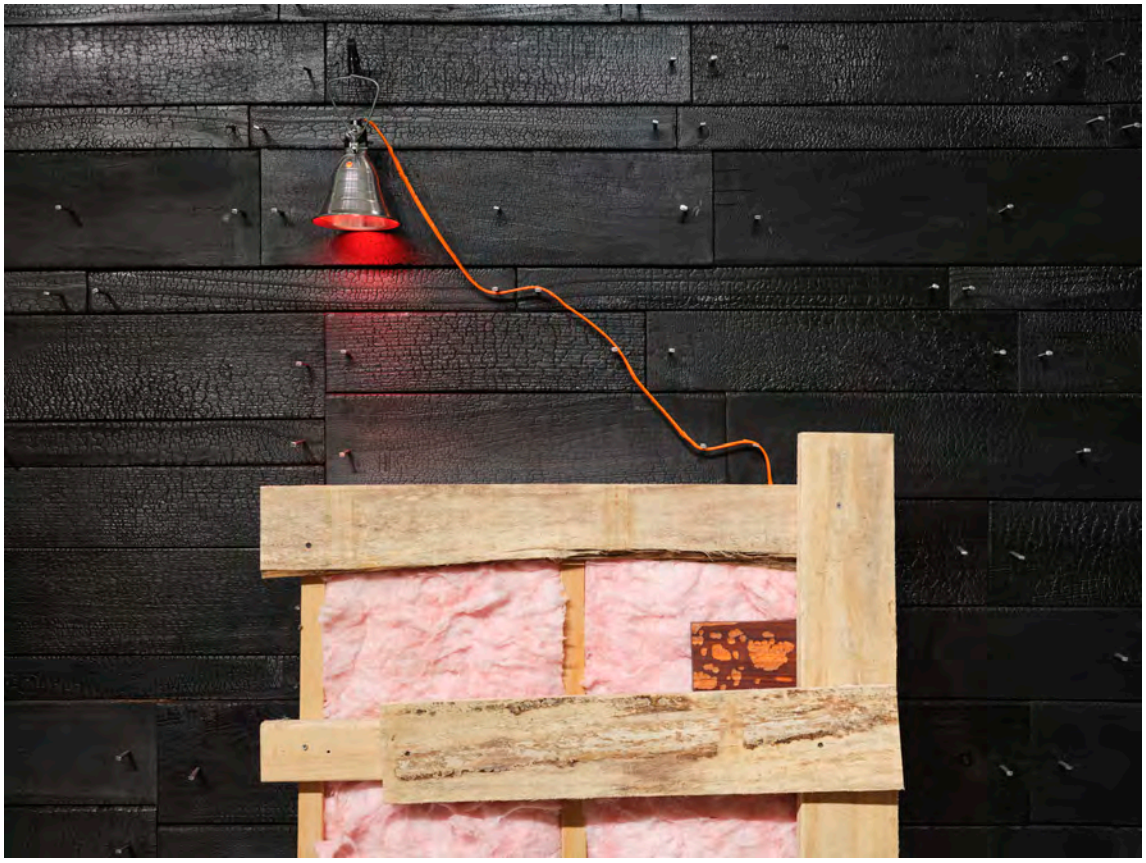
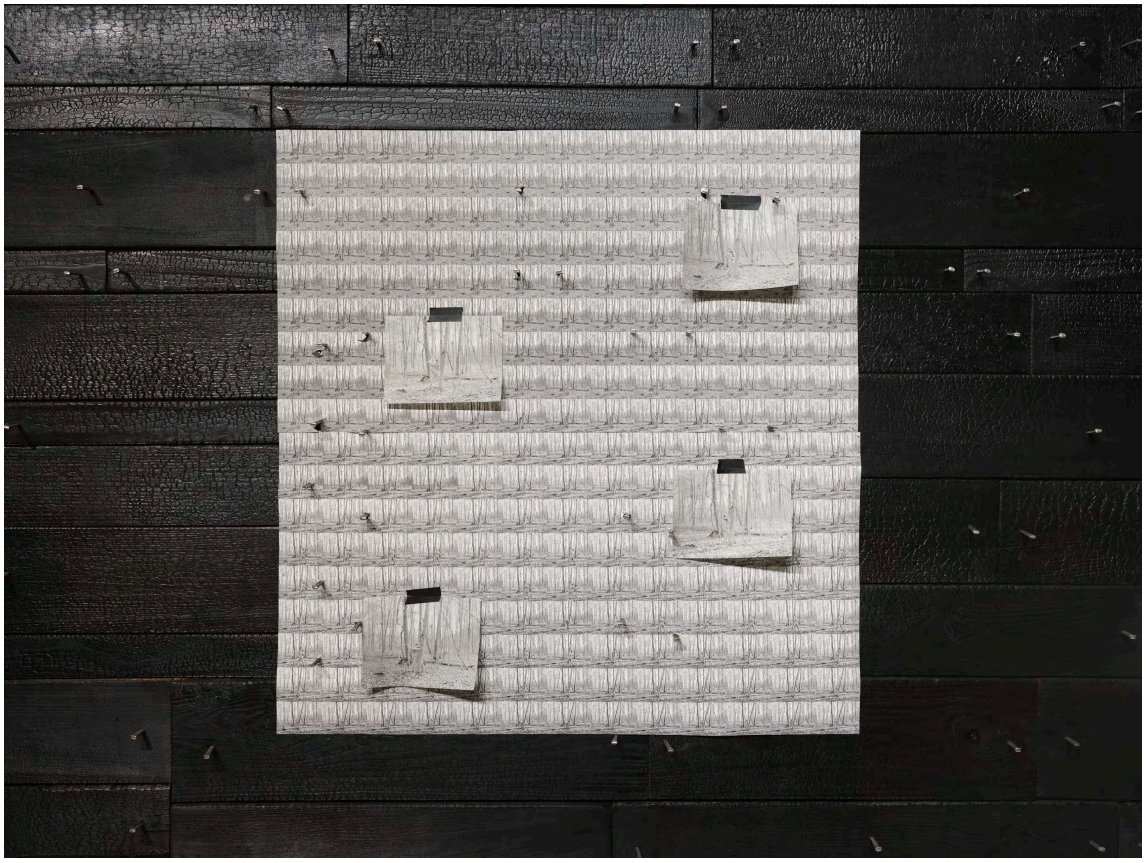
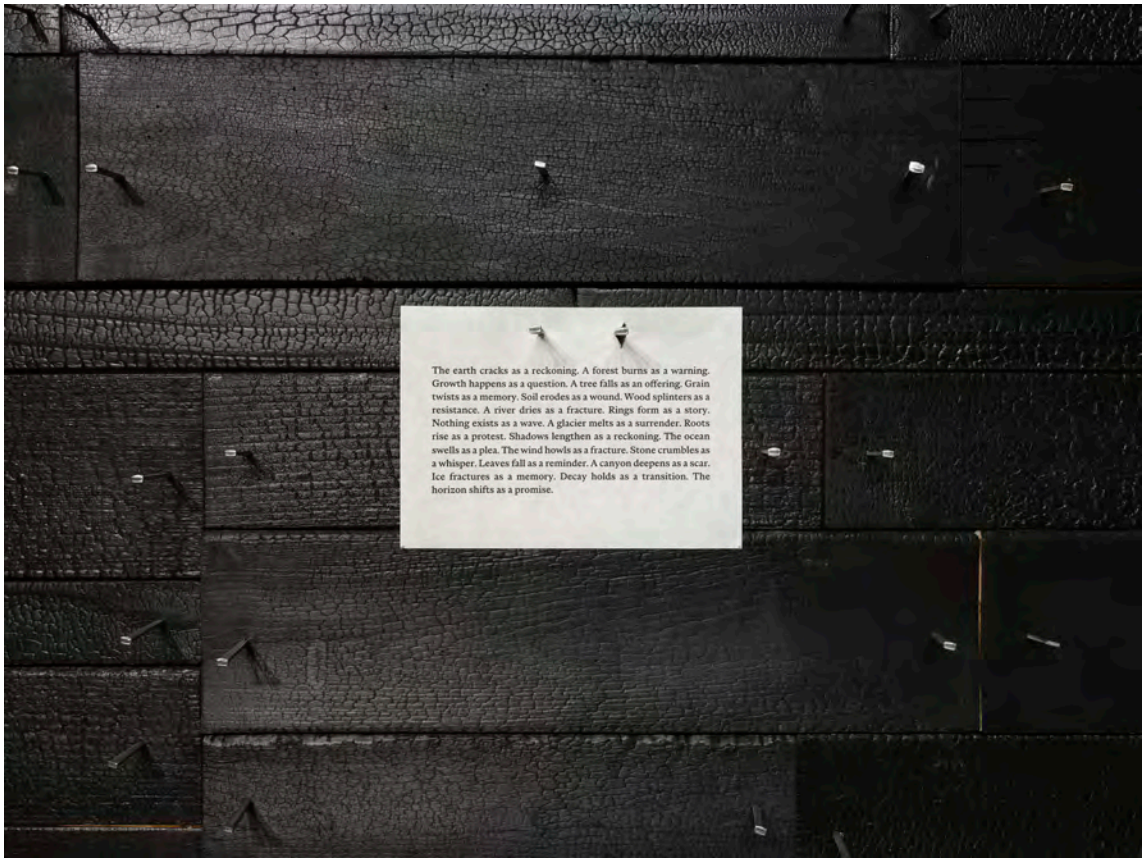
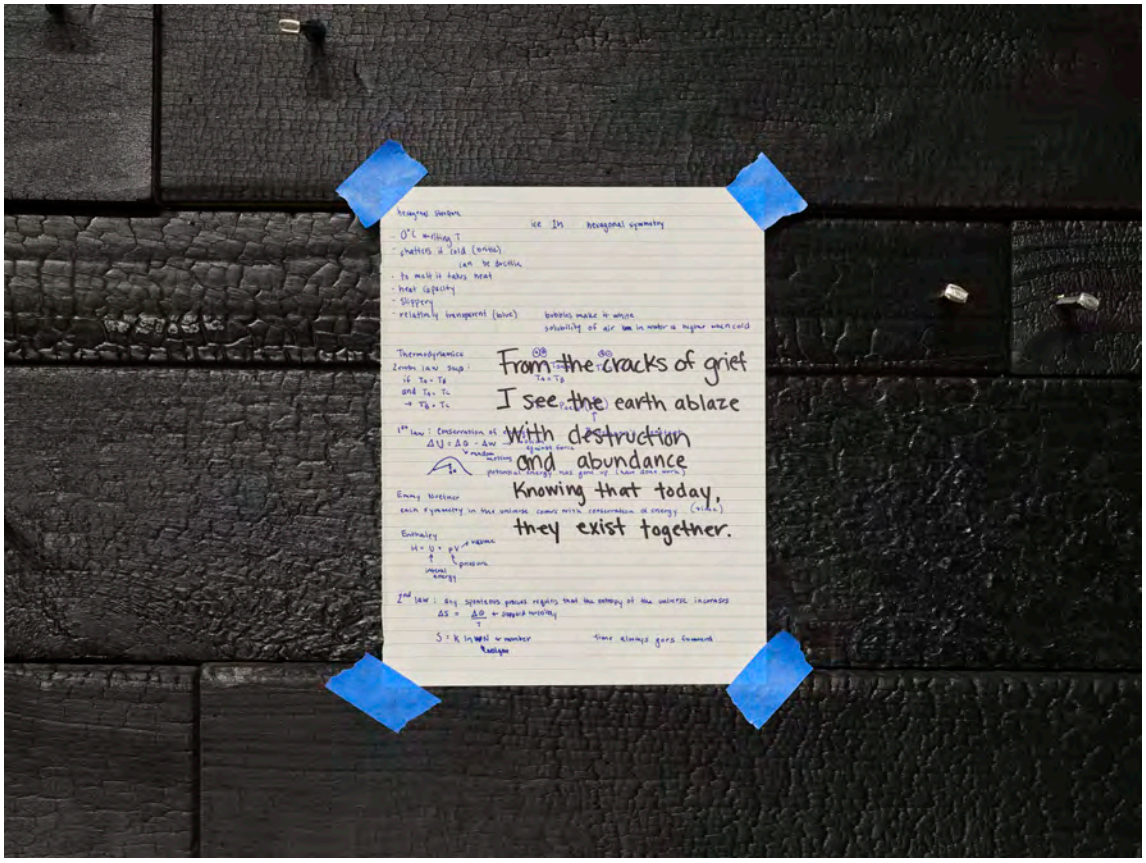
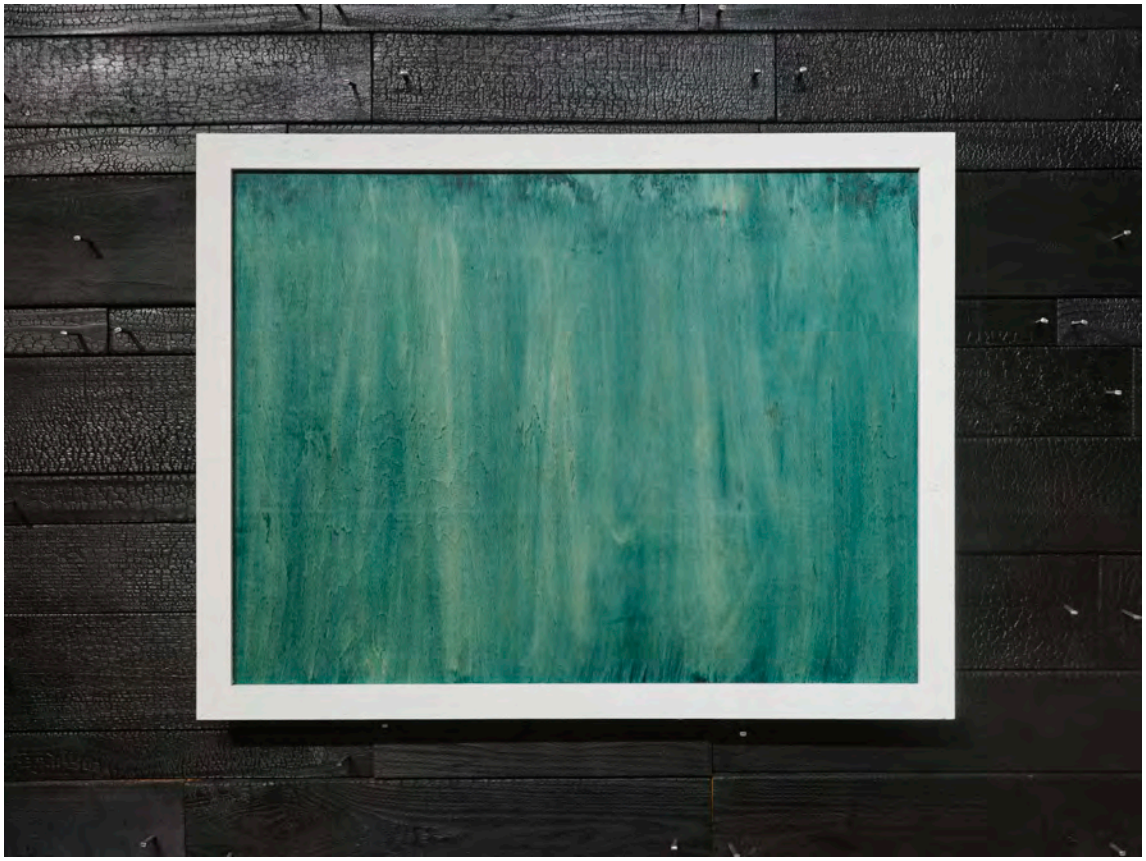







The earth cracks as a reckoning. A forest burns as a warning. Growth happens as a question. A tree falls as an offering. Grain twists as a memory. Soil erodes as a wound. Wood splinters as a resistance. A river dries as a fracture. Rings form as a story. Nothing exists as a wave. A glacier melts as a surrender. Roots rise as a protest. Shadows lengthen as a reckoning. The ocean swells as a plea. The wind howls as a fracture. Stone crumbles as a whisper. Leaves fall as a reminder. A canyon deepens as a scar. Ice fractures as a memory. Decay holds as a transition. The horizon shifts as a promise.


From the cracks of grief
I see the earth ablaze
with destruction
and abundance
Knowing that today,
they exist togethner.