



Falling Still

*Falling Still* utilizes 200 cement-cast feathers as individual pixels to create a larger image across 6 planes. Each of these sculptures has been hand-poured into molds of actual feathers, exhibiting finely detailed quills on one side, and flat concrete surfaces on the other. They hang from the ceiling via discrete fishing lines, swinging, twisting and turning as viewers move around the 8 x 15 x 4 foot installation area. From all perspectives but one, the work floats between 1-dimensional lines, 2-dimensional planes and 3-dimensional pixels. View it exactly perpendicular to its planes, and all the work's elements cohere into a bit-mapped image of a body, leaping through the air. While *Falling Still* is itself suspended between movement and stasis, it also moves and arrests us. The installation directs us in and around incongruous objects, through an improbable image, and across multiple dimensions.



## Falling Still

Yevgeniya Kaganovich and Nathaniel Stern  
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Curated by Jennifer Johung  
Art History Gallery  
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

### *Falling: 200 quills and tendrils*

As a structural system for covering a body, feathers are amongst the most complex. Down feathers contour the skin, trapping air in their hook-free filaments for warmth and insulation. Vaned feathers then layer above, with barbs branching off into barbules that are capable of cross-attaching to each other, particularly across the remiges and retrices. These flight feathers of the wings and

tail, respectively, remain rigidly angled against the beating of wind currents, but can flexibly yield in other ways when not midair. Alignment and orientation of the fibers are key, and differ between those bodies that fly and those that cannot. In either case, the latticework of plumage weighs more than two times the skeleton of bones, which are often hollow. So simplicity is complicated; a lightness made heavy.

Here a feather is cast as a filigree of concrete, so that every frill is frozen. Each feather acts as one point amongst and against others, and each is weighted against type with a downward gravity. Fall towards the grey, cold, and immobile mixture of this concrete, and a thickness of volume prevails. Fall into a minutely curled end, a branching spine, a rippled vein, and know the thinness of this concrete. Know how every point turns and bends so slightly. Know how any part, tip to tail, could break.



### *Catching: threads of fishing line*

Not meant to be seen, but used, as in angling. Early fishing line was made from plant leaves or stalks, and later ones from horsehair, silk thread, linen, cotton, or animal gut – all judged by their elasticity, strength, and endurance. We currently spin, cast, bait and lure with nylon, fluorocarbon, and polyethylene. Although copolymers and braiding are possible, monofilaments are most common, offering the widest range of buoyancy.

Here we are casting in singles for feathers, organic to man-made, baiting and luring them at this precise height and at this measured drop. Translucent to opaque, the lines shimmer into sight and then filter out of focus, almost invisible. They fall in regular intervals; they tangle and complicate, give and resist. Waiting like wall beams to bear load, a blueprint of some structure to come.

### *Holding: the edge of a body*

Linear perspective pinpoints one vantage point, from which three-dimensions can be pictured within two. We are directed where to stand and where to look, and if we follow and comply, we are given what to see. A flat painterly surface opens up onto a depth beyond, while our bodies remain still and our eyes become engulfed in those imagined forms, spaces, crevices, and curves. We feign lifelessness in the hopes of allowing that image before us to take life. We are distinctly separated from the things and beings before us, and we hold safely to that line.

Here we are met with something else, as we come around a corner and pause. Here we are offered a two-dimensional image that comes together from within three, a linear perspective afforded from a depth, a calm that



coheres from the twisting, hanging, spinning, and casting. Along one surface, at one height, if we can take in all the feathered pixels together, we are given this: the outline of a head, torso, leg, one arm outstretched, halted above ground and towards sky.

### *Moving: a flight in suspense*

And what of the image: a body veering, held between becoming and dissolving into other forms, other narratives and contexts outside of our own. That levitating body, a body in the midst of leaping, has its own history. Here is one: in 1960, the artist Yves Klein launched his body from a second story window into the street below. His *Leap Into the Void* was photographed mid-flight, and then doctored to remove his landing pad. Inscribed underneath the image, Klein wrote of his embodied performance: "Today the painter of space must, in fact, go into space to paint, but he must go there without trickery or deception, and not in an airplane, nor by parachute, nor in a rocket: he must go there on his own strength, using an autonomous, individual force; in short, he must be capable of levitation." <sup>1</sup> Body and image, the organic and the me-



chanical, the possible and the impossible, are challenged to commingle. But before that, another context: the oft-repeated images of Christ's ascension, or the levitating images of saints above mere mortals. And after that, there are yet others: *Failing to Levitate in the Studio*, Bruce Nauman's 1966 photographic response to Klein, or Paul McCarthy's own supposed balcony leap taken in the spirit of Klein.<sup>2</sup> And ever on it goes, this inclined body, airborne.

**Still:**

In concrete, through feathers and down fishing lines, towards a body in flight, each point, line, and form implicates and enlivens the other. A hint of motion catches our breath, and we are arrested. We pause, and that feather is arrested, and this outline appears. It, you, and I emerge and submerge, drawn from, out of and into other things;

each object, each body and each structure, tilting and teetering towards another, coming alive and falling still. There is, as political theorist Jane Bennett believes, "a vitality intrinsic to materiality."<sup>3</sup> Revealing the palpably restless and affective vibrancy across organic and inorganic matter, she urges us to recognize "human participation in a shared, vital materiality. We *are* vital materiality and we are surrounded by it, though we do not always see it that way. The ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it."<sup>4</sup>

If you had hoped to clearly distinguish between this body acting and that thing to be acted upon, now you may want to reconsider. To borrow the words of philosopher Jacques Rancière that may signal contemporary art's most ambitious calling, we must leap instead, and

oftentimes in faith or intuition alone, towards "repairing the very sense of the co-presence of beings and things that constitutes a world."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Kaganovich and Stern's work suggests a changeable, vulnerable, yet insistently intimate existence of beings and things, each of which is incipient and autonomous; each of which tends to and from some other, and that with care, is capable of recalibrating, to allow new and fragile co-presences to reform. As so, we are caught, held and moved by the things and beings around us. If so, still we fall.

- Jennifer Johung

<sup>1</sup> Klein, "Selections from 'Dimanche,'" in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein* (New York: Spring Publications, 2007) 106.

<sup>2</sup> For more on images of levitation, see Aaron Schuster, "The Cosmonaut of the Erotic Future," *Cabinet Magazine* 32 (Fall/Winter 2008-2009). <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/32/schuster.php>

<sup>3</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett 14.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Problems and Transformations in Critical Art," Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006) 90.





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