

Samrah Shoaib: Hi Danielle, I just want to start by saying that we are so incredibly excited and honored to have you at CCS in the space. It really means so much to us that you took the time to come back and activate *Taking Up Space*. And I also want to just name that we didn't know if we were going to find you. So we just feel so grateful that we have come this far.

Danielle Webb: Thank you.

SS: I'm gonna start with a few questions, and we can just go with the flow and see how you feel. My first question is, can you share a bit about *Taking Up Space*? What prompted you to create this work?

DW: Prior to making *Taking Up Space*, I had made several totally different but large sculptures that were made of paper. When it came time to, when they were done being shown, and I was like moving or something, I couldn't keep them. I would have to fold them up as small as possible, put them in a dumpster. That whole part of it, always made it like, this is part of the piece, even though it was just me.

I would photograph myself doing that just for my own record of this thing that I had put so much into and made so that the desire to have that be part of the work kind of coincided with some other influences and ideas that I was surrounded by at the time.

And at some point, I realized that I wanted to make the inside of this gallery covered with paper and that address the space that the work goes into as part of the elements or the ingredients of the work. And I sort of figured out this would be an opportunity for that to be part of it—folding, crumbling, deconstructing it in some way, transforming it in some way would be a part of the work.

SS: You mentioned that you've already kind of playing with paper materials. Why paper? What called you to it?

DW: I think, for me, paper, first of all, it's like symbolic of the most basic art material for me, because I grew up drawing, like pencil and paper. So it just has that connotation. But then also it's, to me, the ultimate material of, like it has just enough structure to hold itself when you put like two pieces together or fold a piece. It can hold structure, but it's delicate and ephemeral and light. It has embodied all these things I'm interested in. So again, like a large, lightweight, unwieldy thing of paper. I wanted to make things that have those qualities.

SS: Beautiful! I love how the paper keeps coming back into your life in these different ways. Even so long after you first created this work, which we will get more into. When you look at the CCS Bard website, the work is dated from 2001 to present. Can you share more about what that means for the work to be ongoing for 24 years? And what does it mean to engage with this work now?

DW: I think when I first made the work, I didn't realize exactly what I was doing. The first time I made the piece that's in this video, it was in the Hunter MFA Gallery. While that piece was up, a curator saw it and was like, hey, could this be in a show I'm curating at Bard? And I was like, well, it doesn't make sense to me to just take the ball on the video and plant it there.

So that's when I started to think, what does it mean? It was not a possibility for me to come to a gallery here and do the whole paper thing here, and crumple it, do this kind of activity repeatedly in different spaces. So I started to think again, it was like a confluence of works that I was looking at at the time where the artwork itself has some kind of lifespan or is almost like a living thing, like it goes different places.

There was Eleanor Antin did this 100 Boots piece. I was like, you know, there was a Orozco piece that I really liked at the time, this ball of clay pushing around the city. So those were works I was interested in. And I realized that like I'd made this ball. It lends itself to movement and that there was a way to connect it, to exist in other spaces.

And then I realized that if I shot a video of myself rolling it into the new space, that kind of would connect this old space. The ball is that space, a one-to-one paper map of that room. It's been compressed into a ball and like getting to roll it into a new space. It's kind of like merging architecture, merging a place into another place. And then the video almost makes them seem like they are connected architecturally. This is one place.

SS: Looking back, if you had the chance to do things differently, would you want to be able to kind of crumple the space at Bard? Would you move differently or are you actually happy with it?

DW: No, I'm happy with it because I remember at that time thinking, even though it wasn't an opportunity for me to cover a Bard gallery with paper, I sort of like, I had done it once before at SculptureCenter.

I actually don't want to just keep doing this piece in different spaces. It just seemed like how many times would I do that and why? Whereas this seemed like a more interesting. For me, it was like a satisfying direction to take it. So I definitely like that that happened.

It allowed for this kind of line, like fishing line to be cast into the future where one can come back to this piece, whether it was like soon or 24 years later. It's sort of like a thread that's there that could come, that makes like the pieces set up in a way that makes sense, that you can come back to it at any time. And it's part of the work, whatever time has come by, it's part of it. So I do like, really like what happened with that.

SS: Me too. I'm really glad this is how it played out. And really how this ball plays with different temporalities. You know, I think that to me is one of the most exciting parts of experiencing *Taking Up Space*. Can you perhaps talk about the interplay between permanence and impermanence in the work, the crushing of a space that no longer exists in its initial purpose. So in this case, a gallery converted to a classroom and simultaneously preserved the paper ball in perpetuity. And we touched on this a little bit at the beginning.

DW: The in perpetuity part, especially the questions that address this further down are interesting to me because I have to admit, I had not thought about what would happen if I could not push it or when, or if I'm gone, all those things.

But as far as the first question of permanence, impermanence, I mean, it's for the gallery that the Hunter Gallery that it was made in no longer exists either. But when I made it, I felt like that was the permanent thing. So it's like this layering of this thing. I made an impermanent version, but now it is the permanent record or map or whatever. It contains what that room was in some way. So it just, it sort of changes, you know, it changes what you feel.

It was like, especially with all the years that have gone by, it's sort of like the past is on one hand, like very clear, but it's also not like, like as time goes by, it's like decades go by. You're like on one hand, this thing, of course that I've made it, I know it like intimately, but then it's also like fuzzy at the same time. It's like you, but I also like the idea of the room, just that, like you can imagine this, this part of why I wanted to make it in the first place was to understand, to get like a physical understanding of the space.

Like if I cover a space fully with paper, like I feel like somehow I understand more about the scale and what the room is. And it's just kind of partly an exercise in understanding a specific surrounding that you find yourself in. So to then make an attempt in some way to take that with you, it's sort of like, you know, I don't know if that addresses what you're asking, but in a way, like to take that with you as a way to, on one hand, bring, you know, a version of it with you.

SS: No, that does make sense. And hearing about the Hunter Gallery and the Bard gallery, these spaces that in some ways don't exist any longer, it feels so special that this ball has seen all of those spaces and moved through all those spaces and exists in this version of itself. I think there is something very beautiful about that.

DW: At the time, I just, I also remember feeling like it was really important to, I wanted to figure out like, I feel like I was using my body to measure the space in some way, just by making this one-to-one map. And then crushing it, I was somehow like using my body as like a measure, myself as a measure in relation to the architecture and to the paper of all.

SS: Incredible. So tell us a bit more about how your practice has shifted from then to now. How have various contexts, personal, social, political, or otherwise shaped your practice?

DW: So over time, I found it hard to make big things in terms of space and time and just things like that. And so I didn't continue to make, I mean, works I made after that were more manageable, even if they were vast. There's like a work that took up a whole wall, but it's made up of pushpins with images on the head of each pin. So it's kind of like you experience the wall in this full scale, but you're finding these little points. And so I think I would say my practice, it didn't, I mean, I keep using paper.

I often have myself either in an action with the paper still, or sometimes I make drawings of myself doing things. But I definitely didn't, I didn't keep making large objects that were made of paper, which is partly why this one is so interesting to be able to come back to. It's such an unusual feeling.

But, and then I would say over time, some of the same feelings of like, just enthrall and like involvement and devotion and feeling like I feel like I started to experience that in my work, my job, because it just

like my job started to become more and more interesting to me. And that was working in film and TV. I'm doing like set decoration, set design, but work that, you know, felt like incredibly collaborative and creative. And I could really like, there's this moment of kind of transformation that happens when you're working on a set where it goes from nothing, and then it goes from like, a truck or like hampers full of things that you've gathered.

And then it starts to be like, put in place. And its, it's a pretty amazing, it feels like almost like painting or drawing to me. And you create this whole world. And I, with the large paperwork, I also really, like I was saying, like, I liked creating situations where I was sort of small in relation to the thing I was creating. So that just was like, it felt like it really suited me to be like creating sets. And you always constantly have to step back when you're working on a set and look at the image, like look at the frame, look at the flat, look at the image of what you're really doing.

And just that activity is like, it just felt like I was using, I could really get involved in it. And so I feel like my practice just widened in a way, I mean, from one way of describing it to, to a wider world. And then I would add time, I come and go from making my own more autonomous work over the years.

So, and *SNL* was like an example, ending up there was an example of some place where it's so rapid, like the creation, and then like, taking away to creation and destruction of, of an environment of space. It's kind of like, you have to use all those skills on fast forward. And there's something that's really creative about that. And I work with a lot of other people that are really good at that, too. So we sort of like feed off each other. It's very collaborative.

SS: This is actually a good segue into the next question. But I think you might have already answered part of this. Do you see your work as a professional set designer as an extension and or continuation of *Taking Up Space*? And if so, how does this trajectory inform the resurrection of the work?

DW: I've never tried to name it because I didn't want to pigeonhole it, because then I would judge it. So if I had to describe it, I guess in those terms, the closest thing is that it became an extension. I don't know, extension versus continuation. I think it became a continuation of my creative process, my practice. But I feel like I have multiple practices going on at this point.

The *SNL* feels like it's its own thing. I did the production design for like a narrative feature last year, which was interesting because I'd worked on films before, but never in that exact capacity. And it was extremely it was like a really, really good experience. And I felt more like it was an independent film, and it felt more like creating art with other people than any other film I'd worked on. So there's that. And then there is like my own artwork, which is made like I come and go from that. So it feels like it's all coming from the same place. I guess that's what I can say. Again, like labeling it is hard for me. But I think it's all like, it's all my work.

SS: Right. Right. Yeah. Incredible. A very obvious question, why the title *Taking Up Space*?

DW: Again, like it's a combination of wanting to be in the space and understand my size. But I wanted to understand my scale in relation to the world around me. Like as people, how we have a physical space, but there's just much more to like how much we convey when we're talking or interacting or just living.

And how one sense of how much space they're taking up changes depending on what's happening. So that term for me is just like, it's like a self awareness of or just reflecting kind of thought. And then as an art maker, just like what are you? What are we doing? Like we're making things like, or it's an extension of the artist, and it's part of them, but it's taking up a different kind of space.

So the idea of like a thing and a person takes up space, and then just being able to, you know, in one's surroundings, what would it, what does that mean to take that, to take that up, to take it? How much space is that taking up? How much space does it take up now? Like these relative, these changes that happen in time and space and where things, I don't know. I feel like I'm getting lost. I feel like it's just a cross between the kind of space like a person or a thing takes up and the physical action of like gathering the space, like, and I wanted to gather up the space of that gallery.

SS: Do you feel like this kind of concept of taking up space has followed you in your life, you know, maybe in even other ways?

DW: I mean, you're definitely in the...that's such an interesting question. I mean, for some reason, the first thing that comes to mind, it's totally different. It's like when you, when you're living in a space, like how, how do we use, like how do I arrange this space in my life? Which is like, I, to this day, still feel like I model, not model my living space, but end up with living space that looks like some kind of studio.

And I have a 10-year old son and he, I feel like since he was born, like we've just kind of used the living room as a studio laboratory for him, for me, for whoever. Sometimes I look around and, like I, this is like hard to host people in or something. I mean, it's not crazy or anything, but it is, I do think, I don't know, this, this kind of, maybe what comes from taking up space that I'm, and translates into that is just this, ease with making your surroundings, exist as part of like your creating, whatever it is, as a space that you can make things in, or that those things are just, there's not these like separate lines between how you live and what you do.

SS: And now my last question, it's a long one, so if you need me to repeat it, you can ask. What do you hope for the future of this work? As in, how will you activate the work when you can no longer roll it into a space? Will the performance aspect of the work end? Will the title reflect the last date?

DW: This is such an interesting, definitely had not thought about it. But it's such a good question, because of course, things don't keep going on forever. And, I mean, I think, you know, without having gone through all the exact aspects of what it would mean, I think that the work after, if I'm say, gone altogether, I think the work could go on, but it would, it still needs to get rolled into the gallery in that same way. So if there was somebody that was standing in for me, like the person curating the show, or some other sort of intentionally chosen person, I think that they could roll it in, in place of me.

So that seems right, because when things are gone, or people, the impermanence topic, I mean, things are carried, when someone or something is gone, it still exists, and through other people, through other things. So that sort of makes sense to me. If I was unable to roll it, maybe the same thing, maybe someone in place.

Yeah, I don't think it has to be me. In that sense, there can be, I think the work, it's fine to, along the way, like address the specific situation and within, like, what the work is, like, figure out what the work is, what it means for the work to make one decision, and it's okay to do that.

SS: So there's potential for the date to always say present?

DW: Yeah, yes. Oh, yeah. I was going to circle back to that. In that case, like, I would say present.

SS: Incredible. Thank you so much, Danielle. This was such a wonderful conversation. Again, we're so grateful that you came all the way out here. And we're so excited to see this new iteration of your work.

DW: Thank you.