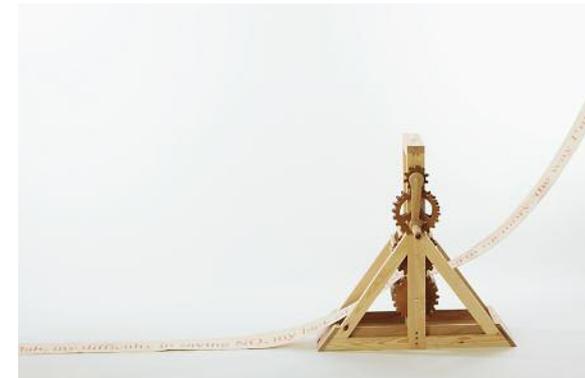
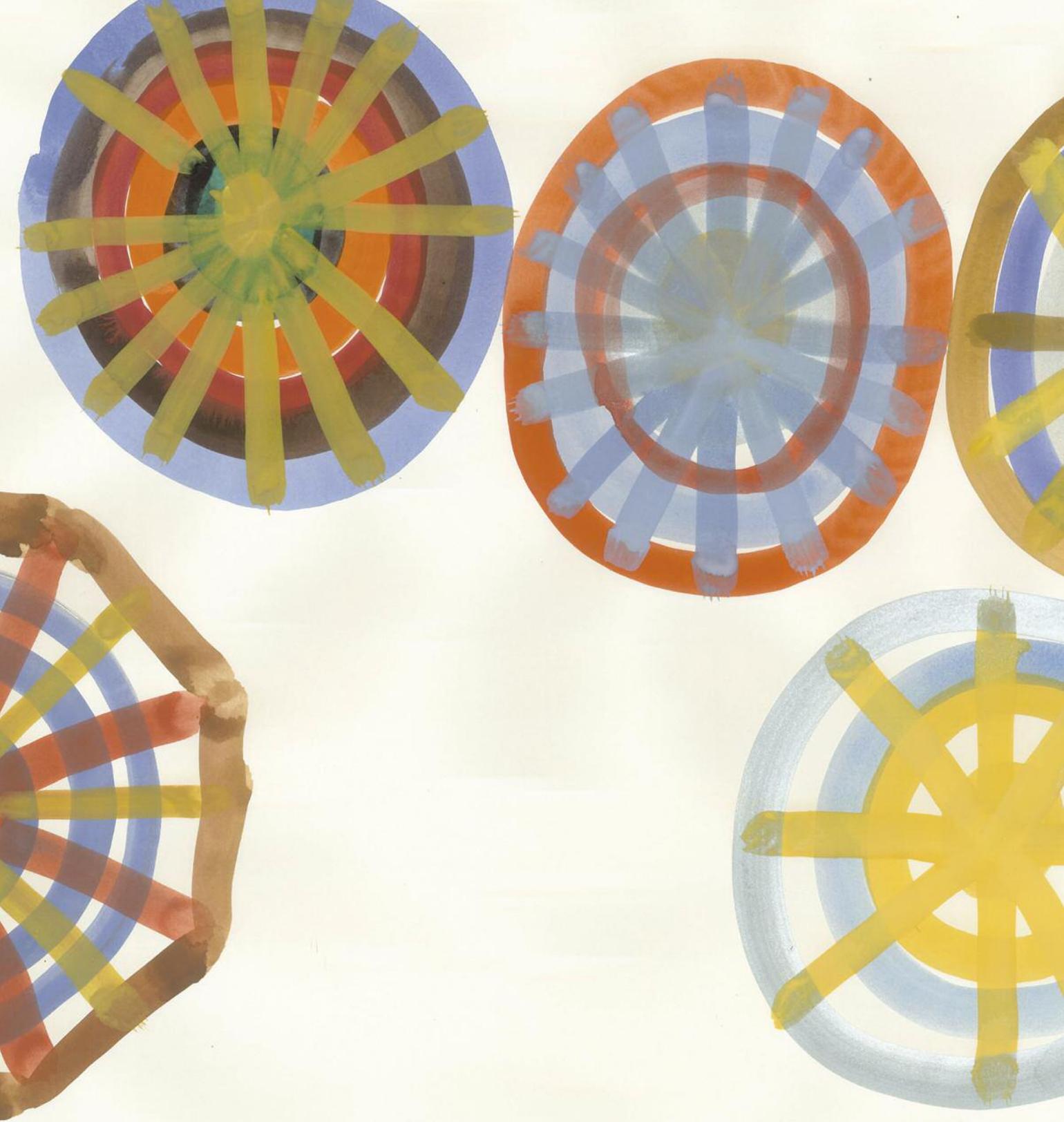




Deborah Boardman
A POROUS SPACE

Gahlberg Gallery
College of DuPage
425 Fawell Blvd.
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-6599
www.cod.edu/gallery
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Faults Crank, 2010, wood and printed cloth

"As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. The site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty." — Robert Smithson¹

Like Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Deborah Boardman's generous art looks to the self-governing forces of nature creating synergies between human experience and natural phenomena. While her practice is deeply rooted in painting, it also belongs to a broader trajectory of process art that includes, in addition to working with systems of nature, artists books, video, performance and public collaboration. Drawing on the poetics and necessities of place, each project serves as a locus for diverse methods of working, a porous space for private exploration and communal exchange.

Boardman's current work is based on the study of fault lines and underground waterways said to emit a magnetic charge when they intersect. While traveling in Europe and researching Romanesque cathedrals, the artist discovered that ancient churches were often constructed where these two natural phenomena meet, as evidence of the divine connection between earthly energies and

the spiritual world. For Boardman, these geological forces become physical and symbolic points of investigation in works that expand the borders of site specificity.

Beginning with *The Flux of Matter* (2007), a project of paintings, sculptures and animation based on the culture and history of the Miami Indians in Peru, IN, the artist asked professional dowsers to identify waterways beneath the soil of the Kokomo Art Gallery, at the University of Indiana, where the exhibition was held. This search made visible the ongoing importance of Midwestern waters to the Miami Indians, whose heritage originates at the mouth of the St. Joseph River, and fostered a deeper sense of connection between land, subject, artist and audience.

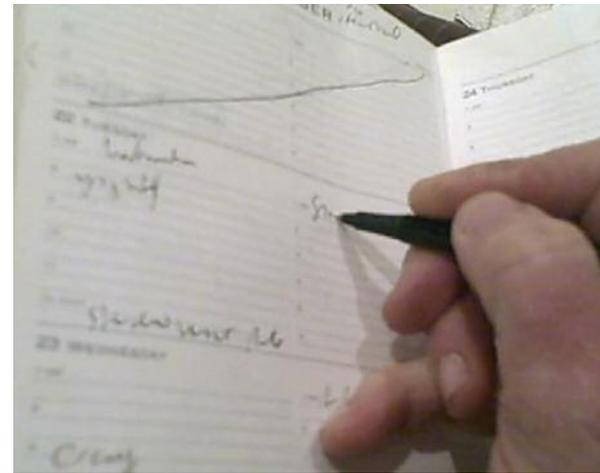
For *A Porous Space*, the first iteration of which took place at Heskin Contemporary, New York, in 2009, Boardman again used diviners to research the waterways



and fault lines below the gallery's ground, as she did for this installment at the Gahlberg Gallery. The gallery resides in DuPage County, named for the DuPage River, the second largest county in Illinois. Portions of the Central Midwest, including Illinois, fall with the seismic zone of the New Madrid Fault Line and, ironically or not, just experienced a sizeable earthquake on Feb. 10 of this year. The water vein and fracture the dowsers uncovered at this site are mapped within this provocative installation of individual yet interrelated works plotted throughout the gallery based on this underground circuitry.

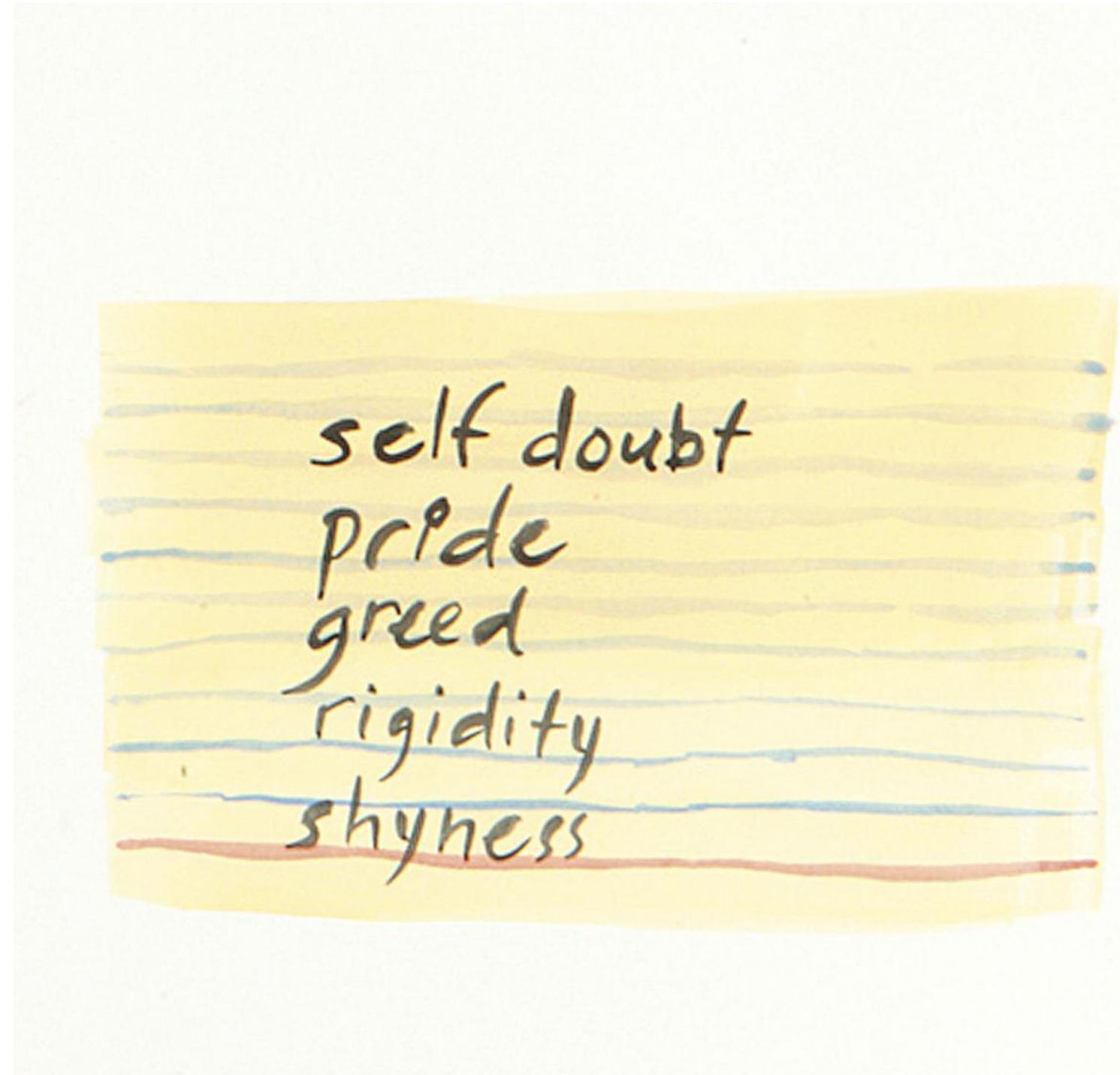
Boardman looks at fault lines as symptoms of "geological weakness," equating them with human frailty. This is not to suggest that the death and destruction caused by natural disasters, such as the recent earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and Tibet, are the result of any direct cause and effect. Rather, the artist reminds us of the interdependence between our existence and the physical world, between all of humanity (as the relief efforts in the wake of such disasters have affirmed), while revealing the positive energies of the earthly sources she excavates. Thus explored throughout the exhibition is the connection between geological faults and personal flaws, and the role of art as a conduit for shared experience.

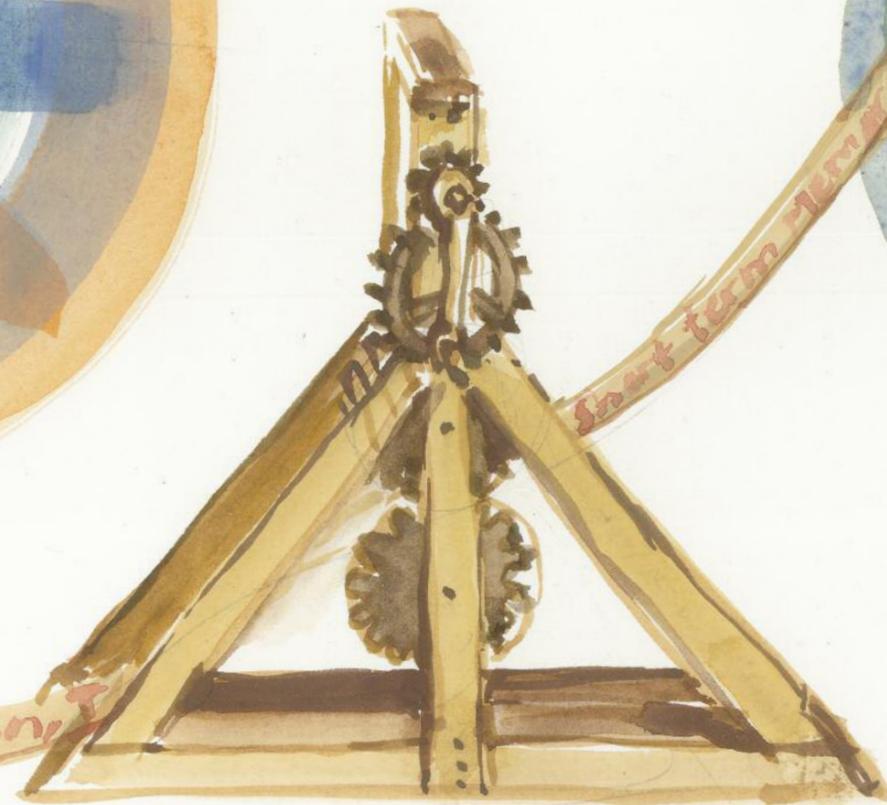
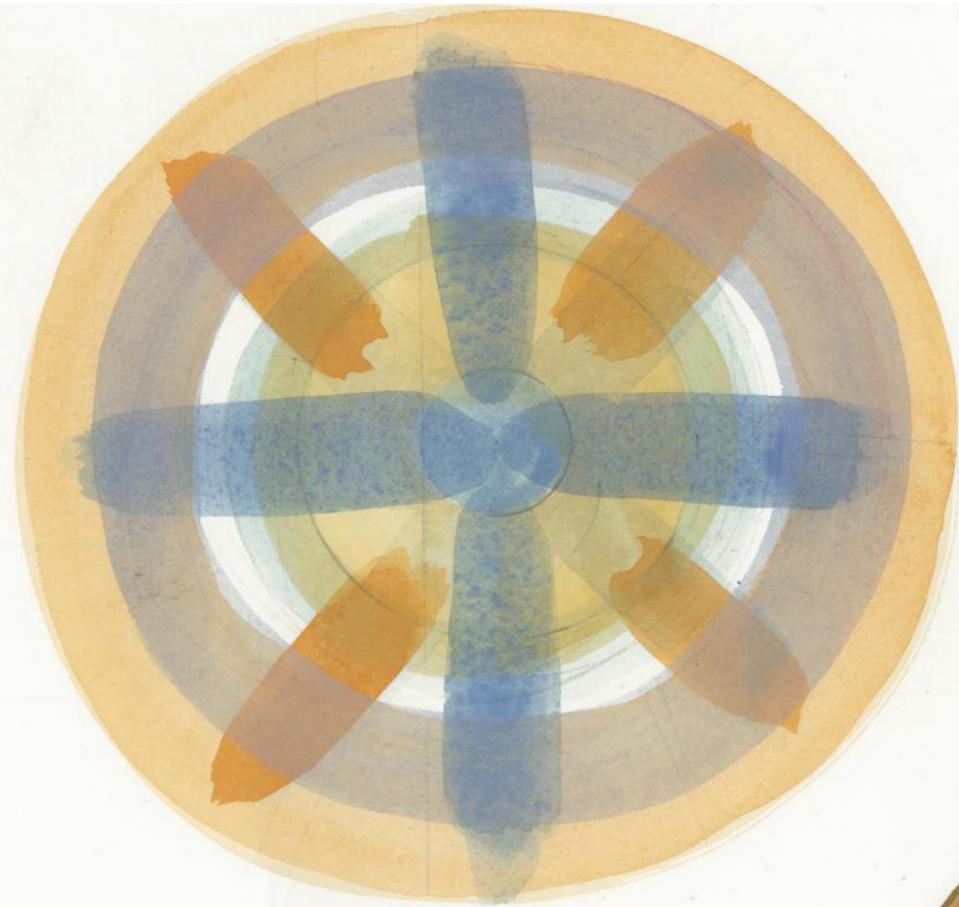
In this version of *A Porous Space*, the artist asked varying publics to share their personal faults, soliciting requests over the Internet and from the school community of College of DuPage. The responses, which range from bodily imperfections to vices to feelings of guilt and inadequacy, with procrastination seemingly to rank highest, are at once disturbing, sometimes comical, and yet, in the end, a bit assuring as one discovers oneself within them. Edited phrases from these responses form the basis for one of the exhibition's central works: a wooden crank from which emanates several large pulleys bearing a textual stream of these faults (or "fault strips") printed on canvas. The pulleys are placed along the same axis as an underground fault line that runs diagonally



Morning Ritual, video still, 2010

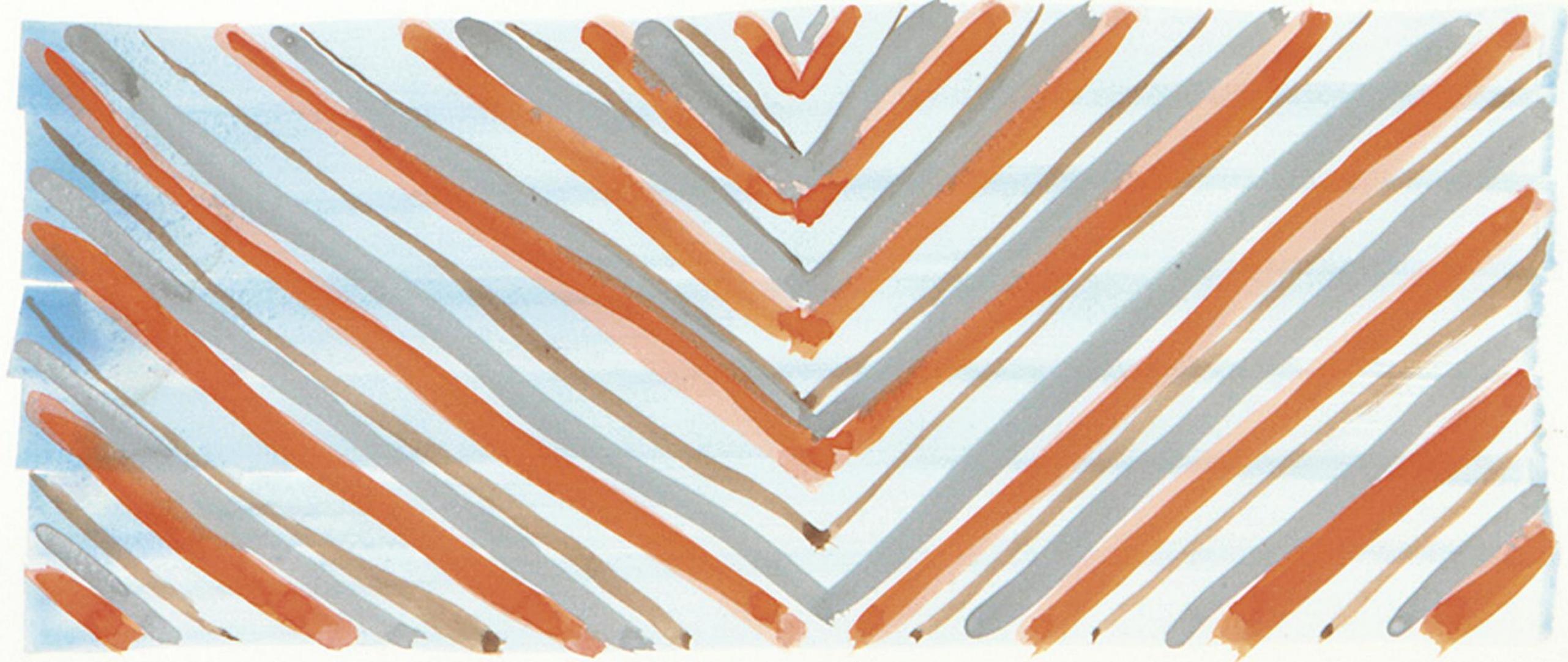
Top: *Line Video*, video still, 2010





Excessive underarm flab, My lack of Spanish, Difficulty in saying NO, My lack of a career, My brother's heroin addiction,

Smart team member, I am the



from the southeast corner to the northwest corner of the gallery and are set in motion with the viewer's turn of the crank.

Demarcated on the floor is a waterline that runs east to west across the width of the gallery. Where the fault line and water line intersect stands a stage constructed from recycled wood that serves as a platform for a public performance. An ambient folk song created by Robert Metrick and Ryan Richey, the lyrics of which are taken from the list of personal faults, will be sung by a chorus at the exhibition's opening.

Near the base of the stage is a video depicting the painting of a horizontal blue line performed by those who submitted personal faults. With no apparent beginning or end, each participant continues the line from that which came before, much in the manner of an exquisite corpse, also suggesting a subconscious link to the subterranean phenomena that provide the template for the show. Revealed is the uniqueness of each artist's hand and the pleasure of mark making, of communal acts of creation distilled to its very essence, not unlike Barnett Newman's *Onement* series, to which Boardman's own paintings have been compared elsewhere. This type of participatory activity is a common strand throughout much of Boardman's work, as evinced in projects such as *Picturing Death* (2001-07), a series of community journaling workshops with several hospices, and *Mutual Borders* (1994), a collaborative artist book gathering the oral histories of three congregations that share the same church building in Chicago.

These public works are an extension of Boardman's prolific studio practice, mainly centered on painting, another form of communication in which the artist frames the seemingly disparate and fragmentary into coherent planes of wonder and reclamation. The artist draws on personal iconography, whether representational or abstract, rendered in large

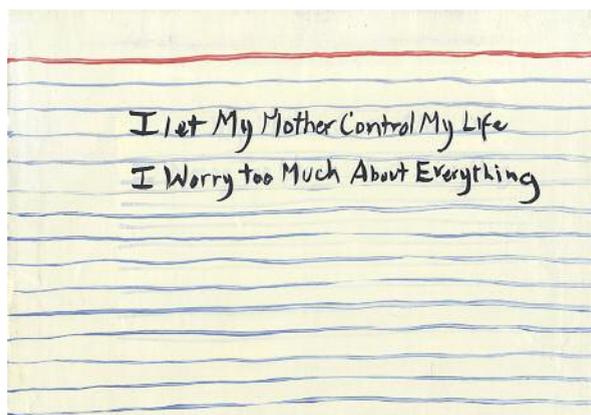
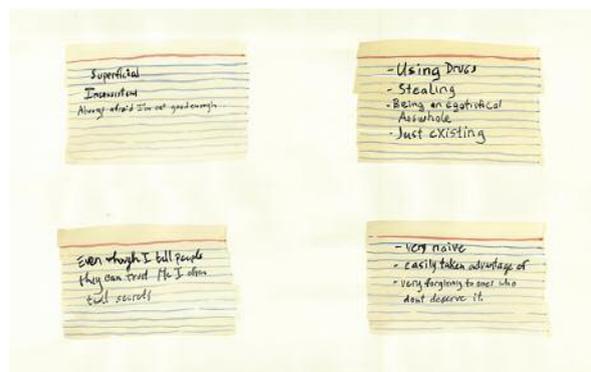


Book of Faults, 2010, painted book, gouache on paper

Top: *Circle #6*, 2010, oil on paper

gestural brushstrokes upon either paper or canvas. Encompassing landscape, studio views that find kinship with Matisse and patterned compositions that hover between gestural abstraction and color field painting, Boardman finds endless potential in her ritualized material of paint. All these various modes of working are bound within the artist book that stands at the center of the exhibition; part diary, part document, it also contains painted facsimiles of the note cards marked with personal faults.

The *Circle* paintings included here merge Boardman's interest in pattern and geometry with the kind of iconic imagery found in several projects based on emblems



¹Robert Smithson quoted in *Robert Smithson Spiral Jetty*, eds. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (University of California Press, 2005), p. 8.

Left Top: *Book of Faults*, 2010, painted book, gouache on paper

Left Bottom: *I Let My Mother Control My Life*, 2010, oil on canvas

Inside front cover and opposite page: *Book of Faults* (detail), 2010, painted book, gouache on paper

Gahlberg Gallery

Deborah Boardman: A Porous Space

Thursday, June 3, to Saturday, Aug. 7, 2010

The Gahlberg Gallery would like to thank the artist, Deborah Boardman, and the writer, Susan Snodgrass, for their creative vision on this project. Deborah Boardman would like to thank all the student volunteers along with Susan Snodgrass, Robert Metrick, Ryan Richey, Ray Zielinski, Tommy Heffron, Jessica Martin, Erin Chlagmo, La La La Singers, Susan Andrews, Jeff Brady, Ike Edgerton, her husband, Joe, and sons Luke and Hugh for their contribution and support on this project.

Barbara Wiesen

Director and Curator

Gahlberg Gallery



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and notions of heraldry. Intermittently dispersed along the walls of the gallery, these paintings, with their saturated wheels of color, offer moments for pause and contemplation, an alternative form of circulation to the linear fault lines and waterways below. From these paintings radiates an energy in tune with the geological forces from which Boardman draws. From this “gyrating space,” to borrow Smithson’s phrase, emerges the possibility of *A Porous Space*.

— *Susan Snodgrass is a Chicago-based critic and a corresponding editor to Art in America.*