

Dinner, 1991

Food, Ziploc bags, and jars

Collection of Kenny Schachter

In the early 1990s, a room above the Second Avenue restaurant Flamingo East hosted DJs, drag acts, and the occasional art show, including Harrison's first Manhattan group exhibition, *Open Bar*. Harrison got a table in the restaurant downstairs during the exhibition's opening reception and ordered a meal. As each course arrived—beer, vegetable strudel, lamb shish kebab, arugula salad, cheesecake with strawberries— she placed the servings into Ziploc bags and walked them upstairs where she tacked them in two regular lines along the wall, creating a grid that evoked conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s and turning them into a material record of the event. A few days later, Harrison got a call from the restaurant's owner: Her work was attracting flies. So she returned to further enclose the meal in mason jars.

5 x 7's (A & R Quality Photo, Aurora, Duggal, Emulsion, Foto Print, Image Studio, Pro Photo, R&B Color Labs, US Color, Victoria Photo), 1996

Ten chromogenic prints

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg 2018.132

Harrison's suite of photographs comes from a single 35mm negative showing a close-up of an anthill on a beach, printed at ten different New York photo labs. Harrison asked each to print the negative at 5 x 7 inches, offering no further instructions. Left to determine their own interpretations of the subject matter, the lab technicians generated images that displayed a gradation of exposures, cropping, colors, and grain, emphasizing photography's tendencies toward abstraction and what the artist has referred to as "the uncertainty of interpretation."

Should home windows or shutters be required to withstand a direct hit from an eight-foot-long two-by-four shot from a cannon at 34 miles an hour, without creating a hole big enough to let through a three inch sphere?, 1996/2019

Pigmented inkjet prints on paper, polyester fabric, and wood; eight sculptures (wood, papier-mâché, spray foam, socks, acrylic, cans of peas, and electric can opener); wood paneling; cans of peas; and eighteen chromogenic prints

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naftali, New York

Harrison's first solo show took place in a gallery housed in the parlor room of a Brooklyn brownstone. The exhibition consisted of a single work that Harrison has described as a "destinationless circuit." Imitation-wood paneling, papier-mâché sculptures, and photographs that the artist had taken on a trip to England were hung at different heights around the room, while cans of peas were positioned in various locations. This re-created version has the same footprint as the original, which no longer exists in its entirety. For this exhibition, Harrison has printed documentation of the original work from 1996, which is presented here alongside the original components. The title came from the lede of a 1995 *New York Times* article about standards of structural preparedness for severe weather, following the widespread damage inflicted by Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The opening sentence interested Harrison for its inspired juxtaposition of the banal language of bureaucracy and complex social and economic realities, a combination that, despite being made of words rather than things, mirrored her own budding artistic concerns.

Teaching Bo to Count Backwards, 1996–97

Thirty olive cans, three framed black-and-white photographs, and metal gutter

Private collection; courtesy Greene Naftali, New York

In *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*, cans of olives are stacked on an upside down gutter amid photographs of the titular Bo Derek—an actress best known for starring in the 1979 film *10*—and her husband, John Derek. As the number of olives on each can's label progressively decreases from left to right, the actress's expression appears to transform. Playing with the idea of shelf life—which pertains to canned food, celebrity, and even photography—the work takes wide, humorous aim at the way systems fall apart when pushed to “logical” conclusions, the beauty pageant-style ranking that gave *10* its title, and ideas of representation (it is, after all, the pictures of olives that are being counted, not the olives themselves).

1:1 (Wonton: John), 1996

Thirty-eight pictures of Johns and thirty-eight unfired and polymer clay wontons

Collection of the artist

To make *1:1 (Wonton: John)*, Harrison went to the Chinese restaurant up the street from her apartment to learn how to make wontons, a lesson that translated somewhat poorly into clay. In a pre-Google era, she scoured the city for images of men named “John,” and ultimately produced a wonton that would correspond to each of the thirty-eight Johns she found. Though not directly inspired by the dominance of men in the art world of the 1990s, nor by the fact that any sweet foodstuff might act as a lazy slang reference for a woman (tart, cookie, honeybun), irritation with patriarchy contributed to the work’s critical mood. By inviting us to wonder what relationships might exist between Johns and dumplings—how could one possibly be like the other?—Harrison humorously poses questions of false equivalence, failure, and the limits of understanding.

Sphinx, 2002

Wood, drywall, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, wheels,
and framed chromogenic print

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; gift of Robin and David Young, 2009

In a photograph on this sculpture, Sister Wendy—a British nun who hosted a BBC art history program throughout the 1990s and early 2000s—appears within the frame of a TV screen, looking intently at a sculpture. Harrison’s care in capturing the nun’s apparently rapt gaze seems to foreground the question of what it is that we do when we look at sculpture. If *Sphinx* provides an answer, though, it is extremely ambivalent. The artist Ad Reinhardt once quipped that “sculpture is what you bump into when you back up to look at a painting,” and the expanse of sheetrock Sister Wendy inhabits does indeed appear as if designed to get in our way. Harrison has discussed using recognizable images as points of focus in a sculpture; the nun might consequently serve as a way in, a reminder that if sculpture as a medium frustrates us with obstructions, it also provides us with reasons to move and rewards that movement with new perspectives.

Untitled from Perth Amboy, 2001

Chromogenic print

Exhibition copy

Untitled from Perth Amboy, 2001

Chromogenic print

Exhibition copy

In September 2000, a woman living in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, identified a likeness of the Virgin Mary in the rainbow streaks on the glass in the second-story window of her home. The resulting media coverage brought hundreds of people to the site. Drawn to this evidence of the urge to find meaning—even miracles—in abstraction, Harrison visited the house a number of times over the course of two weeks and made a series of thirty-two photographs, three of which are on view here. Focused tightly on the window itself, the images use the pane to frame the faces and hands of the faithful, showing their impulse to make physical contact with the glass. Harrison has described a similarity between the window and the SLR (single-lens reflex) camera she used to photograph the window; a glass mirror inside the camera projects the image onto the film.

Gray or Roan Colt, 2004

Television set, DVD player, synagogue bench, and
Gray or Roan Colt (2003; digital video, color, sound,
45:47 min.)

Private collection; courtesy Greene Naftali, New York

Harrison shot this video at an auction of racehorses in Saratoga Springs, New York. She has incorporated it into a work whose title refers to a generic term, “gray or roan colt,” used to describe an unraced and as-yet-unnamed yearling of good breeding. In contrast to this apparently blank slate, a more structured social and economic ritual appears in the video itself, which zooms in and out impassively around the space showing the locals watching from outside the auction ring and the people bidding within. The video’s impartial gaze wanders around the building’s fishbowl space, framing its literal and social architecture. Viewers are invited to sit on the pew, which was given to the artist by a friend who was renovating an old synagogue on the Lower East Side. This structured setting mirrors the architectural focus of the video.

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Sunset Series, 2000

Thirty-one chromogenic prints

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naftali, New York,
and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Harrison has joked that with the *Sunset Series* she made travel photography without ever leaving the studio. She began with a photograph she had found of a sunset—a kind of image that strives to capture a special moment, yet almost always ends up resembling other photographs of the same subject. Interested in how many different images she could make from this one snapshot, Harrison re-photographed it multiple times: she used different lengths and kinds of lenses; she allowed varying degrees of light through the camera's aperture; she cropped, angled, and bent the photo; she shined a weak flashlight on its glossy surface; and she obscured it behind plastic wrap. By manipulating the snapshot only with her camera—not in the dark room—she explored the fundamental photographic question of how the camera records light. In the photograph furthest to the right, the original photograph appears in its entirety, the shadow it cast on the surface below emphasizing its materiality.

Huffy Howler, 2004

Wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, Huffy Howler bicycle, handbags, rocks, stones, gravel, brick, one sheepskin, two fox tails, metal pole, wire, pigmented inkjet print, and binder clips

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2008

Huffy Howler might be seen as an equestrian statue—part of an art-historical tradition of representing sovereignty and masculine conquest by picturing a man on horseback. Equally, it could represent a victorious horseman in a movie, since the face waving like a banner atop the pole is a publicity still from Mel Gibson's bloody, sensationalist Scottish epic *Braveheart* (1995). Yet the sculpture has a flat tire, has been weighted down by handbags filled with bricks, and is stuck on an abstract concrete sculptural form. What is more, two years after Harrison exhibited this sculpture for the first time, Gibson was pulled over for a suspected DUI in Malibu and responded with a drunken, widely publicized, anti-Semitic rant, adding retrospectively to a sense of heavy baggage. Even without that, though, this mock-heroic figure made in part from a child's bicycle seems to be involved in a game of playacting or pretend, and poses questions about the process by which grandeur may become believable, or worthy of monumental sculpture.

Springs, 2017

Seven framed pigmented inkjet prints

Exhibition copy

Taken at the Pollock-Krasner House in Springs, New York, this series of photographs documents the open paint cans that were in Jackson Pollock's studio at the time of his fatal car accident in 1956. Harrison was struck by the way the brushes stuck in the cans represent a moment frozen in time—much like a photograph. At the same time, she responded to the poignant counterpoint they presented to Pollock's action painting, with its emphasis on moving, dripping, and the physicality of mark making. She shot the photographs from above through the plexiglass case in which the cans are permanently displayed; from this perspective, the cans of black paint could resemble voids, even abstract graves.

Hoarders, 2012

Wood, polystyrene, chicken wire, cement, cardboard, acrylic, metal pail, flat screen monitor, wireless headphones, and *Hoarders Video* (2012, digital video, color, sound; 10:39 min.)

Collection of the artist

Harrison has said that she wants her sculpture to assume “shapes that can’t be described.” The voluminous, multicolored form in *Hoarders* pushes this impulse one step further, since its weight and mass are difficult to comprehend (it is, in fact, hollow and relatively light). Painted in a bright bouquet of colors modeled after Henri Matisse’s *Femme au chapeau* (*Woman with a Hat*) (1905), the amorphous, excessive form has been propped up by a garbage can and a video monitor. Playing on a loop on the screen is a video that Harrison made in a taxi on her way home from the airport, the driver sharing his thoughts on greed, tax cuts for the wealthy, and religious intolerance.

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In recent years, Harrison has reckoned with the tradition of sculpture, undermining its assumptions of permanence. To realize *The Classics*, Harrison photographed pages from her sketchbook, on which she had made line drawings of ancient Greek sculptures using a pink Sharpie. She then enlarged the photographs, treating the prints as a base on which she continued to draw.

The Classics, 2018

Colored pencil and fiber-tipped pen on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of Manny Kadre

The Classics, 2019

Colored pencil and wax crayon on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2019

Colored pencil, India ink, and wax crayon on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2017

Colored pencil on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York, and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

The Classics, 2018

Colored pencil, fiber-tipped pen, India ink, and wax crayon on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2017
Colored pencil, India ink, and gouache on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York, and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

The Classics, 2019

Colored pencil, India ink, and wax crayon on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2018

Colored pencil and India ink on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2018

Fiber-tipped pen and India ink on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2017

Colored pencil, India ink, and wax crayon on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of the artist; courtesy Greene Naffali, New York

The Classics, 2018

Colored pencil, India ink, and wax crayon on pigmented inkjet print

Collection of Manny Kadre