

BECKY BROWN | PORTFOLIO OF 15 IMAGES



Community Has Its Limits, 2018

Acrylic paint, pencil and collage on paper, 65 x 55 inches

In the form of a six-foot-high 35mm slide sheet, this work on paper matches real and invented uses of the word “community” with layered pictorial compositions. It is part of an ongoing series reconfiguring found images and text into oversized calendars, notebooks, maps and other functions increasingly replaced by digital substitutes.

It is among my works that hold collections of particular words, such as “conversation” and “community,” documenting contemporary overuse by collecting and reconfiguring examples. In this case, real and invented phrases form an inventory of communities large and small, open and closed, specialized and generalized, political, regional, professional and cultural—from “the intelligence community” to “the online therapy community.” How do we define “community” and how, why and to what end can a word be exploited by American society at a particular moment in time?



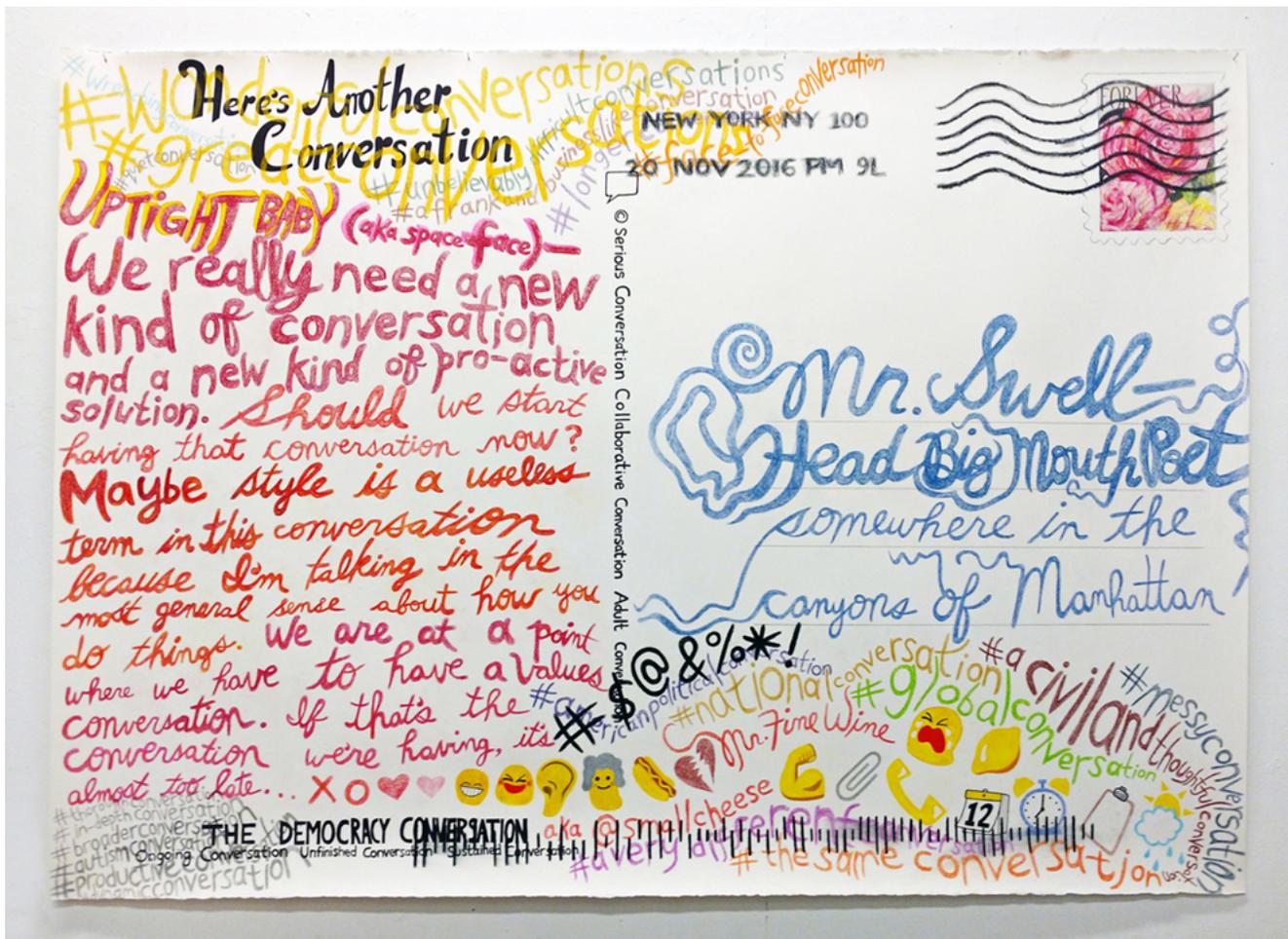
This Email is Itself a Ghazal, 2015
Acrylic, collage, pencil and ink on paper, 52 x 80 inches

In collaboration with a poet, Brown translated his Arabic Ghazal into a visual language using Google Image results in an inconsistent formula. The drawing takes the form of a giant spiral notebook into which she recorded multiple revisions of a poem. In this body of work, poetic forms become visual encyclopedias combining personal experience with research and fantasy.



***Pleasant View*, 2016**
Acrylic, house paint and collage on paper, 42 x 64 inches

This over-stuffed map brings together diverse images of place (from actual maps to rocks and forests to the Las Vegas skyline) at every possible scale in a composition that plays with overlaps between mapping conventions and the language of abstract painting. It is also part of Brown's "Paperwork" series because maps, like notebooks, have moved from paper to digital formats.



A New Kind of Conversation, 2016
Pencil and ink on paper, 52 x 72 inches

By collecting and reconfiguring examples, the postcard documents contemporary overuse of the word “conversation” in an increasingly outdated, and fetishized, form of communication. It considers how and why language can be exploited by American society at a particular moment in time. It is part of Brown’s ongoing series reconfiguring found images and text into oversized calendars, notebooks, maps and other functions increasingly replaced by digital substitutes.

Should I text you? Did you email me? We could set up a conference call? Can you jump on a quick phone call rn? Let me pull up that chain... Sorry, which thread was that on? Oh, it was the group chat... Or was it in Facebook Messenger? Were you looped in? Let me forward it. Yes, he was copied. No, she was BCC'd. Did the text go through? I never got your message. Your voicemail box is full. You commented on my Instagram post? Was it a direct message? What's your handle again? When did you send the text? Sorry, my phone is dying. Wait, I can't hear you. Are you there? I saw that email, but I missed that part. Was it a private message? I said it in my email. No, the text says... The email covers the text. I'll text you about that email. Let's keep it in the private thread. I think he fell off the thread. Oh, THAT thread?! It was in the body of the email? I couldn't open the attachment. Can you send it as a text? Did you export it? Is it backed up on the cloud? Just text me. Can you talk? Are you still there? Did it download? Did it refresh? I think it went into my spam. My inbox is full. The text disappeared. You didn't text me back. She used WHAT emoji? Hello? I can't hear you. Can you hear me? Sorry, my phone died.

Can You Hear Me?, 2018

Acrylic on paper, 12 x 17 inches

Can You Hear Me? collects fragments of meta-communication that feel increasingly common as we enter 2019: communication about how best to communicate, and the constant glitches, slippages and misunderstandings that go along with them. It questions whether technological advances in communication, and the proliferation of channels, really increase its quality or efficiency.



***Fear Melancholy*, 2018**
Acrylic on paper, 12 x 18 inches

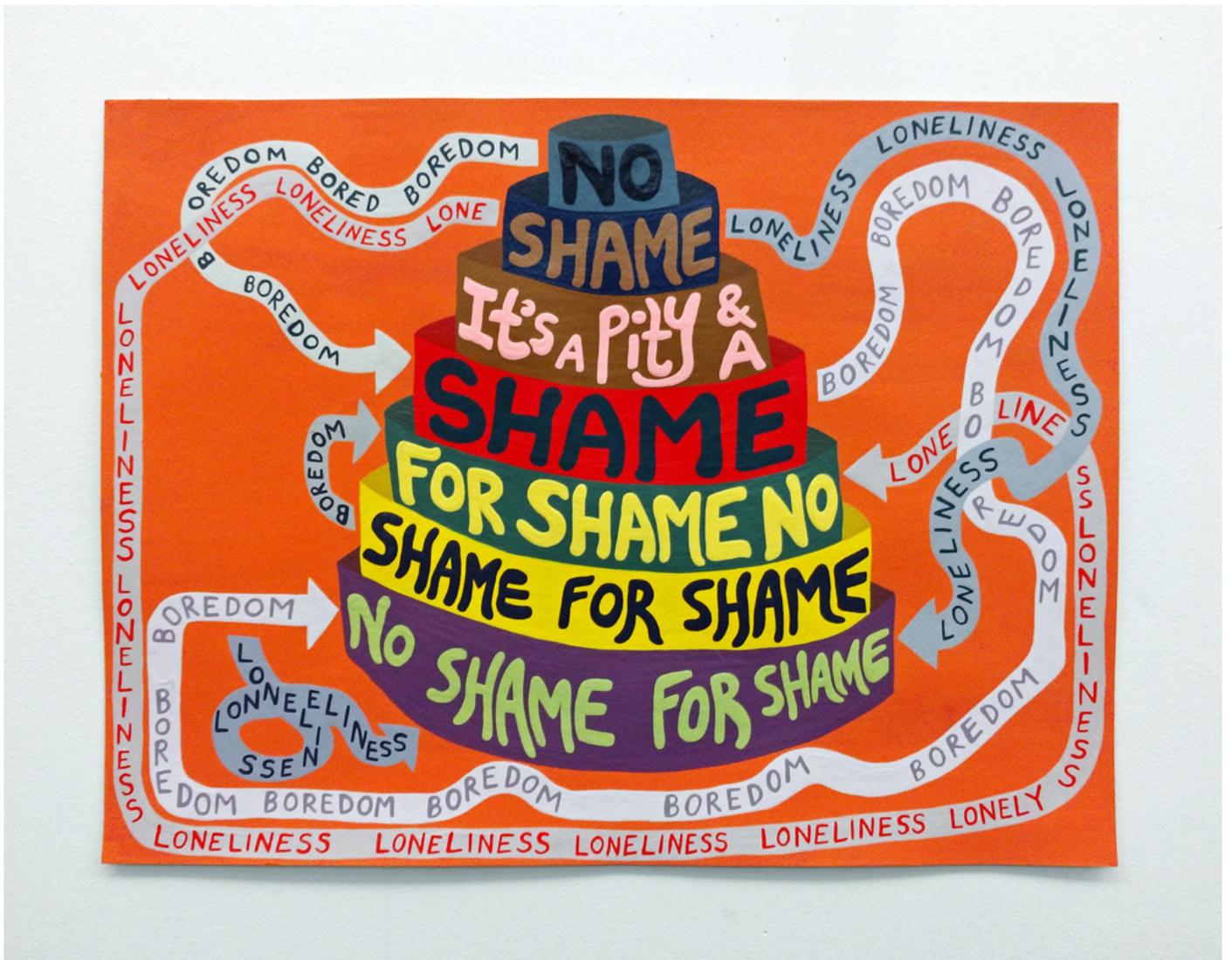
Here, opposing pairs are presented as two clickable fields in a string of abstracted computer windows, suggesting a false ease in selecting one or the other.

This series uses repetition to explore different relationships between between pairs of words, such as opposition and synonymy. Words and concepts are often defined by opposition — “tall” is understood in relation to “short,” etc. Studying this relationship reveals that opposites are not as far apart as we imagine, and that opposing ideas are embedded within a word or concept itself. This connects to discourse around “otherness,” in which one’s fear of the other stems from elements of otherness in oneself, which Brown explores through the form and content of language. She is interested in how opposing forces can be held together in a single experience or shape.



ZZZ FAQ, 2018
Acrylic on paper, 12 x 17 inches

This piece scrambles together symbols and a common acronym. The speech bubble is both a nostalgic nod to comic book convention, and the contemporary icon of text messaging. "FAQ" is the digital era's substitute for a human interaction once inherent to asking questions, another way that everyday experience is streamlined and automated, and we become a little more like robots.



No Shame For Shame, 2018
Acrylic on paper, 12 x 17 inches

Like “data,” “shame” is a word Brown has explored from many perspectives. Here, she presents different phrases that include it in chart-like layers. Connecting arrows suggest intersections between boredom, loneliness and all forms of shame.



Big Box Store, 2017

Mixed media on freestanding wall with molding, 70 x 60 x 10 inches

Big Box Store is a free-standing painting that explores illusions of flatness and depth through a direct confrontation between pictorial (2D) and physical (3D) space. On its front surface, I interweave examples of classic single-point perspective (a computer server's headquarters, Walmart interiors, etc). Lines originate at different vanishing points, extending and distorting across the painting's surface, around its edges, over objects on its top, and onto its back. They become geometric and biomorphic shapes more akin to abstraction's flat surfaces than the illusion of "deep space."



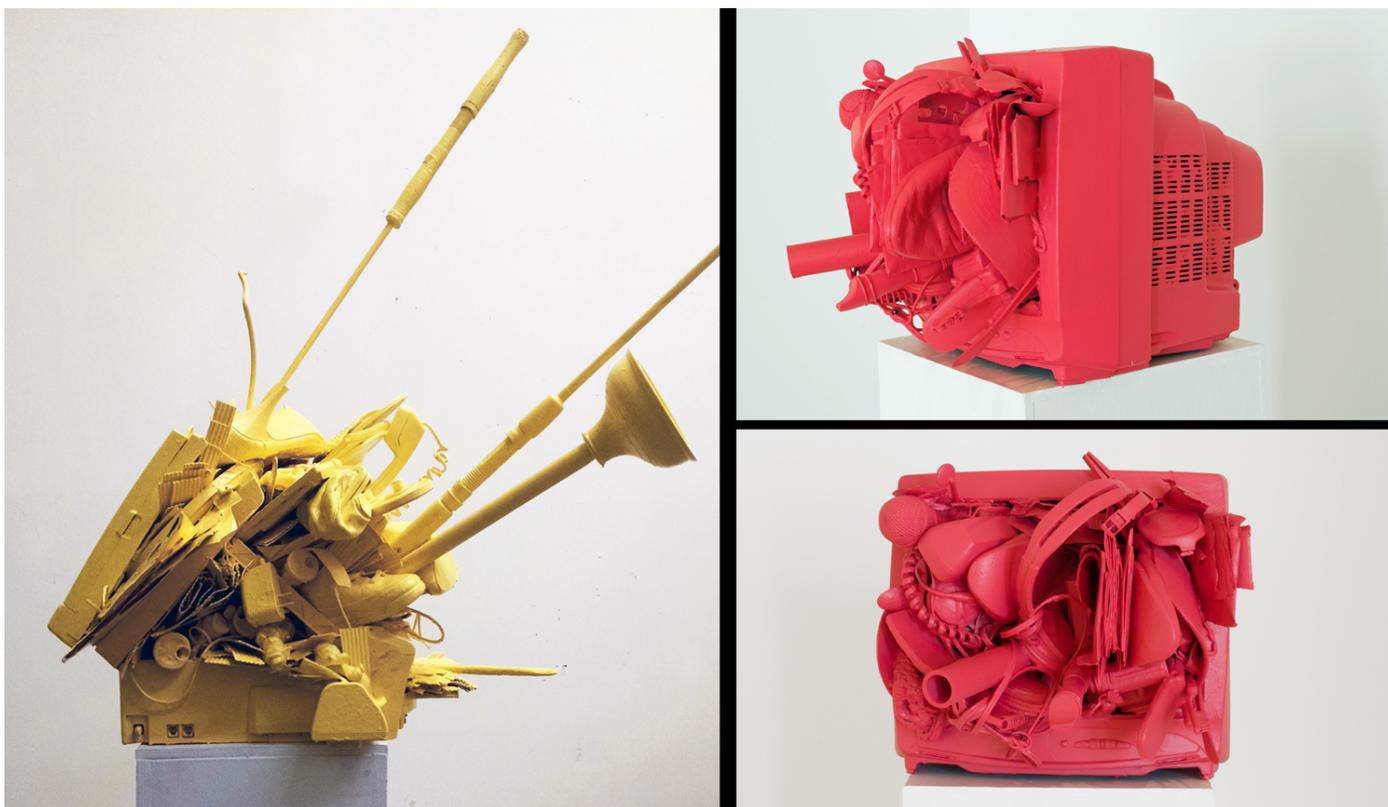
***Stuy Town Classic Kitchen* (from “Safe Keeping” series), 2016
Mixed media installation; 7 x 9 foot floorplan, height variable.**

This installation contrasts the fantasy of a pristine interior with the reality of squeezing one’s life into increasingly small spaces. The domestic tableau demarcates the exact footprint of the “classic kitchen” in NYC’s Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village (where I spent my childhood in the 1990s): a controversial example of fluctuating real estate interests. Rebranded as luxury living, its 7’ x 4’ “classic kitchen” remains a fixed reminder of its original working-class tenants. My installation simulates the experience of entering this kitchen—but with jumbled household clutter appearing to “spill” from all sides, alluding to the past and future displacement of residents.



***No, said the Fruit Bowl* (from "Safe Keeping" series), 2014
Mixed media installation in the kitchen of a 19th century house, dimensions variable**

This is a site-specific installation in the abandoned kitchen of a former military residence on Governors Island in the NYC harbor. The title is borrowed from Anne Carson's "Autobiography of Red," in which Carson assigns her child-protagonist's dialogue to the fruit bowl he has on his head. In the story, the kitchen becomes a site for interactions that are at once heavily charged and completely ordinary. I have chosen this fragment—a refusal from a piece of kitchenware—to suggest a kitchen acting out by refusing to perform its conventional functions.



“Safe Keeping” series: Scanner and TV

***Scanner (Safe Keeping)*, 2015; Assorted material, scanner, house paint; 51 x 24 x 49 inches**

***TV (Safe Keeping)*, 2014; Assorted material, TV, house paint; 13 x 16 x 15 inches**

My “Safe Keeping” series addresses obsolescence with unlikely, overflowing collections of discarded stuff, both personal and anonymous. Collecting and reassembling becomes hoarding (neurosis, obsession and desperation) to reflect our changing relationship with the material world: as so much is now immaterial (Cloud storage, iTunes libraries), how and why do we hold onto physical objects? Like fossils or corrupted digital files, these works present but deny access to their contents; reflecting the culture through what it casts off.



Personal Effects, 2016

Mixed media installation, dimensions variable.

Portal Art Fair at Federal Hall National Memorial, New York City

This installation in Federal Hall's ground floor rotunda is sited beside the display of crates illustrating the building's history as a U.S. Customs House. It addresses Federal Hall's role as primary port for goods entering the U.S. between 1842 and 1862. In 2003, Customs administration merged with the Immigration and Naturalization Service to form one new government agency: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, with jurisdiction moving from the Treasury to the Department of Homeland Security.

A single agency now determines who and what can enter the United States, at what costs. "Personal Effects" addresses this conflation of goods and people with highly personal, idiosyncratic assemblages of domestic objects. It connects this history of importing goods with today's crisis-conditions of people (and their personal goods) moving between borders.