

When I first looked at Jeremy Laing's piece *Leavings*, I was immediately intrigued. The fact that a bag of yarn scraps made its way into a museum fascinated me, I thought of my yarn scraps in a Ziplock bag at home, and I instantly wanted to find the piece's caption. However, there was no caption to be found. It was not until I emailed Tilly about the work that I could read its caption and more context for why the piece was there. Unlike other works in the gallery and Laing's portfolio, there was no actual content in the caption, simply the title, its date, materials used, and how it came to the museum. We need to use external sources to best understand *Leavings* such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault and how dialogue ties it together.

To begin our understanding of *Leavings*, we must first analyze why Laing created it. First, we can question whether Laing made it while making other pieces or if he made other pieces while making *Leavings*. In this way, Laing's portfolio and *Leavings* are constantly doing and undoing each other. Without the other existing, both artworks would be missing something. This push and pull between piece and portfolio are akin to our relationship with sexuality and gender and society. Our view of our gender depends entirely on the way others perceive us. Without others perceiving us, our gender would not exist, our notion of self would not exist, there is a constant push and pull between our identity and society ascribing labels and words to our actions. Without a title or existing in a museum, *Leavings* would only be a pile of yarn scraps. Without having labels assigned to it, it would be missing something.

Whether or not *Leavings* is the originator or the byproduct, Laing had to use yarn from other projects to create it; otherwise, it would be devoid of its meaning. Much like how gender and sexuality are constantly in play with each other and society, *Leavings* continuously plays with all of Laing's other fiber art. Without the use of yarn, *Leavings* would not exist, and without *Leavings*, the perceived unfinished look of Laing's other pieces would not have as much gravity. In Laing's Swatched Pot/Potted Swatch series, he leaves all the ends of the fiber art out; unlike traditional fiber art rules, they do not weave the ends in to make the piece more substantial, as you could just cut the ends off, but then you risk your piece unraveling. However, to the layperson, the project could look unfinished rather than ongoing or have room for growth. There is constant room for doing by leaving the ends unwoven, and by keeping the scraps, we see endless room for *Leavings* to grow.

"Leavings" - the Keeper and her Mother, 2018- Ongoing. Studio Scraps, Plastic Garbage Bag, Variable Dimensions. Loaned courtesy of the artist.

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. -Butler, 2004

In Butler's essay Acting in Concert how our gender and sense of self rely entirely on society and the ways others perceive us. However, when our gender depends on how society perceives us, we lose any autonomy we previously thought we had. Thus, there is a constant push and pull between our gender and society.

In contrast to the Potted Swatch/Swatched Pot series, Laing's piece *Vessel* has an even more exciting interaction with *Leavings*. The yarn that composes *Captive Vessel* is a red weight-six bulky yarn that is still attached to the skein and runs through a ceramic vessel. However, there is not a visible scrap of this bulky red yarn. Suddenly, we discover something that does not fit into our general narrative, is *Captive Vessel* doing yarn wrong by not having any scrap in *Leavings*? Or is *Leavings* doing yarn scraps incorrectly by not having this scrap?

Much like *Leavings* requiring other pieces to exist, the actual yarn in *Leavings* is needed for it to exist. Whether by choice or happenstance, the scraps hold each other together so that they can fall to the ground while staying together in one cohesive piece. Nevertheless, if Laing did not declare this bag of yarn scraps art, we would not perceive it as such, as until it is assigned a word that society understands, it means nothing. If that is not gender, I'm not quite sure what is. *Leavings* is performing art as we perform gender. I exist in America, so I perform American masculinity; *Leavings* exists in the context of a museum, where it performs art. *Leavings* nor I have an active choice in the performance we put on but are merely acting in concert with the scene we are placed.

While the idea of "art museum" gives us one way of knowing *Leavings*, there are other ways of knowing the piece as well. The title of the Exhibition itself changes how we are going to view the pieces inside the museum. Queer/Dialogue will prime people to enter the space and think of things as Queer, even if they typically would not. By taking Queer values, experiences, and norms, we can create an understanding of *Leavings* that is more refined than simply looking at the piece. Suddenly, a pile of yarn scraps that could be otherwise thought of as trash in a capitalist way of knowing becomes something with significance. It becomes something that represents the way society throws Queer bodies away, but the other Queers are there to hold newcomers together. The vibrancy and chaos become more than randomness; instead, it becomes the unique way we all incorrectly perform our genders and sexualities.

Both these ways of knowing and the context in which we perceive things come back to dialogue. There is constant communication between audience and piece, audience member and audience member, and the dialogue between the pieces themselves. We cannot say with any confidence that it is the piece itself that influences us to view it queerly or the

In Butler's essay Critically Queer, she writes of regret of people taking her phrase gender performance too literally. While she once compared it to drag, many people then thought gender was a conscious choice. However, what was crucial for understanding this performance is that it is a copy of a copy. Nothing in gender is authentic, and it is all an unknowing constant performance.

This "way of knowing" refers to Michel Foucault's term discourse and his understanding of knowledge, or in French, "savoir." Savoir is different from the other word for knowledge, connaître, which means to know someone or something abstractly. Savoir is a definitive know, such as facts or knowing how to do something. Discourse is the "way," and savoir is the "knowing" in the phrase "way of knowing." Traditionally, discourse refers to established power that creates the way of knowing, like the Catholic Church and their Confessional.

context that it is in. The push and pull between our understanding of *Leavings* and how we begin to understand things through *Leavings* is no different from how our understanding of our gender comes from society, but then we start understanding things through gender itself.

Without Butler and Foucault, our understanding of *Leavings* is so much more one-dimensional. By understanding the ways that Butler and Foucault's work were in dialogue and pushing and pulling on one another, we see the ways that *Leavings* becomes more than a pile of yarn scraps and instead becomes both gender and society.

References

- Butler, Judith. 1993. "Critically Queer." *GLQ* 1:17–32.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. "Introduction: Acting in Concert." Pp. 1–16 in *Undoing Gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. "We Other Victorians." Pp. 3–11 in *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1. Éditions Gallimard.
- Laing, Jeremy. 2019. "Captive Vessel."
- Laing, Jeremy. 2018-Ongoing. "Leavings."
- Laing, Jeremy. 2019. "Potted Swatch/Swatched Pot."
- Nelson, Maggie. 2015. "The Argonauts." Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press

