

Alex Chitty

Entirely opposite, with moments of overlap

January 21 – March 15, 2025

Opening and gallery talk: January 24, 5-7pm

Entirely opposite, with moments of overlap describes many things: the mediums of photography and printmaking; being a parent or progeny; the relationships between subject and object, reality and representation. It also reflects how Chitty thinks: spatially, mechanically, always looking at form and reimagining it.

Chitty's studio—a large, industrial space in Chicago's Austin neighborhood—is separated into different zones. There's one for reading; one with a tool that allows her to manually bend metal rods with ease; one for working with and storing scrap wood and other found and foraged materials. In the far corner of the studio by a large window, there's a chalkboard wall where she sketches ideas for objects and artworks to scale. At any given moment, layer upon layer of chalky residue is spread across its surface in large circular strokes, remnants of an ongoing process of drawing and erasing, of objects and forms in a constant state of emergence.

Chitty's artwork is steeped in the histories and conventions of both art and design. References to art historical traditions such as still life painting and *trompe l'oeil*—a term that translates to “trick the eye” and describes the illusion of three-dimensional objects rendered on a flat surface¹—coincide with sculptural elements made from materials like cast bronze and hardwood, ubiquitous in mid-century modern furniture design. With an acute awareness of the way history and culture are embedded in objects and form, Chitty harnesses these traditions in service of a visual language distinctly her own.

A large triptych piece, *Figs break open of themselves, I, II, III* (2020-2022) anchors the exhibition, the point from which the other works emanate. These include a series of *Character Studies*, small sculptural objects that reappear as components of the larger triptych piece, some recognizable, others transformed. Descendants of surrealist objects like Méret Oppenheim's furry teacup and saucer, Chitty's *Character Studies* convey affect through material and form, tapping into a strange, subconscious layer beneath the surface of the everyday.

Chitty's objects (which include her photographic works) are anything but static—they shift depending on context and display, they trick the eye, emulate and appropriate. They become pseudo-things. The design principle, “form follows function”² is turned on its head, standard milk crates designed with one purpose in mind given new life as exhibition display furniture.³ By pointing to all the ways objects shift and deceive, Chitty poses the question: How do we know what something is, and by extension, how do we know anything at all?

Working between object and image, Chitty has long been preoccupied with the way representation expands our understanding of reality⁴ while at the same time distorting it. Her exhibition is full of stand ins for other things:

¹ Recall the story of Zeuxis, the ancient Greek painter who created a still life so realistic that a bird flew down and began pecking at the painted grapes.

² A guiding principle of modernist architecture and industrial design in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

³ Put into widespread circulation beginning in the late 1960s and early 70s, the modern plastic milk crate was developed to move milk products through industrial-scale production and distribution networks. Its design made it instantly susceptible to frequent misuse for purposes ranging from record storage to bike baskets.

⁴ As one example, Eadweard Muybridge's 19th century photographic studies of galloping horses allowed for a greater understanding of animal locomotion.

Donald Duck, a marble head with a removeable and interchangeable face, a crumpled-up bag that once contained Cuban sandwich flavored potato chips. Photographs of photographs emphasize the medium's materiality and context, undoing its presumed objectivity. Though playful, her work points to the slipperiness of representation as the basis of various forms of knowledge, be it scientific, cultural or historic.

A prominent case in point underpinning Chitty's work is the minimization of women in the history of modern design and architecture, despite ample evidence of their many contributions to the field.⁵ Drawing on this history and her own experience growing up in a family of makers,⁶ Chitty's work looks at the ways people and things are represented in their absence; at the weird, slanted versions of reality that come about as a result.

But more than offering a corrective to the past, Chitty's work opens up spaces of possibility within the everyday. It invites us not only to reexamine our assumptions, but to see the world around us as constantly being made. To design for a world that doesn't yet exist.

Alex Chitty was born in Miami and now lives in Chicago. She teaches at the Art Institute of Chicago, where she received her MFA in 2008. Chitty's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Virginia Commonwealth University; the Elmhurst Art Museum; GAVLAK Gallery, Los Angeles and Palm Beach; Luce Gallery, Turin, Italy; and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, among other venues. She is represented by Patron Gallery, Chicago.

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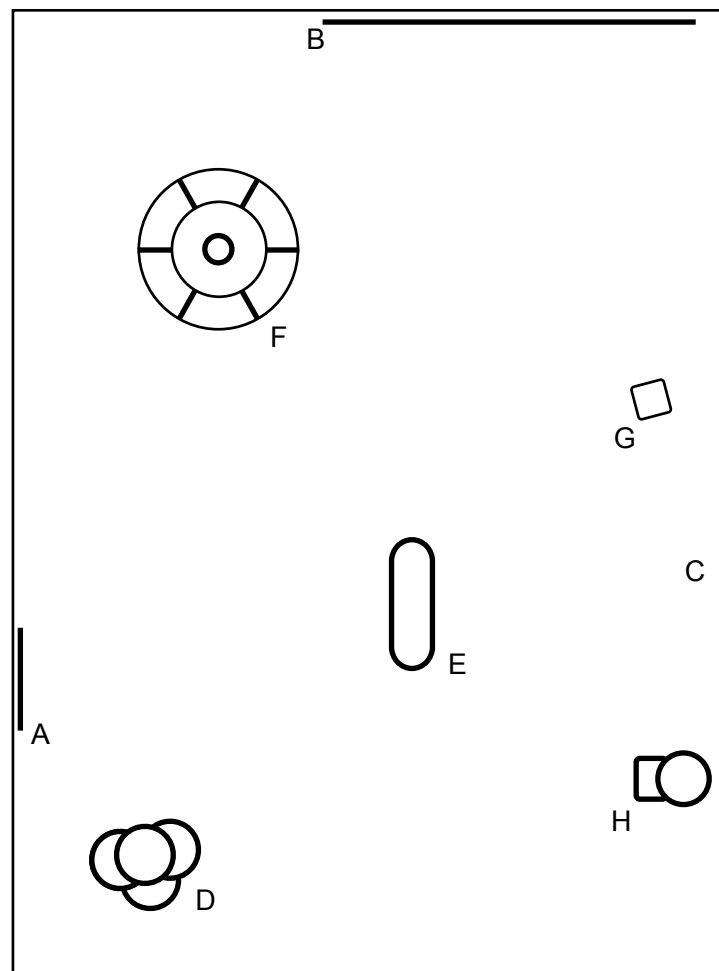
⁵ Well-documented in Beatriz Colomina's text, "With, or Without You: The Ghosts of Modern Architecture" published in *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*.

⁶ Chitty's great-grandfather owned the furniture factory, Meredew of Letchworth. Recently, she found a watercolor drawing of her great-grandmother in a woodshop "setting her plane." One of the few things Chitty knows about her is that she was put in a mental institution for being "too eccentric."

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A – A hole all the way through, even at midnight, 2017

Laminated and mounted archival inkjet print, walnut

53 3/4 x 36 3/4 x 1 3/4 in | 136.5 x 93.4 x 4.5 cm

Unique with 1 AP

B – Figs break open of themselves (I, II, III), 2022

Oak, ebonized walnut, drafting table top, cast brass, horse hair, gold chain, jade grapes, cast bronze, pink vases, glass, lead Donald Duck figurine, photograph, digital print on canvas, plexi glass, blackened steel, powdercoated steel

65 x 139 x 6 1/2 in | 165.1 x 353.1 x 16.5 cm

C – Skin of the visible world, 2024

Mounted archival print, patinated aluminum, perspex

28 x 22 x 2 in | 71.2 x 55.9 x 5.1 cm

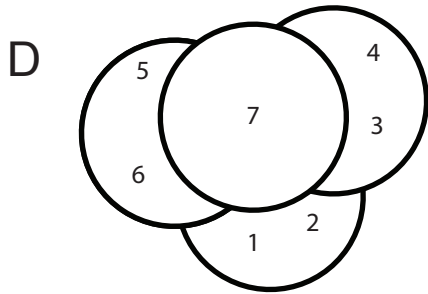
Unique with 1 AP

Display units:

Structures II, 2025

Milk crates, strapping, CNC cut MDF

Character Studies:



1 – (*stubbies*), 2024
Plastic strawberry, foam, paper, wood, melted rubber band, glass marble, steel

2 – (*one week*), 2022
Seven plastic melted cups

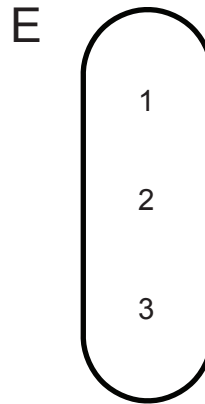
3 – (*preceding thunder*), 2017
Paver, brass, piano mute

4 – (*linked*), 2021
Walnut, cotton webbing, brass

5 – (*small ghosts*), 2020
Cast perfume bottle, wood, graphite, gouache

6 – (*Shy as Fuck*), 2020
Cast bronze lily bud, ash

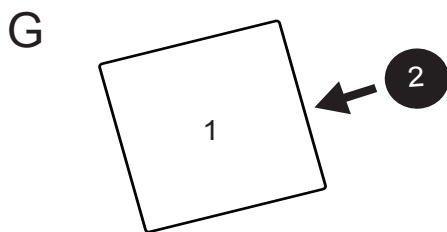
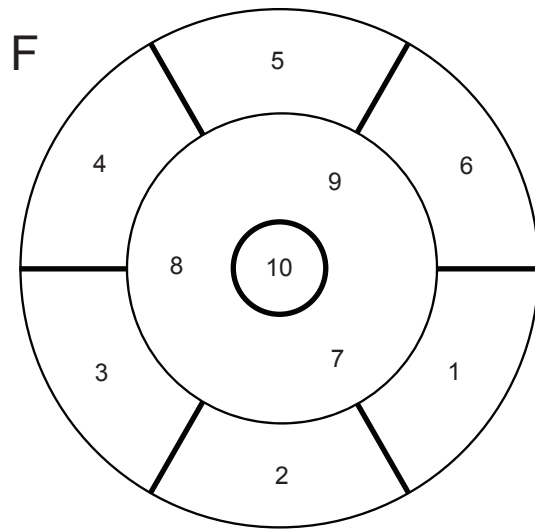
7 – (*throb*), 2023
Paver stone (Arts Club of Chicago), lucite, false fruit (wooden), towel fragment



1 – (*a basic dissatisfaction with history*), 2020
Terracotta frown, steel

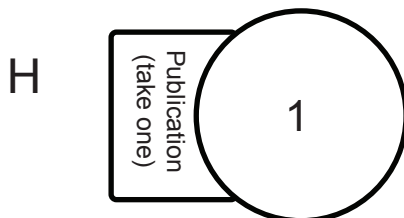
2 – (*when the time comes*), 2017
Green marbles, brass, blackened walnut

3 – (*spooning*), 2019
Ceramic bowl (Noah Singer), bent spoon



1 – (*who is she, though?*), 2023
Polished steel, altered marble carving

2 – (*Nothing to it*), 2022
Slipcast Donald Duck with cinquefoil, found steel



1 – (*rind*), 2024
False fruit (plastic), lucite, oak

1 – (*sealed*), 2023
Florida whelk, wood, sealing wax

2 – (*honey mule*), 2022
Plastic horse, concrete, cardboard

3 – (*friends*), 2024
Walnut, hot glue, window shims

4 – (*slip*), 2016
Fired terracotta, maple

5 – (*muffled*), 2021
Trumpet mouthpiece, stone

6 – (*ripple*), 2023
Cast brass Aroid spadix, steel, stone

7 – (*snake eyes*), 2019
Lucite, painted wood, brass

8 – (*kitty*), 2018
Fired clay, kiln cones, 3 point kiln still

9 – (*eavesdrop*), 2014
Lucite photo frame, pearl, thread, aluminum, c-print

10 – (*recounting countless encounters*), 2024
Cherry, steel I-beam, empty potato chip bag (Cuban sandwich flavored)