

2010 Benjamin  
**MENSCHEL**  
Fellowship  
**EXHIBITION**

15–22 November 2010

THE COOPER UNION  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF SCIENCE AND ART



Salomé Balderrama | Daphne Binder | Madeline Foster | Jessica Friscia | Samuel Holleran | Jeremy Jacinth | Valerie Keane | Bailey Scieszka

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THE COOPER UNION  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND ART

Salomé Balderrama Architecture

Daphne Binder Architecture

Madeline Foster Engineering

Jessica Friscia Engineering

Samuel Holleran Art

Jeremy Jacinth Architecture

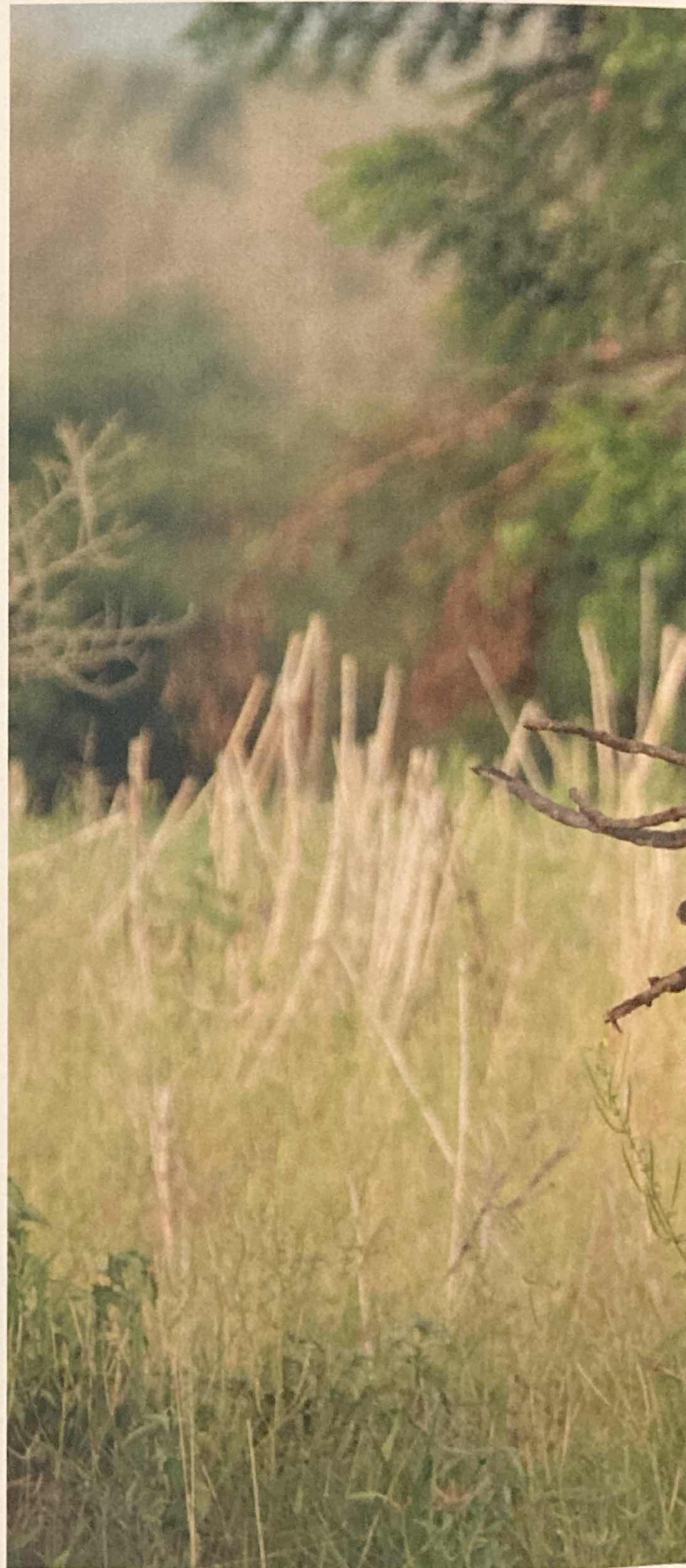
Valerie Keane Art

Bailey Scieszka Art

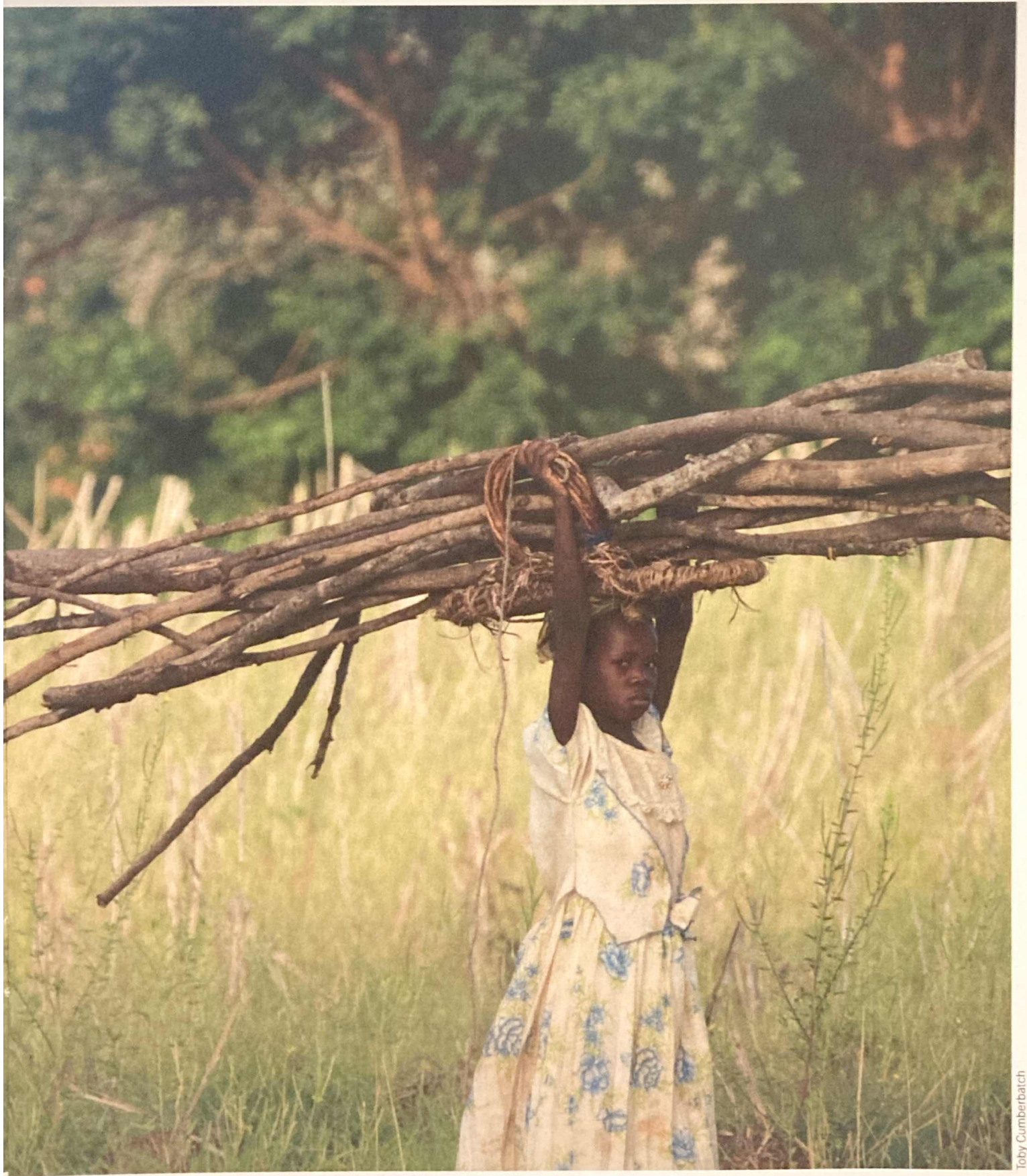
The Benjamin Menschel Fellowship Program to support creative inquiry was endowed by a grant given to The Cooper Union by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation in 1994 to support work in the fields of art, architecture, design, and engineering. This generous grant was intended to provide funding to exceptional students who propose scholarly, independent projects that will in some way provide a culmination to their educational endeavors at The Cooper Union. It is the hope of the Goldsmith Foundation that students designated as Benjamin Menschel Fellows will be encouraged by their awards to complete bodies of artwork, develop scientific protocols, or otherwise further their intellectual investigations in a manner that will provide inspiration and illumination to the community as a whole.

Front Cover: Salomé Balderrama | Daphne Binder

Right: Madeline Foster | Jessica Friscia







Toby Cumberbatch



CIRCUMNAVIGATING THE DEAD SEA



*"It is tradition among passersby  
to put a stone on a stone  
in certain places along the trail.  
We were told that this tradition  
is of sacred importance...."*

*—We Circled the Dead Sea by Foot,  
Rafi Tahon, published in 1977  
recounting a 1934 expedition*





SALOMÉ BALDERRAMA  
DAPHNE BINDER



We were drawn to the Dead Sea, an ancient sea with a unique chemical composition and the most saline body of water in the world, by the knowledge that some of civilization's first settlements were built on its shores. Unfortunately, like many other bodies of water today, it is in a fragile state of survival. For more than 50 years now, the Dead Sea's water level has been dropping and its perimeter receding due to human intervention. The region's ecology, population, and built environment are changing and its future is uncertain.

We wondered: What does it mean to walk around a landscape so altered by man-made intervention? What can we learn about the exploitation of natural resources, the transformation of historical symbols of culture, and the constant shifting of international borders?

When proposing to circumnavigate the Dead Sea, we were unaware of our predecessors, a group of Israeli youths who in 1934 decided to pioneer the same trail we had ventured on in 2010. Despite half a century between the two expeditions, Rafi Tahon's words ring true to our personal experience in traveling such a course in the Dead Sea region.

Our journey took us through sites where people still live, work and visit, across international border crossings, and into the water itself. We observed the consequences of the drop in water level, its receding perimeter and its shores scarred by sinkholes. We documented the current built environment alongside the natural one in a series of maps, plans, photographs and interviews. As we circumnavigated the Dead Sea, we observed ruins thousands of years old alongside settlements still under construction. These sites, as we



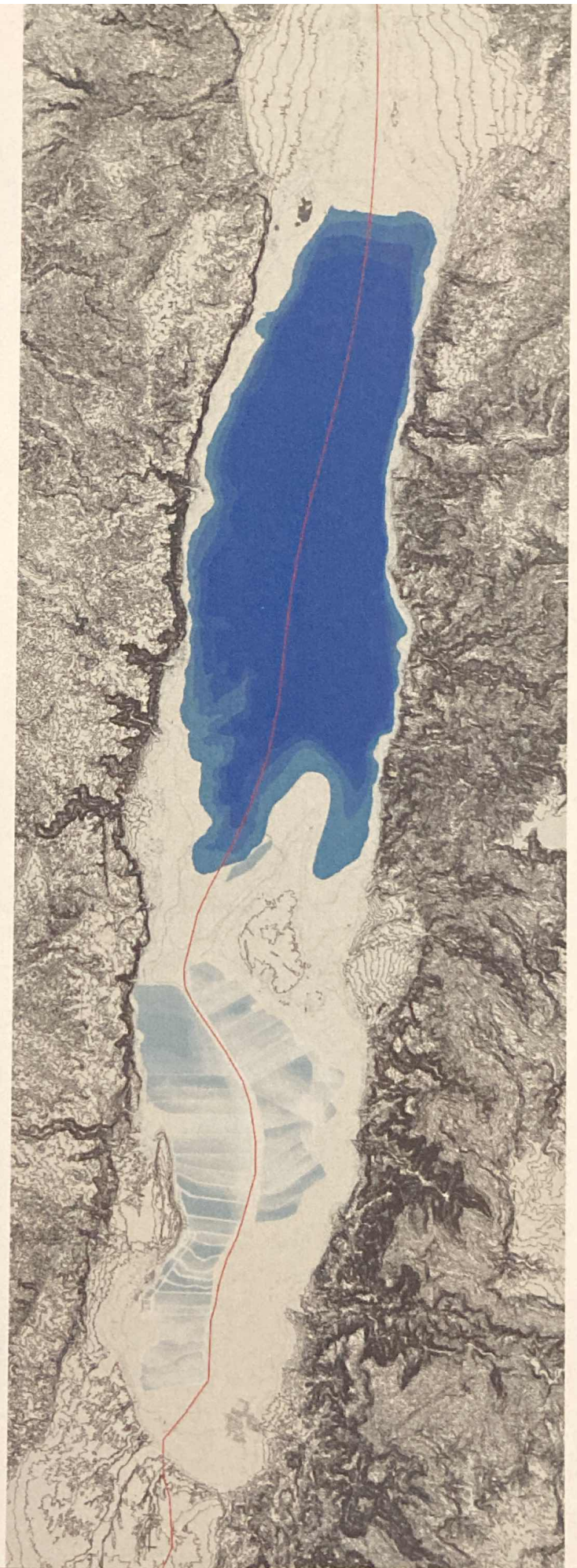






mapped them, appeared to us similar to the trail markings that Tahon speaks of: that is, they became signifiers not only of the past but also as an outreached arm to the future.

This future will be determined to a large extent by the nations on the lake's shores. The proposed canal from the Red Sea (The Red-Dead Canal), which intends to heighten the water level, can potentially bisect ancient archeological sites and interfere with ecosystems on which human settlements depend. Furthermore, the mixing of the waters will alter its unique chemical composition forever. Consequently, the Dead Sea's most significant characteristics, its iconic nature, healing abilities, and harvested mineral content will change as well. We hope that in our journey, documentation and exhibition we have also fulfilled the tradition of leaving a "guiding marker" for future travelers on the trail.





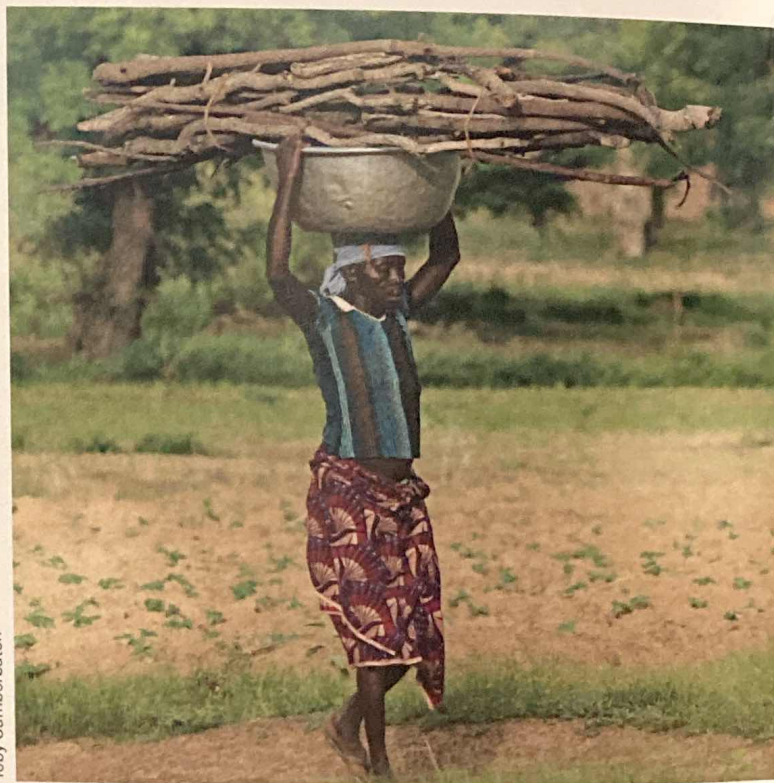
## LIVING BY THE LAND: A YEAR THROUGH THE EYES OF A GHANAIAI WOMAN

Wood and Water. These are resources we may not even realize we rely upon daily. They allow food to be cooked and life to continue. The earth sustains and nourishes, but our relationships to the land vary across regions and cultures. A woman in northern Ghana is responsible for ensuring her family can eat, yet the governing factors—rainfall patterns, soil fertility, physical health—are largely out of her control.

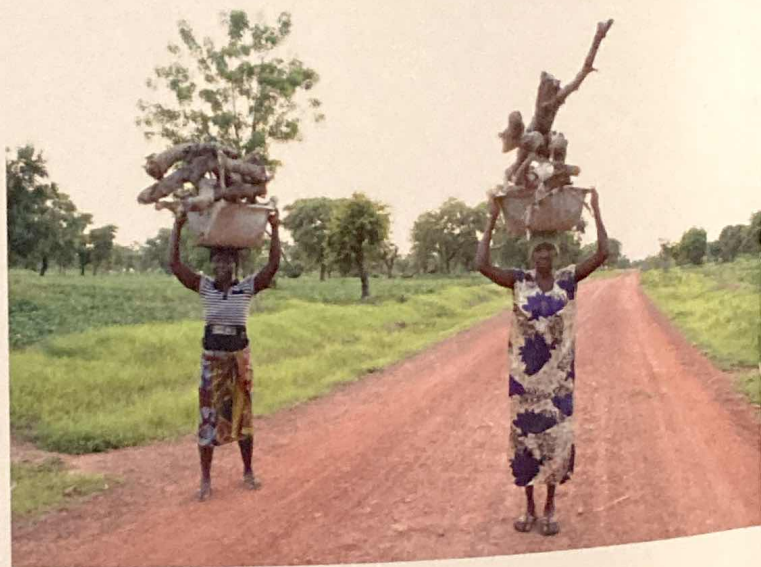
The use of the land over generations has taken its toll. With the onset of global climate change and population growth, the tree lines have receded, the water table has dropped—but the need for food and water never diminishes.

As these changes take place, the increasing burden of collecting wood and water falls primarily on women both young and old. The amount of labor required for these duties makes education an impossible venture. This lack of education limits these women's opportunities, preventing them from becoming anything more than their mothers were. This cycle thus continues, just as the coming and going of the seasons.

We have spent two summers documenting the work of the women of northern Ghana. We invite you to step outside of your daily routine and, for a brief time, take on the roles of the women we are proud to have met. As you walk the paths of these women, a year in their lives will pass by. The yearlong cycle of seasons defines the life of these women. Begin in the dry season and watch as the land and your responsibilities evolve with the coming of the rains.

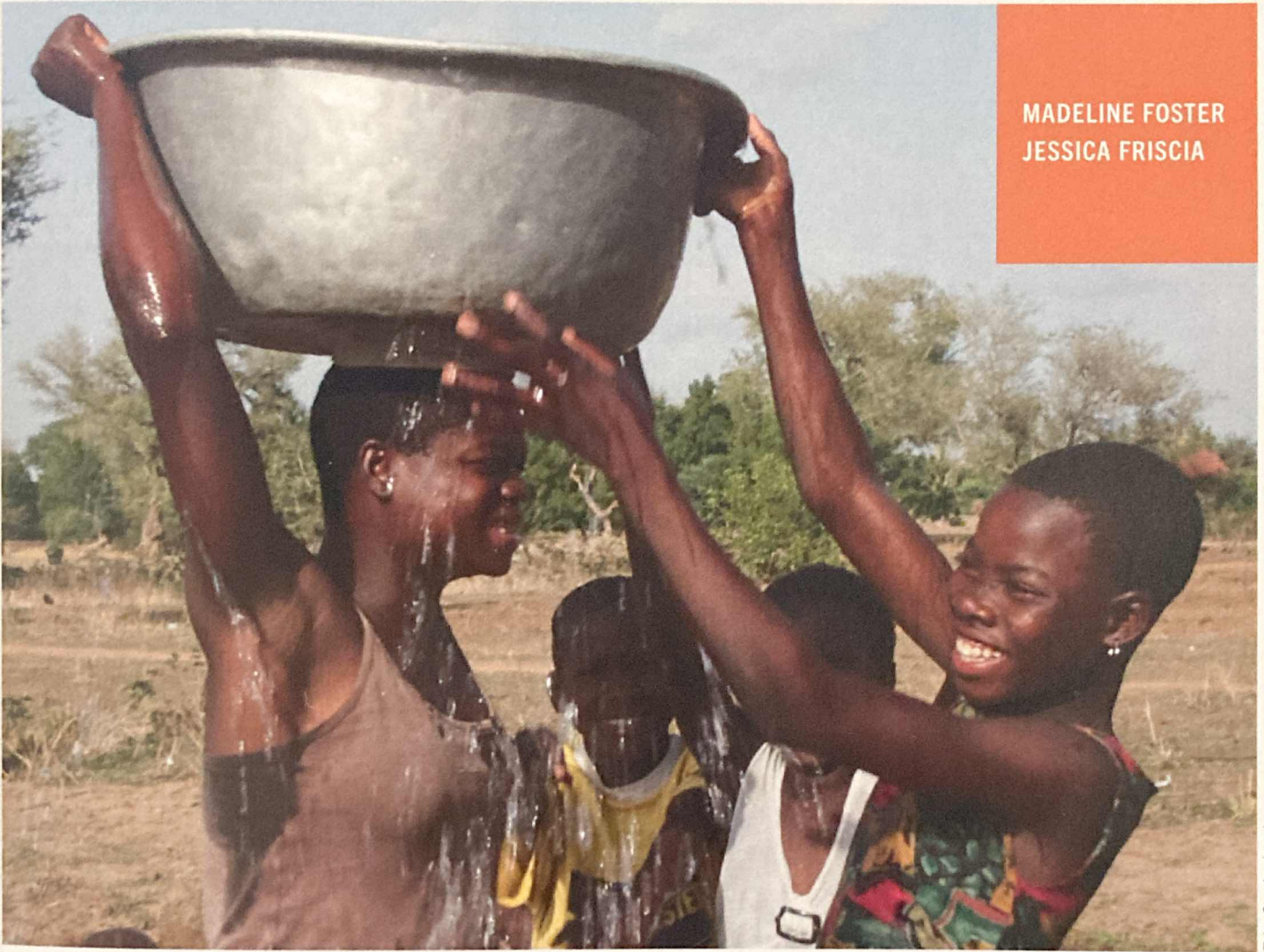


Toby Cumberbatch



Julien Caubel



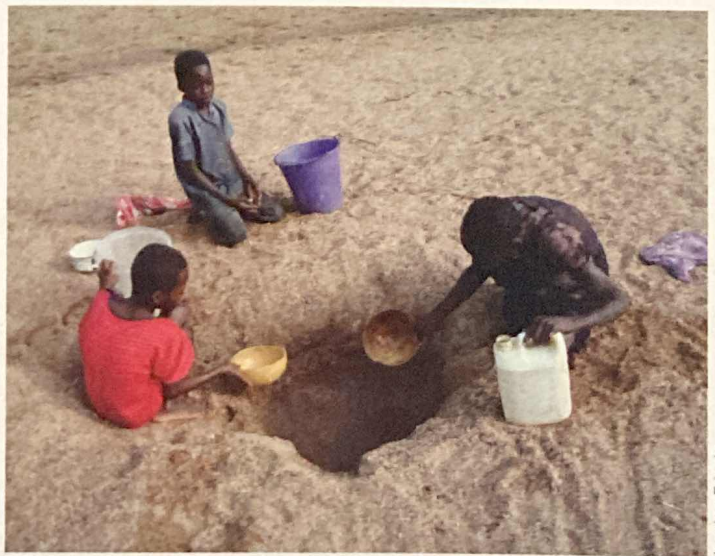


MADELINE FOSTER  
JESSICA FRISCIA

Toby Cumberbatch



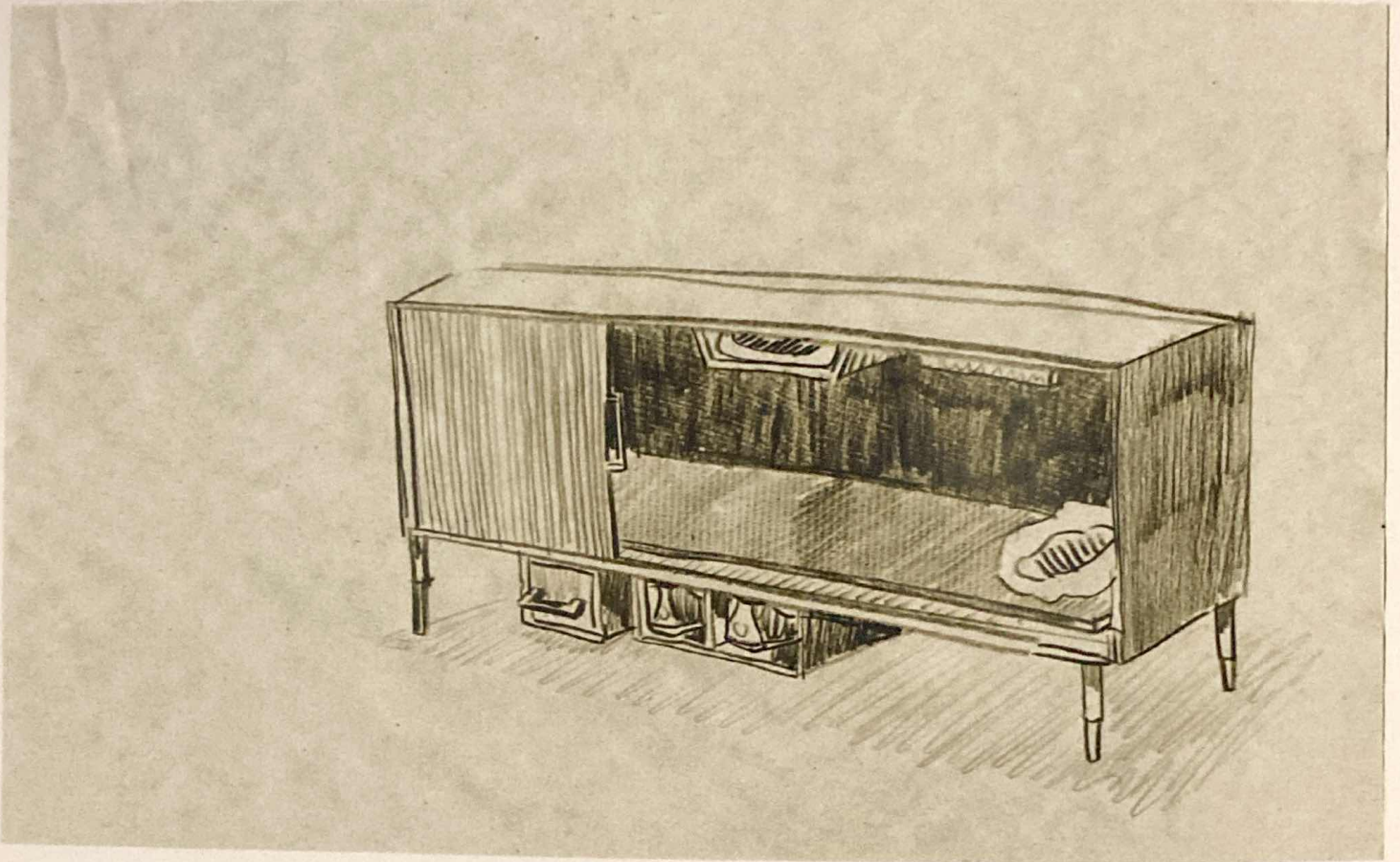
Jessica Friscia



Jessica Friscia



## SLEEPING QUARTERS



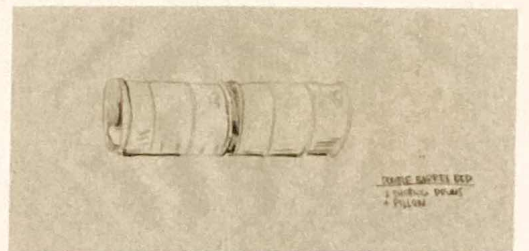
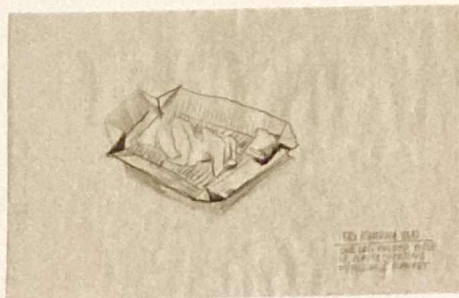
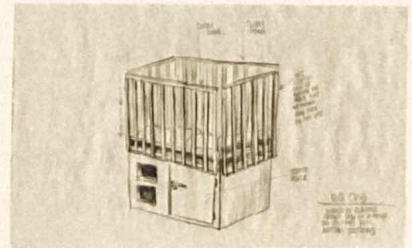
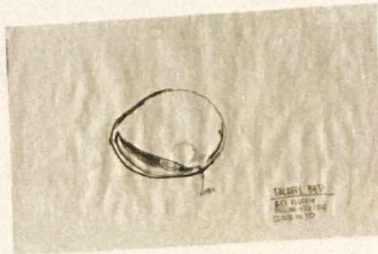
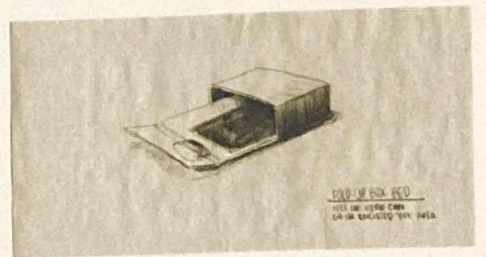
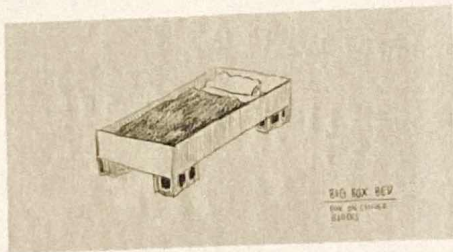
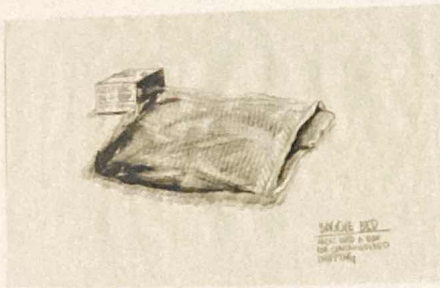
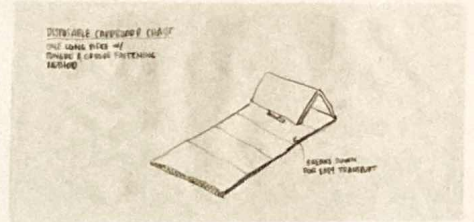
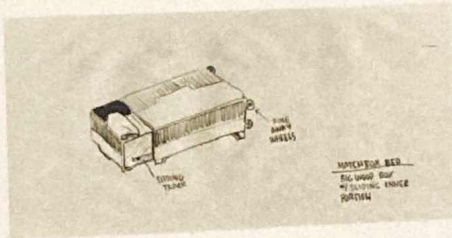
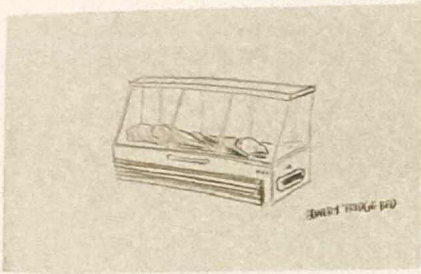
What kind of project, we asked ourselves, would allow us to intervene in close-to-home issues? Our aim was to use the funds made available through the fellowship to put something back into the community in which we work and, sometimes, live. Our installation addresses classmates' needs during the most fraught time of every semester: finals. Specifically, it sets up a space where they can comfortably grab some shut-eye during this work-intensive period.

For two weeks every semester our institution goes into overdrive mode and becomes a buzzing hive of creative energy. It is a time when everyone is running on fumes. The 24-hour access period typifies Cooper students' dedication to their work—often at the expense of sleeping and bathing.

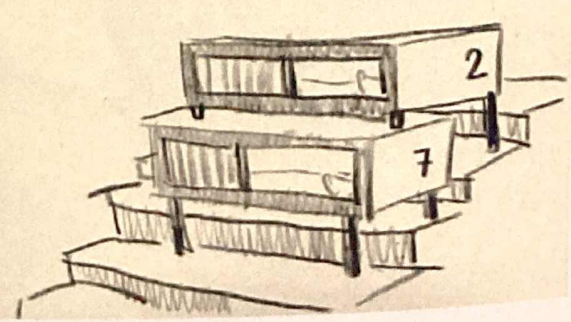
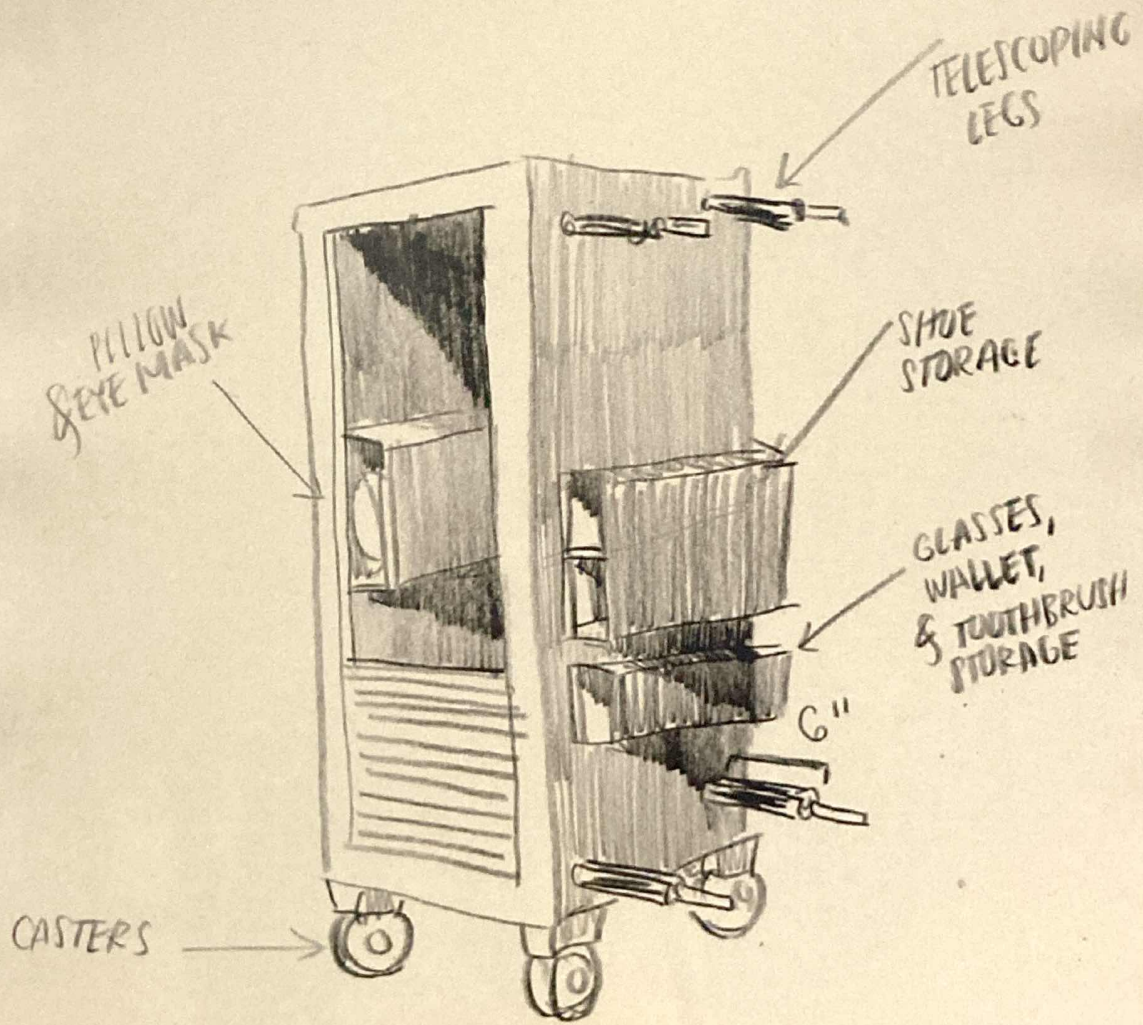
As rental prices have soared students are forced to commute from increasingly far away locations. During finals it is not uncommon for them to forgo a 4 AM train ride home to sleep on model stands, benches, or under their desks on sheets of cardboard. This need not be the case. One key element of our project is a modular arrangement of sleeping berths where students can rest at school. These sleeping quarters will be made available in the New



SAMUEL HOLLERAN  
JEREMY JACINTH











Academic Building (which also includes bathing facilities) during the 24-hour access period from December 8th to 22nd. In this exhibition we hope to kick-start this dialogue between public and private space, as well as sociability and sequestered quarters.

In conceptualizing our installation we drew on a variety of different sources: from furniture design, to camping gear, to flat-packed disaster relief shelters. We looked beyond what has been designed by professionals and examined ad hoc and vernacular forms of architecture such as *favelas*, ice fishing huts, and treehouses. From these disparate sources we imagined a number of 'model' environments in which students could eat and sleep during the finals period. The goal was to create a space in which the distance between the social (classrooms, labs, and studios) rapidly gave way to the private (sleeping berths). Our prototype allows for a wide variety of different formations and stackings, and uses screens—as Japanese capsule hotels do—to negotiate between visible and enclosed spaces. We invite visitors to test out our sleeping module and leave feedback for our continued development.



## LEARNED OUT FROM LAS VEGAS

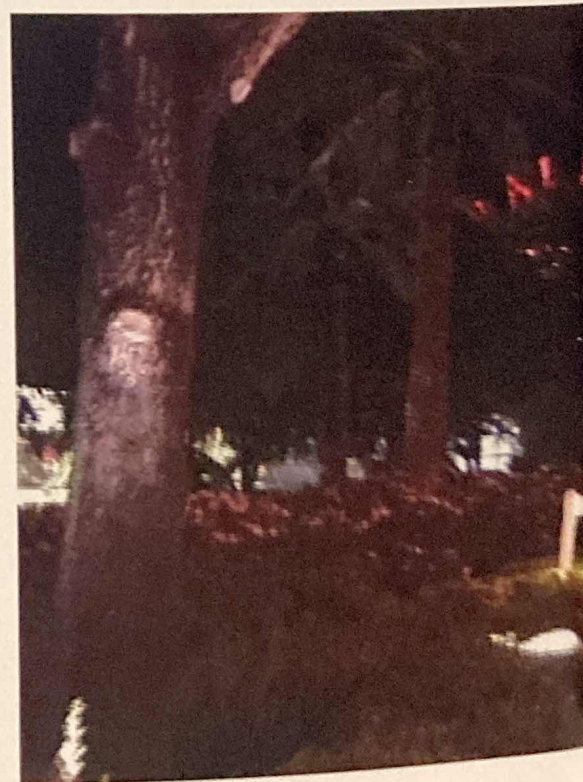
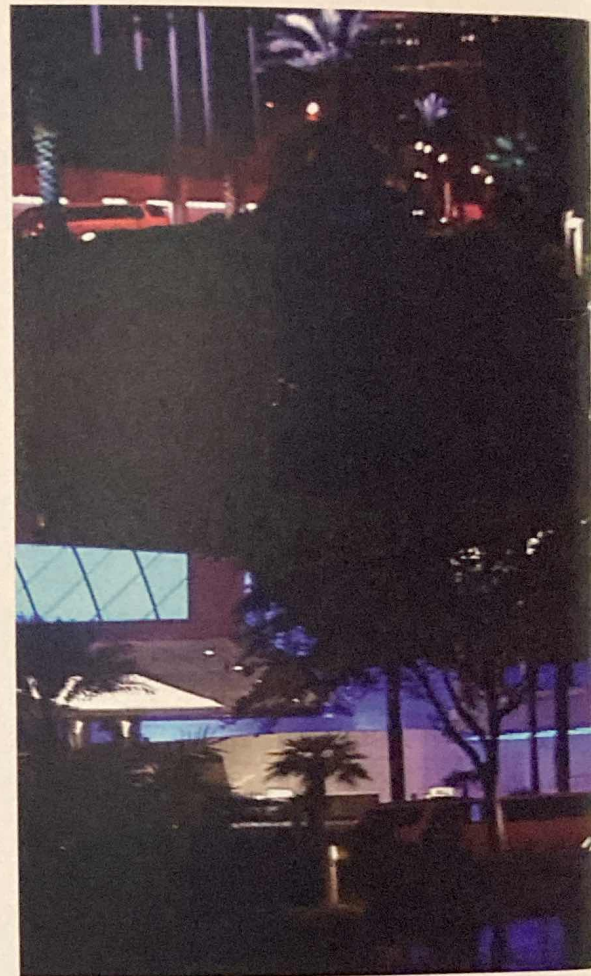
Because of its geographic location, an inherently vivid vernacular, and a history as an American Wonderland, Las Vegas functions as a giant performance space: a symbolic set where one is free to fantasize within the limits of The Strip. By design, the Strip shows no interest in the original meanings of its referents (e.g. Sphinx) nor in a scale uniform to these referents (e.g. Sphinx's relation to Eiffel tower to Statue of Liberty). This problem of scale extends beyond architecture: hotels outfitted with preventatively shallow pools that crest at three feet, tourists with 128 oz. novelty cups secured proximal to the mouth by means of neck straps.

An aerial view of The Strip allows one to anticipate Las Vegas' mottled, irreverent constituents: aisles of slot machines each with a unique theme; buffets boasting the quantity of dishes rather than their appeal to the palate; the litter of *Girls Direct To You* call cards—each with a different face—along every sidewalk, stairwell, escalator, and moving walkway; beautiful, yet complex carpet patterns—seem only to epitomize its “schizoid” décor. Conceptually, Las Vegas exists as a nested space—quasi-fractal—through a constant rearranging of the scenarios it presents.

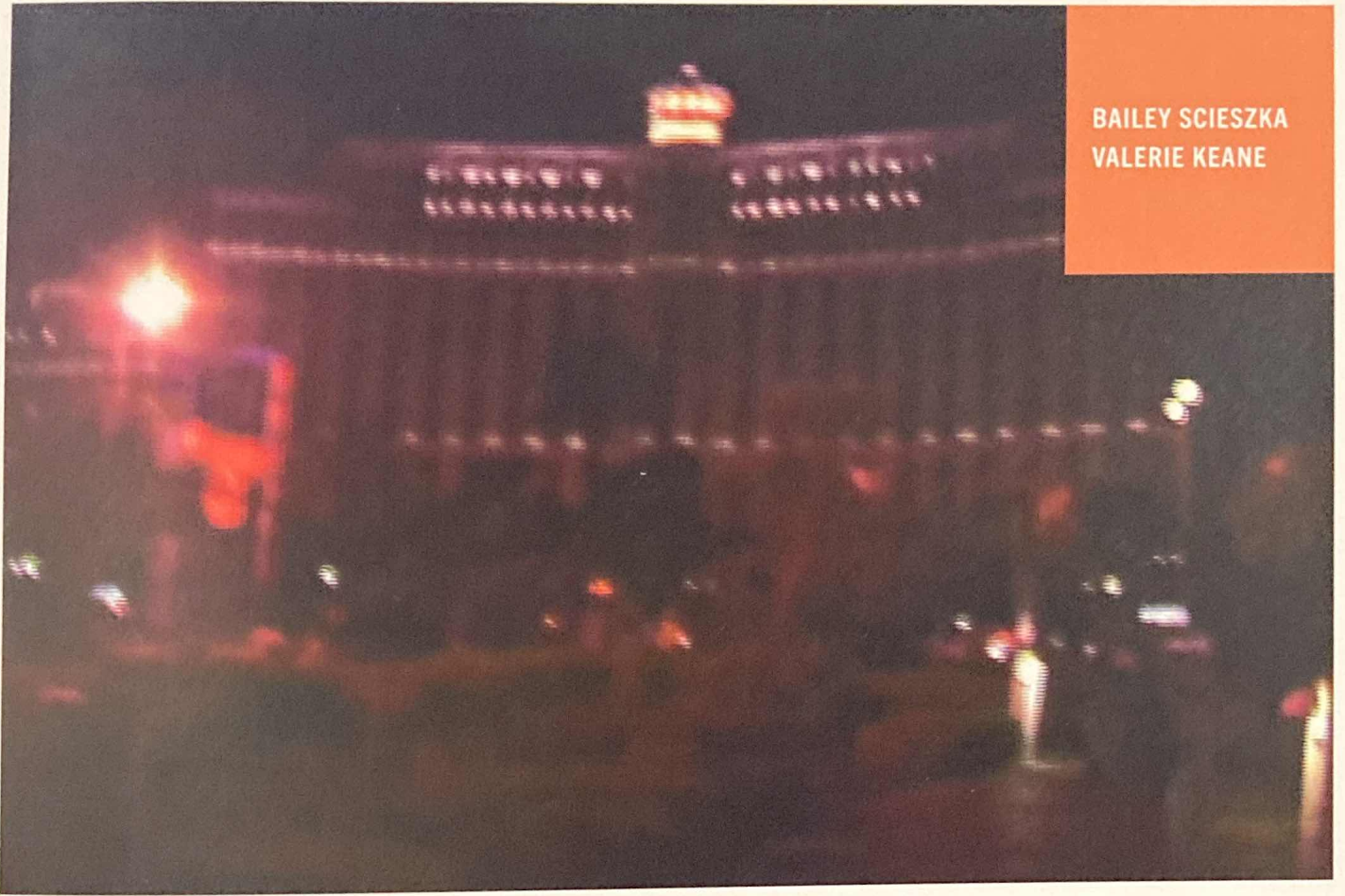
Venturi described the Las Vegas of the 1970s as space best comprehended while moving [through a car].<sup>1</sup> We discovered The Strip by walking and found a perpetually changing, cinematic effect, trajectories determined by bridges, escalators, conveyor-belt walkways. In fact, it is impossible to walk the length of The Strip, on a single side, completely outdoors. Instead one tacks, alternating between sides of the street, casino interiors, sometimes standing still, but moving nonetheless.

We present this video not as critique, but as fascination with and re-interpretation not of the decorated sheds of the 1970s, but the decorated malls of the present.

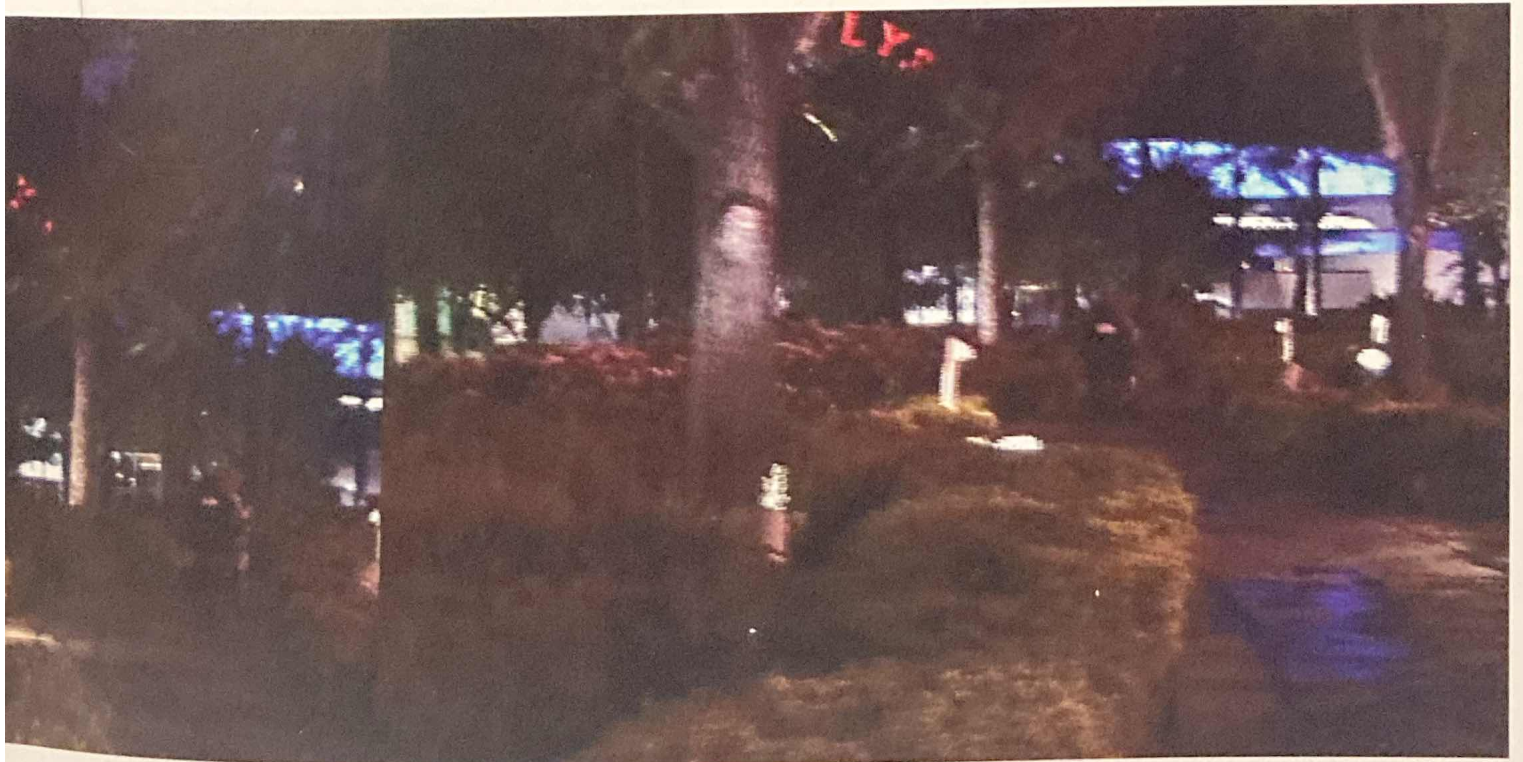
<sup>1</sup>*Learning from Las Vegas*. (with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour), MIT Press, Cambridge, MA; 1972, revised 1977







BAILEY SCIESZKA  
VALERIE KEANE







THE COOPER UNION



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