Lift, 2018, acrylic on panel, 24 x 18 inches

Mess 2, 2018, acrylic on panel, 12 x 18 inches

Anniversary, 2018, acrylic on panel, 24 x 36 inches

Table Dance (video still), 2017, stop motion video, 3:12 minutes
Lindsay Arnold: Tedium

C. Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.)
   The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs =
   minimum wages, housewives = no pay.
   clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor,
   wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby’s
diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend
   the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the
   stinking garbage, watch out don’t put things in your
   nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills,
don’t litter, save string, wash your hair, change the
   sheets, go to the store, I’m out of perfume, say it
   again—he doesn’t understand, seal it again—it leaks,
go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call
   him again, flush the toilet, stay young.

   - Mierle Laderman Ukeles “Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969”

I am sitting at my dining room table as I begin to write this essay. There are dishes that need to be cleared away but they will have to wait. I type but am distracted by the sounds of the house; my daughter watching a cartoon, the crackling fireplace, my husband strumming a guitar softly so as not to wake up the toddler sleeping in the other room. I am a writer (and curator and artist) who has spent the last six years working around the realities of life with small children. Between pouring glasses of milk and searching for missing toys, it’s been far from glamorous. But this domestic work, long tagged “traditional women’s work,” has served to solidify existing elements of feminism, identity politics, labour theory, and social practice within my professional work.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ “Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969” was created while she was grappling with the meaning of “maintenance work” as a full-time mom and artist. She felt as if the work that she and others were doing to provide care and maintenance to the operations of everyday life was being overlooked and silenced. “This is 1968, there was no valuing of ‘maintenance’ in Western Culture. The trajectory was: make
to the operations of everyday life was being overlooked and silenced. “This is 1968,
back to the start of this essay. Maintenance, whether of a writing practice or a

caretaker to this stunning collection and the maintenance required in keeping this

cacophony of pieces organized in order to produce such a project.

I am back at my dining room table now on a different night. There is a new set of dishes needing to be cleared away. The kids are playing in the basement, they come upstairs from time to time and interrupt me for a snack. This back and forth between my computer screen and the pressing needs of little ones brings me back to the start of this essay. Maintenance, whether of a writing practice or a
domestic sphere, can indeed be a drag. It can take all the time. It does not stop
and it is tedious. But the tedium as Lindsay Arnold shows us, has its role in art and
in life. In her work she has allowed the tedium of her subject to push through and
past itself, revealing a vibrancy that is surprising and glorious. Make something
new, always move forward? Maybe now is the time to reach into the forgotten
recesses and reexamine the lacy frills of tedium anew.

Jenny Western

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