

Jeffrey Michael Austin
Artist's Statement "What We Can Handle"

"The world is a mess. I inherited a mess." — Donald J. Trump, 45th President of the United States of America, February 16th, 2017

"We cannot live human lives without energy and attention, nor without making choices which show that we take some things more seriously than others. Yet we have always available a point of view outside the particular form of ourselves, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous. These two inescapable viewpoints collide in us, and that is what makes life absurd. It is absurd because we ignore the doubts that we know cannot be settled, continuing to live with nearly undiminished seriousness in spite of them... What we say to convey the absurdity of our lives often has to do with space or time: we are tiny specks in the infinite vastness of the universe; our lives are mere instants even on a geological time scale, let alone a cosmic one; we will all be dead any minute. But of course none of these evident facts can be what makes life absurd, if it is absurd. For suppose we lived forever; would not a life that is absurd if it lasts seventy years be infinitely absurd if it lasted through eternity? And if our lives are absurd given our present size, why would they be any less absurd if we filled the universe...? In viewing ourselves from a perspective broader than we can occupy in the flesh, we become spectators of our own lives. We cannot do very much as pure spectators of our own lives, so we continue to lead them, and devote ourselves to what we are able at the same time to view as no more than a curiosity, like the ritual of an alien religion." — Excerpts from Thomas Nagel's *The Absurd*, published in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 20, Sixty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division (October 21st, 1971), pp. 716-727

"Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat." — Audre Lorde, from "Audre Lorde: An Interview." With Karla Hammond. *Denver Quarterly* 16 (1981): 10-27.

On March 2nd, 2004, the European Space Agency launched a spacecraft they'd named Rosetta along with Philae, its lander module, on what was to be a ten-and-a-half-year journey to its ultimate destination: the surface of a moving comet, titled 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko. Fulfilling this mission on November 12th, 2014, the Philae lander successfully performed the first-ever landing on a comet. The ESA had hoped to collect an ongoing stream of information from Philae's findings on the surface of 67P, but due to complications in the proximity of its landing site, the lander ran out of battery power after only two days.

Despite its eventual shortcomings, one may look to the Rosetta mission as a stand-in example of a truly astounding and wondrous feat of mankind, so grand in its scale of accomplishment and poetry that it's difficult for most of us to recognize as anything but an abstract story -- not easily reconcilable with day to day life on Earth. The work in **What We Can Handle** juxtaposes this end of the spectrum of human achievements — and the immense scale of its context: the cosmos — with its opposite: the mess of mundane, routine gestures we would rarely regard as extraordinary or worthy of enthusiasm. Navigating this exhibition, one's concerns are pulled through the tangible and the theoretical; the vain and the reticent; the odd and absurdly meaningful.

Jeffrey Michael Austin Biography

Jeffrey Michael Austin is an interdisciplinary artist, musician and educator based in Chicago. Through a variety of sculptural and installation processes, Austin composes situations characterized by instability, impermanence and illusion -- inviting from their visitors a sense of empathy, mindfulness and openness to the unknown. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, recently including such venues as Societe d'Electricite (Brussels), The Luminary (St. Louis), Chicago Artists Coalition, Hyde Park Art Center, Ed Paschke Art Center, Le Carreau de Cergy (Paris), Kunstenfestival Watou (Belgium), The University of North Texas Art Galleries, Lehr Zeitgenoessische Kunst (Berlin), The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Fondation Vasarely (Aix-en-Provence), The Mission, The Franklin, and Manifold, a partner of ACRE Artist Residency. Austin studied at Columbia College Chicago and the Burren College of Art in Ireland before eventually receiving his BFA from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Austin also produces music as Young Elder and as one third of the Growing Concerns Poetry Collective. Growing Concerns has performed at such venues as The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Steppenwolf Theatre and WBEZ Chicago. The collective recently published a book titled Five Fifths with Candor Arts.

Jeffrey Michael Austin

Resume

Education

2014, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Bachelor of Fine Arts)
2013, Burren College of Art, County Clare, Ireland
2011-2013, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
2006-2008, Columbia College Chicago

Solo Exhibitions

2018
What We Can Handle, Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago
2017
Strange Mess, The Luminary; St. Louis, Missouri
Puddles, A traveling exhibition presented by Say Uncle. Participating venues: University Galleries of Illinois State University; Normal, IL, DEMO Project; Springfield, IL, Sidecar; Hammond, IN, Boneyard Arts Festival; Urbana, IL
Stay alive, Chicago Artists Coalition

Group Exhibitions

2017
Outside Jokes, DEMO Project; Springfield, IL
The 2017 Terrain Biennial, South Shore, Chicago
TIME, Société d'Électricité; Brussels, Belgium
2016
Welcome To The End, The Franklin; Chicago
Not Just Another Pretty Face, Hyde Park Art Center; Chicago
BOLT Preview 6: We've Met Before, Chicago Artists Coalition
Bad Habits (Remember Me), fort gondo compound for the arts; St. Louis, MO
New Business, Hyde Park Art Center; Chicago
Dock 6 Art & Design Series #9, Dock 6 Collective; Chicago
You Are Looking Good, A Real Good Looker, Chicago Artists Coalition
2015
Construct, FLATSstudio; Chicago
LAPS, Le Carreau du Cergy; Paris
Dark Fiber, Curated by Marissa Lee Benedict and David Reuter; EXPO Chicago 2015
Rough Idle, Chicago Artists Coalition
Kunstenfestival Watou, Watou, Belgium
ACTIVATE, Represented by Johalla Projects; Chicago
Lost in Trans, The University of North Texas Art Gallery; Denton, TX
2014
No More Drama In My Life, Lehr Zeitgenössische Kunst; Berlin
From Downtown (We Got This), A collaboration with Matt Austin; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
The Middle of Everywhere, Burren College of Art; Newtown Castle, County Clare, Ireland
Starwalker: Threewalls Annual Gala, Represented by ACRE, Sixty Inches from Center, Autotelic Studios and The Chicago Perch
Mana Contemporary, Chicago
LAPS, La Fondation Vasarely; Aix-en-Provence, France
BFA Thesis Exhibition, Sullivan Galleries; The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
You Have No Idea, THE SUB-MISSION; Chicago
Please Stand By, ACRE_TV; Mana Contemporary Chicago
2013

Present, Chicago Art Department (West); Chicago
Hi-Vis, Burren College of Art; Newtown Castle, County Clare, Ireland
Serenade, Terrain Exhibitions; Oak Park, IL
&again&again, Chicago Art Department (East); Chicago
Dock 6 Art & Design Series #5, Dock 6 Collective; Chicago
At the Threshold, A performance with The Mountain Was A Gift; The Smart Museum of Art, Chicago
Mere Observation, Manifold (In collaboration with ACRE Projects); Chicago

Awards & Residencies

2017
BOLT Residency; Chicago Artists Coalition
2016
Ox-Bow School of Art Fall Residency
ACRE Artist Residency; Steuben, WI
The Center Program; Hyde Park Art Center
2015
Luminarts Visual Arts Fellowship Award
The Burren College of Art Alumni Residency Award
2015
HATCH Projects; Chicago Artists Coalition
2014
HATCH Projects; Chicago Artists Coalition
Award of Excellence; Dave Bown Projects
Edward L. Ryerson Fellowship Award
2012
Mormyrid Artist Residency; Chicago, IL
ACRE Artist Residency; Steuben, WI

Public Collections

ACE Hotel Chicago

Private Collections

Nick Cave
Jason Kalajainen
Myrna Kaplan
Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection