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JILL MAGID TENDER: BALANCE

In each of her in-depth projects, Jill Magid becomes intimately involved with different systems or structures of authority, whether government bureaucracies, a secret service agency, or the guardians of other artists' estates. Gaining access through existing loopholes or contact with people on the inside, she follows the rules of engagement with each institution and draws out their internal logics. In a way, she becomes a stand-in for any person trying to navigate something much larger than themselves.

As the pandemic began, the complex relationships between individuals, groups of people, institutions, and deeply rooted systems quickly came into stark relief. Magid was especially struck by the way public figures weighed the loss of human lives against the supposed costs for the economy. Against this backdrop, she began developing a project that would take multiple forms, all centering on the circulation of pennies, but unfolding with different durations and degrees of visibility.

Featuring the premiere of a new film and other new works, Magid's exhibition *Tender: Balance* follows the movement of pennies and some of their afterlives. Reflecting her unique approach as an artist, the exhibition has aspects that are intimate and poetic while also observing broader systems around us, in this case the intertwining of the economy and the lives of individual people. Thinking about

different forms of vulnerability and various traces left behind, the works in the show bring out hints of absence and loss as they follow the flows of circulation on both a small and large scale.

Grounding the exhibition, Magid's new film, *Tender Balance*, begins behind the scenes at the U.S. Mint and coin distribution networks, as huge volumes of pennies are packaged and sent out into the world in armored cash-in-transit trucks. In footage filmed during the pandemic in New York, where Magid lives, the film also finds haunting echoes with the refrigerated morgue trucks that appeared outside hospitals. Its focus then shifts to individual moments of exchange, pennies passing hand to hand at a time when every touch has its risks. The sound design and score play a vital role in the film and are an active presence throughout the exhibition, permeating the space left open in the minimal installation.

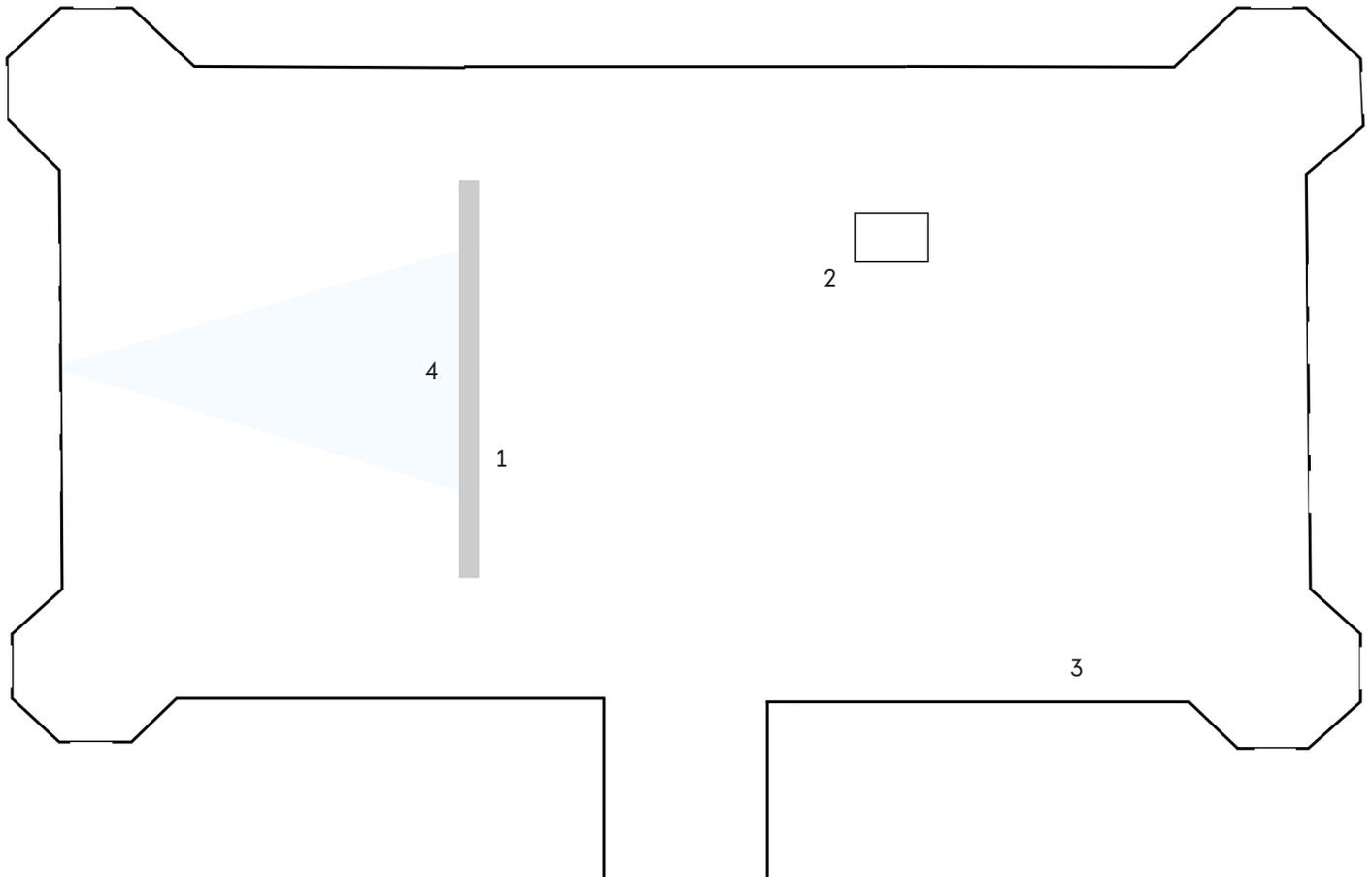
Within this relatively empty space, three smaller works become focal points. Near the center of the room, a ballistic bag used for transporting coins in bulk stands on a steel pallet. Borrowed from the U.S. Mint, these functional objects have been diverted from circulation temporarily, pausing here in Chicago. Close by, an x-ray shows a foreign element in a young boy's chest, capturing the accidental passage of a swallowed penny through the artist's son's body. Lastly, in a display case, Magid presents a set of "pattern pennies," which reimagine the U.S. government's 1942 prototypes for glass pennies, including some made with uranium—an aborted wartime experiment while copper was being diverted to defense production. (Today only twelve of the original coins are known to exist.) At the time, workers carried the glass pennies in their pockets to test out how they would stand up to wear, a gesture that Magid has repeated with hers.

In Magid's film, some of the pennies changing hands have a phrase laser-engraved on their edges: THE BODY WAS ALREADY SO FRAGILE. These glimpses of the marked pennies connect *Tender: Balance* back to the first manifestation of her larger project: a monumental but nearly invisible public artwork, *Tender*, produced

by Creative Time in New York beginning this past fall. Setting it in motion, last summer Magid acquired 400,000 uncirculated 2020 pennies, the volume of a standard bag from the U.S. Mint. On 120,000 of these pennies, she engraved the edge with the phrase mentioned above. (This amount, \$1200, is equal to the first stimulus checks sent out by the U.S. Treasury as part of The CARES Act.) Magid then introduced these pennies into circulation through transactions at bodegas throughout New York. As they are used and exchanged over time, they're likely to stay in circulation for forty years.

The initial expression of the project, unfolding as a dispersed public artwork, can only be experienced in intimate and unscripted ways, one penny at a time—or more likely, simply as a rumor. Here, Magid's new film and installation bring the project to rest momentarily, a pause in circulation that might tell its own stories as it introduces new conceptual threads.

Curated by Karsten Lund



1 *In Circulation*, 2020
X-ray film, lightbox

2 *2020 Cents / U.S. Mint Ballistic Bag, \$4000 Value, Partially Dispersed*, 2021
280,000 uncirculated 2020 U.S. pennies, metal skid (on loan from U.S. Mint), ballistic bag (on loan from U.S. Mint)

3 *2020 Glass Pattern Penny*, 2021
Flameworked and mold-pressed glass (4 amber, 2 amber-uranium, 4 uranium, 2 recycled uranium), brass and steel mount, wooden pedestal

4 *Tender Balance*, 2021
HD video with four-channel sound, 28 minutes

All works courtesy of the artist and LABOR, Mexico City.

***Tender Balance* film production:**

Director: Jill Magid
Producers: Paul Dallas, Dana Brandes-Simon
Editor: Hannah Buck
Director of Photography: Jarred Alterman
Original Music: T. Griffin
Sound Design: Ryan Billia
Additional Camera: Brian Wengrofsky, Davyana San Miguel
Special thanks to Creative Time and Field of Vision

***2020 Glass Pattern Pennies* production:**

Digital Design and Fabrication: Harry Abramson
Mold Production: Jerred M. Poff
Glass Production: Dorie Guthrie

Jill Magid studio production support:

Michelle Levy, Russell Perkins