

M+B

Jesse Stecklow : Staging Grounds

April 7 – May 12, 2018

Opening Saturday April 7, 6 – 8pm

Waiting for the bus.

In a city populated by selfish, non-native palms that give little protection from the sun, the bus shelter is intended to offer shade. It's meant to provide temporary refuge and transient comfort. Shelters are odd structures, whose proscenium architecture is designed to create enclosure while maintaining its transparency and permanence. They don't like you to get too comfortable.

I like to locate bus shelters within the history of drawing room plays or single setting productions. To me, they are a sort of spontaneous theater, hosting interchanges between characters whose exterior timelines are fictions, extending outwards from this circulatory meeting point. It works if you think of a play as a set of programmed meetings with an audience. Car drivers tend to ignore the bus stops and those waiting become audience to their own temporal performance. A dance of exchanges and actions shared by residents with overlaid destinations. We share a schedule and a sense of timing, too.

Waiting, and watching others wait, is like watching someone get rung up for groceries. I think about where they came from before this, and what kind of lifestyle they must lead to be buying only bee pollen and toilet paper; or to be waiting for the bus at this time with that particular gathering of plastic bags. Bikers and strollers and grocery shoppers and cooler carriers. Most are coming or going, and some are riding perpetually, occupying the space between the two. The bus arrives, possibly late, and I'm grateful for this system and especially for its drivers.

The bus is a tool of slowness for me; a way to mull over ideas that lay themselves out onto a visual city stream, grounded by glass. I enjoy periods of waiting while in motion, and within the bus I can create an isolated stasis where someone else is in control of my movements. It's akin to

being carried. I like to lift up my knees and press them against the back of the seat in front of me, wedging and shrinking myself so that I only move as the bus moves, not as an independent body. Here I can place the half of my forehead closest to the window against the glass and turn inwards to thought, while my eyes shift focus between the bus and the moving exterior. This thinking space is not unlike that of lying in bed before sleep, noting the arrival of non-sequitur solutions that evaded me during working hours. Back on the bus, my thoughts are punctuated only by the staccato of the turn signal; a rhythmic pause in the route. We will observe the approaching stop.

*Adapted from a talk given at
Otis College of Art and Design in 2016.*