Communal Table

Andy Cross
Joy Curtis
Rico Gatson
Lars Kremer
MaryKate Maher
Ellie Murphy
Ben Pedersen
Marc Andre Robinson
Lynn Sullivan
**Ian Umlauf**
Danielle Webb
Letha Wilson

Curated by Björn Meyer-Ebrecht

From the email invitation to the artists; April, 2014:

        << I would like to include a sculpture of yours in a show in my studio during Bushwick Open Studio this year. It is going to be a show of sculptures only, all presented on one big table in my (otherwise empty) studio. The table will be my contribution to the show, built in similar vein to the platforms and benches I have recently been working on. I want to include all the sculptors who have been in my orbit and have in the past few years influenced my thinking about sculpture. The title of the show will be "Communal Table."

        There will be an opening on Thursday night, 5/29/2014, and then the show will be open on the open studio weekend, 5/31-6/1/2014. I am inviting about 15 artists to participate in this show. The scale of the work will range from small to mid size, as everything will be shown on one big table. I like to think of it as a group show in the truest sense, presenting all the works as a group, in close proximity to each other, emphasizing relationships and references between each work. Obviously each work will still be given its necessary room to breathe, yet the spirit of the show is certainly "communal." >>
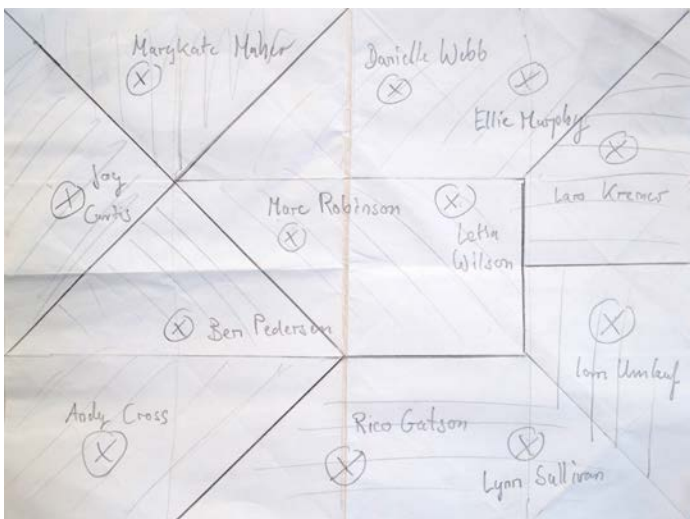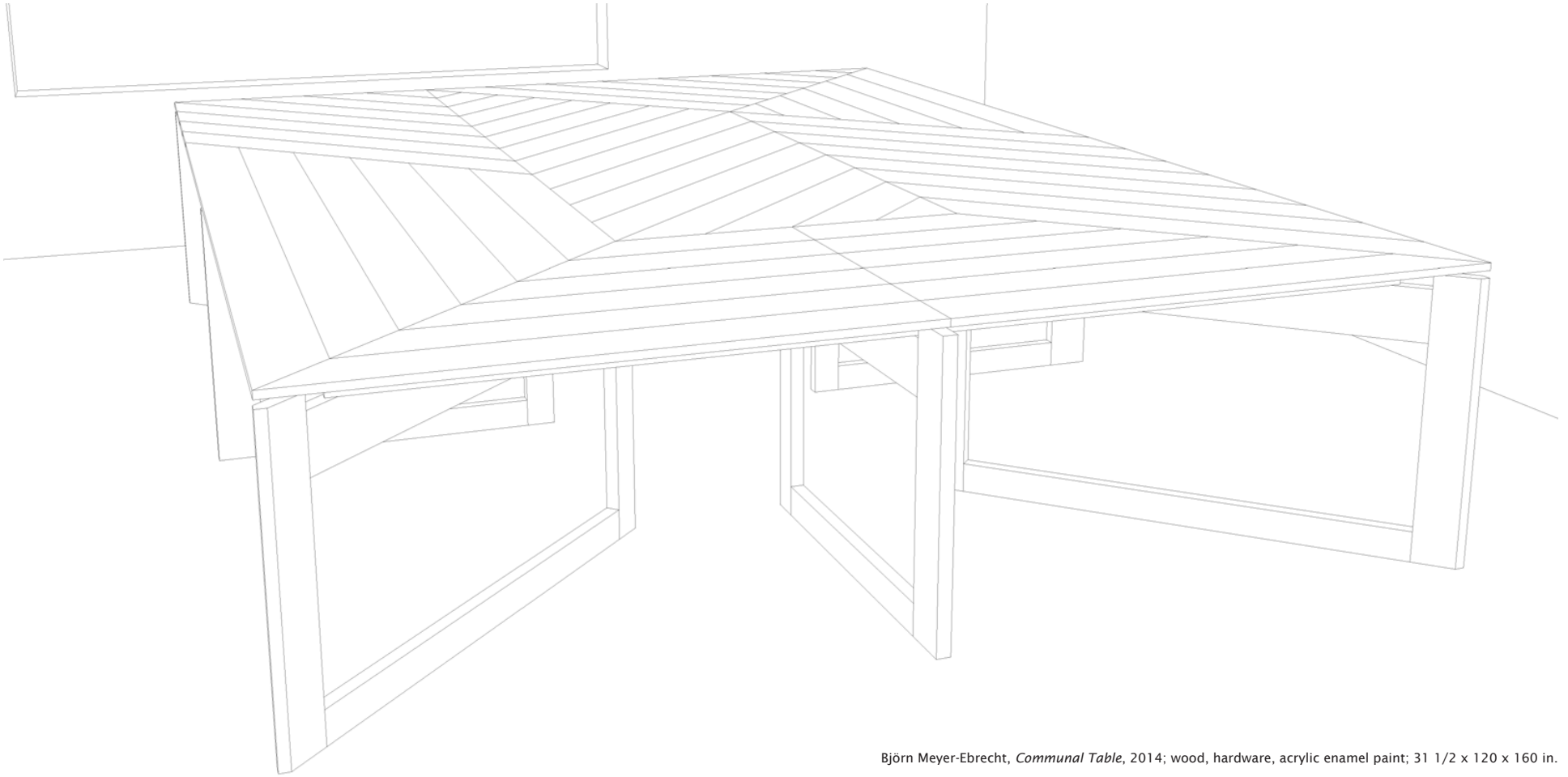
Björn Meyer-Ebrecht, *Communal Table*, 2014; wood, hardware, acrylic enamel paint; 31 1/2 x 120 x 160 in.
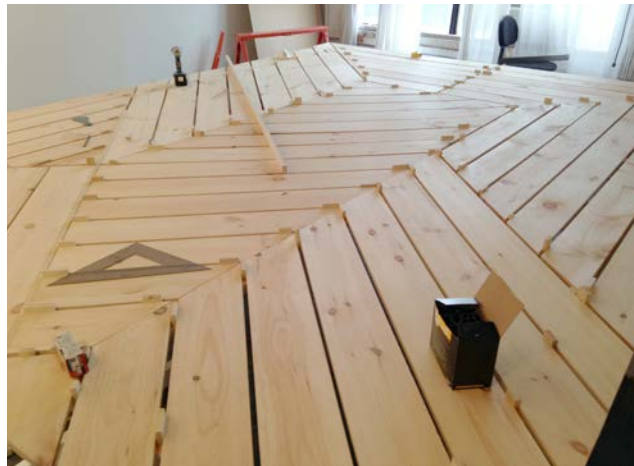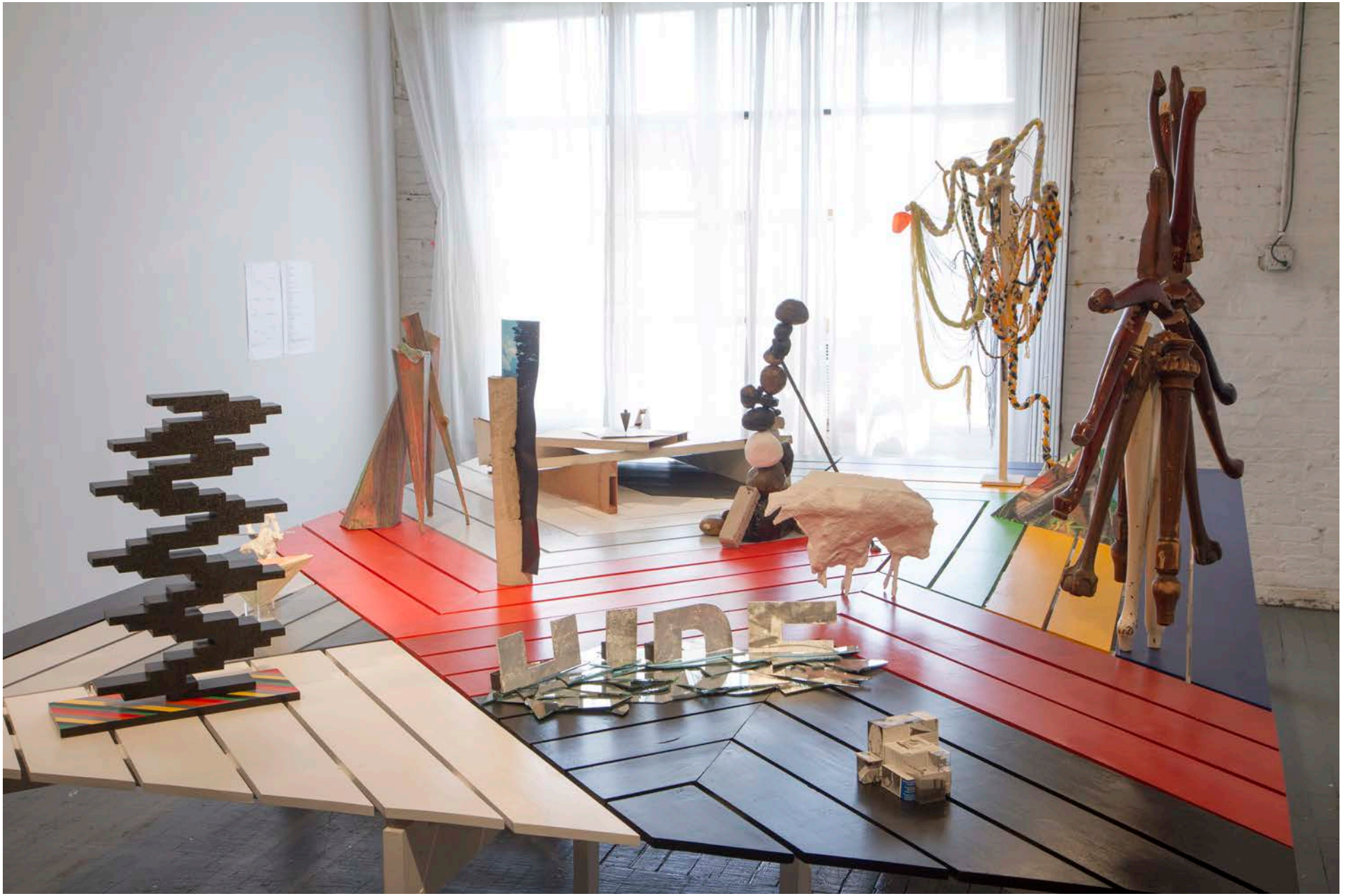
Rico Gatson, *Mystery Object #5*, 2014; spray and latex paint on wood; dimensions variable

Left:
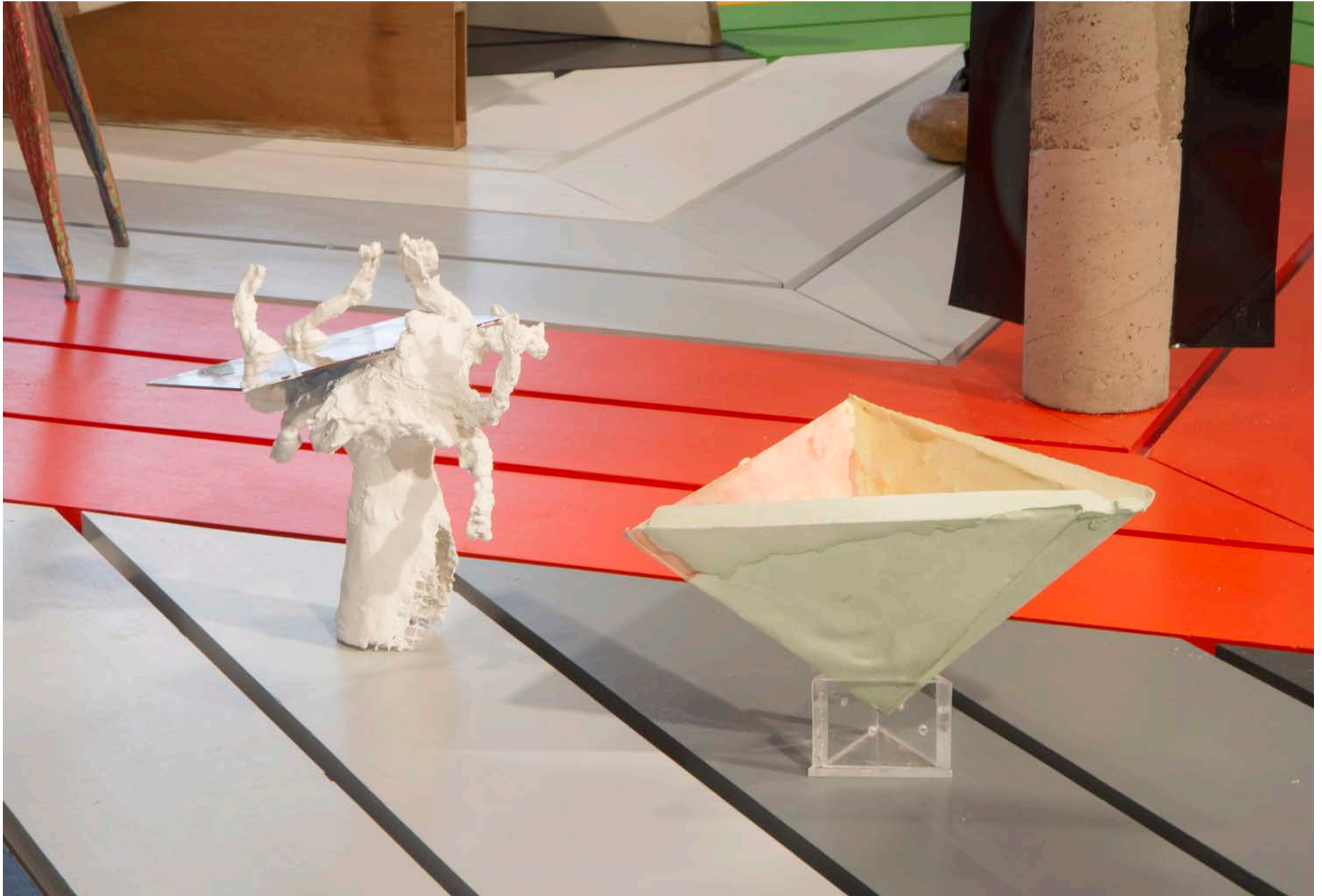Forground: Joy Curtis, *Untitled*, 2014; Hydrocal, wire, and plexiglass mirror; 9 x 9 x 7 in.
Back: Marc Andre Robinson, *Not yet titled*, 2014; mixed media; 53 x 35 x10 in.
Left: Lynn Sullivan, *Wrapped Ships*, 2013; plaster, ship model sets:14 x 16 x 13 in.
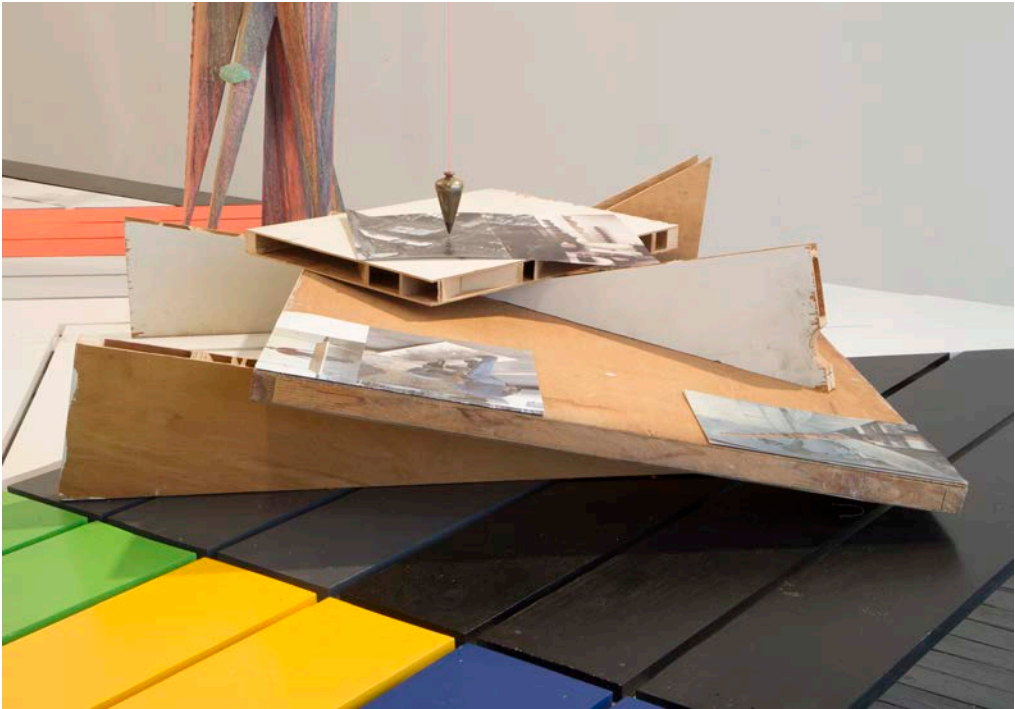
Below:
Danielle Webb, *Polyhaus (after 'Siedlungshaus im Dessauer Bauhausstil')*, 2012; materials: Polytek Developments Corp. Moldmaking & Casting newsletter (issue No. 22 winter 1997/1998,) and glue.; 7 x 7 x 4 in.

Joy Curtis, *3 Grandmas*, 2014; Hydrocal, paper, pigment, and plexiglass; 6 x 10.5 x 11.5 in.; and *Untitled*, 2014; Hydrocal, wire, and plexiglass mirror; 9 x 9 x 7 in.

Right:
Ian Umlauf, *Teparu: Endlessly (adapted)*, 2014; mixed Media; dimension variable

Below:
left to right:
Ben Pedersen, *Spikes & Blobs*, 2013; cardboard, polymer clay, latex, acrylic, and spray paint; 28 x 18.5 x 12 in.
MaryKate Maher, Brooklyn Rubble, 2014; mixed media; 30 x 24 x 18 in.
Ian Umlauf, *Teparu: Endlessly (adapted)*, 2014; mixed Media; dimension variable
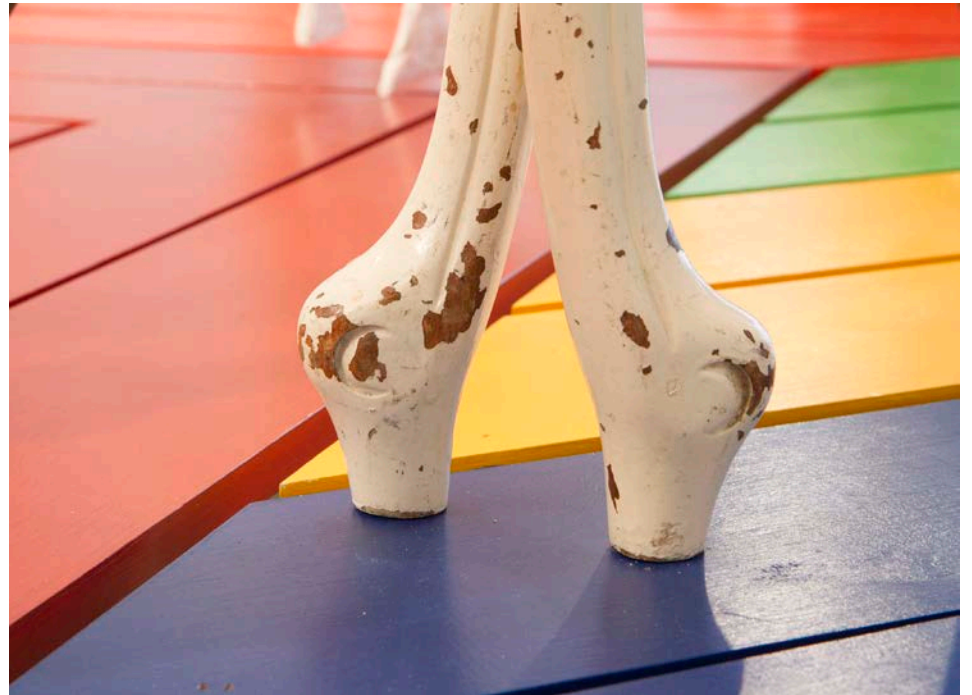
Lars Kremer, *HIDE (broken mirror transient reflective)*, 2014; mixed media; dimensions variable

Left:
Ellie Murphy, *Untitled (Post)*, 2014; acrylic yarn, wood, metal, plasticine and plastic; 50 x 30 x 25 in.

Right:
Detail: Marc Andre Robinson, *Not yet titled*, 2014; mixed media; 53 x 35 x10 in.
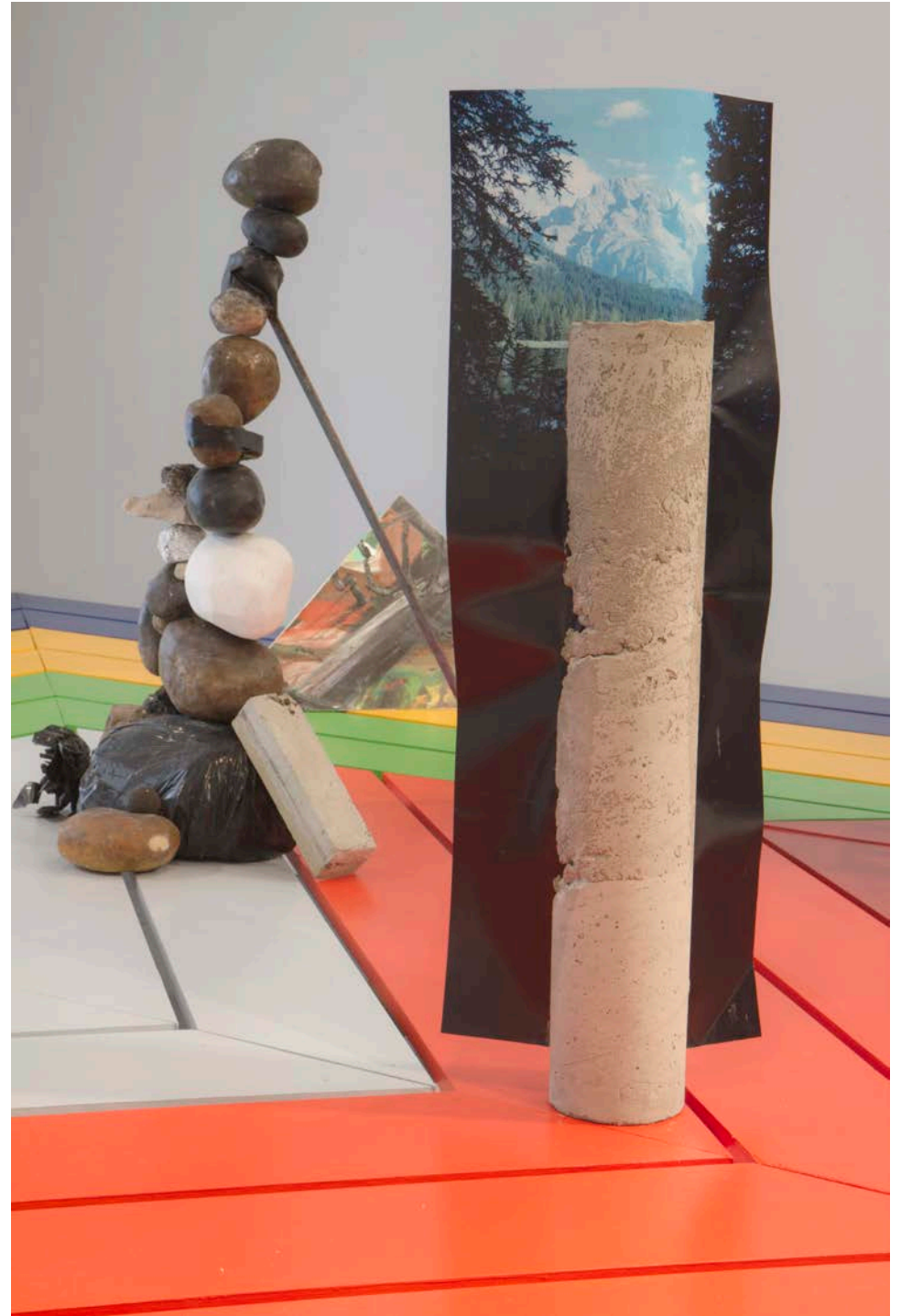
Above:
Andy Cross, *Pyramid Painting*, 2014; oil on canvas on 3 sided wooden pyramid; 13 x 22 x 22 in.

Right:
Lynn Sullivan, *Wrapped Ships*, 2013; plaster, ship model sets; 14 x 16 x 13 in.

Forground: Letha Wilson, *Grand Tetons Concrete Column*, 2012; concrete, C-print ,30 x 4.5 x 10 in.
Back: MaryKate Maher, *Brooklyn Rubble,* 2014; mixed media; 30 x 24 x 18 in.

<< One of the group shows I was most anticipating during the 2014 Bushwick Open Studios was Communal Table, curated by artist Björn Meyer-Ebrecht, and last night I attended the early opening to discover that it was most certainly worth the wait.

Communal Table is a smart table-top show featuring the sculptural work of 12 artists who are connected to Meyer-Ebrecht, either through friendship or artistic kinship. The result is surprisingly rich for a show that was mostly spontaneous after the groundwork was set — each artist showed up with a work they wanted to contribute to the show.
The premise of the exhibition revolves around Meyer-Ebrecht's own recent work, which rides the line between design and traditional fine art in the form of table and bench-forms that combine the zeal of Bauhaus geometric with the practicality of furniture. They relish their ambiguity and are hard to categorize — and that is part of their appeal.

During Meyer-Ebrecht's exhibition at Storefront Ten Eyck gallery earlier this year, which paired his pieces with the colorful paintings of Osamu Kobayashi, he told me he saw his work there as a play on American artist Ad Reinhardt's infamous quote about sculpture: "Sculpture is something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting." While Meyer-Ebrecht's work did suffer a little in that show because of its striking visual similarity to the paintings all around, often appearing like furniture from which to contemplate the surrounding art rather than art itself, here in his studio, which he's transformed for BOS into a temporary gallery, the work plays a central role. And it shines.

The notion of a communal table, something that's be come ubiquitous in restaurants in Brooklyn and elsewhere, is the basis of this BOS groupshow. Every sculptor was allotted a place, and each brought a work they wanted to share, like an artistic potluck. The result is full of subtlety and nuance.

Rico Gatson's "Mystery Object #5 (2014), with its stark geometry, has a lot to say to Letha Wilson's "Grand Tetons Concrete Column" (2012), with its interrupted concrete column, as well as Marykate Maher's "Brooklyn Rubble" (2014), which seems precariously stacked. Then there's Joy Curtis's small "3 Grandmas" (2014), based on a 10-armed Kali, across the table from Marc Andre Robinson's mandala-like "Not yet titled" (2014) — both works knowingly nod to one another.

The conversation around the table is free-flowing, as similar forms pop up in different variations, colors vibe off one another, while no work dominates, even though some are much larger than others. Even Lars Kremer's "HIDE (broken mirror transient reflective)" (2014), which plays the depressive wallflower at the table, seems to blossom when placed next to Daniele Webb's small and delicate paper house model, "Polyhaus (after 'Siedlungshaus im Dessauer Bauhasstil')" (2012), and close to Joy Curtis's "3 Grandmas" (2014), with its mirrored accent.

Meyer-Ebrecht's work often plumbs the depths of modernism, particularly the utopian moment when people felt like they could really reinvent the world through art and design. In Communal Table, that energy transforms into something more considered and generous, extended through an invitation to those the artist wanted to get to know. Fortunately for us, it's a visual feast, and all we have to do is pull up a chair. >>

<< The Communal Table >>

I have been invited to introduce four artists and their works from a sculpture show I organized in late spring 2014 at my studio in Bushwick, Brooklyn.(i) The show consisted of 12 sculptures presented on a table that I built. The title, Communal Table, riffs on the ubiquitous yet hollowed-out use of the expression in the restaurant industry. The communal table of this show aspired to an earlier, utopian idea of a platform where members of the community gather to share and debate ideas. By including 12 artists, I wanted to create a map of the sculptural conversations that have formed and informed my own recent sculptures. I selected artists well known to me, with whom I have a history of exchange and shared ideas, as well as artists whose work I did not know in depth, but whose work had recently gained my attention.

The table is a sculpture in its own right, not simply a neutral plinth. Central to its design is the construction and pattern of the tabletop surface. Colorfully painted wooden planks form a grid of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. The pattern consists of fragments of larger geometric systems, similar to various languages and systems that would intersect on the surface. The table and 12 sculptures were conceived as a single installation, the only prerequisite being that each artwork receive the space and presence it required.(ii)

Conventionally, models are displayed on tables, often as proposals to be executed in full-scale in the future. Communal Table played with this visionary aspect of smaller works. Placed on a table, even sculptures not intended as models are transported beyond their immediate environment and specific size into a fictional space of undetermined scale, where the monumental can exist next to the miniature.

Danielle Webb's Polyhaus plays directly with the convention of the architectural model by presenting us with a form based on a design for a Bauhaus-era home. Made out of a newsletter for casting and mold making published in the 1990s, Polyhaus is grounded in two time periods: autobiographically in the nineties, and historically in the era of early modernism. Constructing a sculpture from paper is a conscious alternative to conventional sculptural modes, which the newsletter serviced — turning the artwork's own making into its subject. Simultaneously, as an architectural model, Webb's piece echoes the grand ambitions of modernism and the revolutionary project of the Bauhaus.

Rico Gatson's sculpture, Mystery Object #6, could be mistaken as a model for a monumental, modernist sculpture. At closer inspection, it only plays with the form of the proposal, while firmly existing in its own scale and size. In a different way to Webb's model home, it speaks to its own making as a studio activity. Identically sized wooden blocks are stacked in a zigzag pattern to create a compressed column. Slight imperfections and irregularities reveal the manual process, and the attention to detail and labor spent. The painted base grounds the sculpture in the larger political context of Gatson's work, in which diagonally-painted stripes in red, orange, yellow, green, and black, simultaneously refer to the visual language of western modernism as well as to the project of black liberation. By putting the sculpture on this base, Gatson removes it from its surroundings and puts it into its own frame of reference. In this act, he achieves something similar to what the installation of the Communal Table is attempting.

Ian Umlauf's teparu: Endlessly (adapted) is a stack of wooden planes and wedges, printed images, and a plumb line suspended from above. Umlauf's sculpture consists of loose elements that are laid out and assembled on site. As the only work that extends beyond the table, it has a neon-colored thread that hangs from the ceiling and ties to the wall of my studio. It follows the logic of collage, combining different materials and modes of representations: the wooden planes are part of a found hollow-core door that has been cut into pieces, revealing its cardboard corrugation inside. Cut into geometric shapes, they are squared up and leveled with the architecture of the building. Two found images printed on a single paper are placed on the door fragments. Playfully didactic, they spell out other uses for this type of door, as a ramp, or a tabletop. Another print superimposes an image of Brancusi's Endless Column with a satellite image of the viewer's location. In a self-reflective move, the plum line identifies the exact location of the sculpture, and by extension, anchors the whole table in its specific geographic reality, while simultaneously following the upward, soaring movement of the Endless Column. The three works introduced thus far have a distinct matter-of-factness.

MaryKate Maher's sculpture, Brooklyn Rubble, subverts this notion with a carefully crafted pile of rocks and concrete fragments sitting on top of a miniature black trash bag. It is precariously leaning, and impossibly held by a thin metal rod. While the title suggests found debris from some derelict industrial streetscape, the rocks turn out to be skillfully hand-painted casts, mixed with actual debris and dirt. The pile's lean, its lightness and defiance of gravity, reveals the artificiality of this arrangement. The deceptive naturalism, it brings to the table, sets this sculpture apart from the other works. Similar to Umlauf's plumb line, Maher's sculpture grounds the table in its geographic context in Brooklyn. Yet by staging the illusion of her found objects, she exposes the romanticized notion of the non-determined post-industrial environment where most art is made.