

**Olga Holzschuh, Desire Moheb Zandi and Johanna Odersky**  
***The Way We Fall***  
**EIGEN + ART Lab**

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**Text: Ella Lewis-Williams**

Simone Weil, in her notebooks that would later be published as *Gravity and Grace*, describes the inescapable force that drags us all down as a condition of our creation. Ever since the maker's cord was cut at the knot of our navels we've been plummeting. A hidden force that spares no one and no thing, from *funus* to *funis*,<sup>1</sup> this is the way we fall.

Can we be relieved of this burden? The graceful practice of Decreation, Weil replies, will 'make things come down without weight.'<sup>2</sup> We must unmake ourselves and our hall of mirrors.

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The artists here work within the firmament between gravity and grace. (This is not to say they hover – beware the levitating cowboy.)

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In the Islamic tradition, the loom symbolises the structure and motions of the universe. The upper roller is named the heavenly roller; the lower stands as Earth. In between, a realm of entanglements, held in suspension. Bodies entwine and keep a hold of themselves here, intimate liaisons. Passing throughs, homecomings, reunions, divorce, about turns. Continuities clot into something resembling a pattern. When the work is done, the weaver cuts the threads that were tethered.<sup>3</sup>

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Beyond the security of the frame and within the slackening loops, pleats, blemishes and puckers, disorientation is an opportunity for new cartographies and minglings.

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To fathom [from the German *Faden*] the world, we embrace it with outstretched arms. We have always measured in spans of hands, feet and forearms, instrumenting our frailties to make the material world robust, containable, to make space yield. In addition to jostling away undesirables, or propping up one's boredom, the Ancient Egyptians used the elbow as a vital measure: the cubit – the length of a man's arm from his elbow to middle fingertip. The Great Pyramid of Giza was 280 cubits high. We have not ceased to extend our soft rulers and with a clenched fist hammer everything into shape. Upon a fall, the elbow fractures easily.

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Writing, Eileen Myles's 2001 poem, begins:

*I can / connect // any two / things // that's / god // teeny piece / of bandaid.*

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Icarus, the craftsman's fledgling, was warned to fly neither too low nor too high.

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In 1934, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who proclaimed his distaste for the crowd-pleasing circus of colour photography, preferring to sieve the world into binarisms, turned toward the setting sun. Aboard a Brazil-bound ocean liner, the structural anthropologist attempted to transcribe his experiences of being spellbound

daily when our star would fall from the sky. Over eight pages of his logbook, Lévi-Strauss rapturously records 'the phases and sequences of a unique event which would never recur in the same terms.'

As the sun ceases to be an architect and becomes in its final moments a painter, 'gradually the evening's constructions-in-depth began to dismantle themselves. The mass which had stood all day in the sky ... seemed to have been beaten flat like a metal leaf, and behind it was fire first golden, then vermilion, then cerise. This fire was beginning to work on the elaborate clouds - melting, disintegrating, and finally volatilizing them in a whirlwind of tiny particles.' After it sinks beneath soil and sea, he and I and you return to black and white ' - a stick of charcoal on granulated paper.'<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, colour rises.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Ponge, 'The New Spider' in *Things*, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971, p.108.

<sup>2</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, London: Routledge, 2002, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> The root of the word 'text' is literally "thing woven," from *texere* "to weave or braid."

<sup>4</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, New York: Criterion Books, 1961, pp.65-73.