 

**Media Contacts:**

In US and elsewhere: In UK:

Steve Runk Emily Bryson

Director of Communications Assistant to Ryan Gander

Lewis Center for the Arts Ryan Gander’s Studio

Princeton University Saddlemakers Lane

N502 Arts Tower Melton

Princeton, NJ 08544 Suffolk IP 12 1PP

609.258.5262 +441394383618

[srunk@princeton.edu](mailto:srunk@princeton.edu) [studio@frankandeunice.com](mailto:studio@frankandeunice.com)

news

**For Immediate Release**

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***Natural and Conventional Signs***

**A virtual exhibition by U.K. artist and Princeton Hodder Fellow Ryan Gander**

***New works made in a period of reflection as the world paused amid a global pandemic***

***Live exhibition tour and conversation with Princeton faculty member David Reinfurt***



Caption:  Ryan Gander’s *Shapeless Endeavour I* (2020), a cararra marble carving of a dolos, a form usually used as a barrier to interrupt natural tide cycles with the intention of preventing coastal erosion. Depicted here only partially formed with the intention of being finished by snowfall, predicted by a computer algorithm, meaning the sculpture is most likely never to completed. One of the works in the exhibition *Natural and Conventional Signs.*

Credit: Ryan Gander’s Studio

What/Who: In the virtual exhibition *Natural and Conventional Signs* U.K. artist Ryan Gander presents a selection of new works directly guided by his research at Princeton undertaken during his time as a Hodder Fellow (2019-2020) and made during a period of reflection while the world paused amid a global pandemic. Gander invites an audience into his new gallery space within his studio, Solid Haus, in rural Suffolk, two hours east of London. He has assembled a show in which the works have duality in meaning and utility; subverting the signs, tropes, and markers seen in the everyday world to shine new light on how we position ourselves in relation to the values of time, money, opportunity, attention and privilege. Princeton faculty member David Reinfurt engages Gander in a live guided tour of the exhibition and conversation on February 9. Presented by Lewis Center for the Arts.

When: February 5-26 video tour available on-demand; Live Guided Tour and Conversation with the Artist - February 9 at 12:00 p.m. (EST)

Where: Exhibition video on-demand at [arts.princeton.edu/gander](https://arts.princeton.edu/events/natural-and-conventional-signs-exhibition-tour-by-ryan-gander/); live tour and conversation via Zoom

Admission: Free and open to the public, registration required for live tour and conversation on Zoom

Accessibility: The live tour and conversation will be captioned. Viewers in need of other access accommodations in order to participate in this event, please contact the Lewis Center at [LewisCenter@princeton.edu](mailto:LewisCenter@princeton.edu) at least 2 weeks in advance.

For more information: <https://arts.princeton.edu/events/natural-and-conventional-signs-exhibition-tour-by-ryan-gander/>

(Princeton, NJ) Princeton University’s Lewis Center for the Arts will present *Natural and Conventional Signs*, a virtual exhibition in which U.K. artist Ryan Gander exhibits a selection of new works directly guided by his research at Princeton undertaken during his time as a Hodder Fellow and made during a period of reflection while the world paused amid a global pandemic. A video tour of the exhibition, physically mounted in Gander’s new impromptu gallery space, Solid Haus, in Suffolk, England, is available on-demand from February 5 through 26. On February 9 at 12 p.m. (EST) Gander will present a live guided tour of the exhibition and engage in a conversation with Princeton Program in Visual Arts faculty member David Reinfurt via Zoom. The exhibition video and live tour/conversation events are free and open to the public at [arts.princeton.edu/gander](https://arts.princeton.edu/events/natural-and-conventional-signs-exhibition-tour-by-ryan-gander/).

Gander was one of five artists awarded a highly competitive Princeton Hodder Fellowship for the 2019-20 academic year. Hodder Fellows are writers, composers, choreographers, visual artists, performance artists, or other kinds of artists or humanists who have, as the program outlines, "much more than ordinary intellectual and literary gifts.” Artists from anywhere may apply in the early fall each year for the following academic year. While not required to be present on the Princeton campus, Gander made a few visits from his home in Britain to engage with the Princeton community, including screening his film *Me, My Selfie and I* in December 2019; mounting an exhibition, *The Annotated Reader*, early in 2020; and, when travel became a challenge early in the COVID pandemic, presenting a virtual live studio tour from the U.K. last April.

The exhibition was originally planned to take place on the Princeton campus, however, with travel still an issue, Gander’s new work will now be installed at Solid Haus, a new Kunsthalle-like contemporary art space situated in rural Suffolk, two hours east of London within Gander’s studios. Unfortunately, with new severe restrictions in place in Britain, the exhibition is now completely virtual.

Gander has assembled a show where the works have duality in meaning and utility; subverting the signs, tropes, and markers we see in our everyday world to shine new light on how we position ourselves in relation to the values of time, money, opportunity, attention and privilege.

“I’ve become a little obsessed with the idea that the world can be divided into ‘those things that naturally convey meaning’ and ‘those things that are made to convey meaning’,” said Gander. “I guess that is what Maurice Merleau-Ponty meant by ‘primary and secondary modes of expression’. Almost all art—perhaps with the exception of outsider art—is made of conventional signs, not natural ones. For me, the phenomenon of finding natural signs outside the safety of a gallery by happenstance—like a discarded bus ticket, a waning moon, footprints in the snow—is often a more memorable and significant experience than those I am fed and manipulated by, which we might find charged by the white spaces of the institutions of art. As we navigate the world we miss so much, there are endless flashes of magnificent provocations, but we have to look.”

Among the works in *Natural and Conventional Signs* is a motion-activated ticket machine, re-programmed to print unique, computer-generated GPS coordinates taking one to a randomly selected land-based location somewhere on the planet, then redirects the visitor to another encounter outside the gallery space of conventional signs into a real world of natural ones.

Another work presents what appear to be political campaign or protest leaflets strewn across the floor. On closer view, we find that the political messaging is rendered illegible by comic-like cartoon writing leaving the viewer with a motif of protest or political perspective, condensing the action of political engagement to merely a futile gesture.

One of the works references John Higgs’ *The Future Starts Here: Adventures in the Twenty-First Century* (2019): “Those immaterial things, spirits, gods, boundaries, tribes, laws, myths, flags, money, and corporations. If these things have a physical element it is little more than a piece of cloth or paper, or a small chunk of earth. It is in their immaterial aspect which we dream up and project onto the physical world, where their power and importance lie.” What appears as a common donation collection box filled with coins and cash, is upon close inspection, filled with dollar bills folded into five-point stars using origami—a meditative tool that embraces the idea that time can be consumed in positive and generative ways while ironically exposing our inability to pause the flow of both our time and the formal valuing system of money.

A very large backlit billboard displays a photographic image of a pair of faux-soiled Adidas trainers created by the artist in 2014. However, it is revealed these particular trainers were worn by Omar Ruvalcaba during September 2017 in the aftermath of the Mexico City earthquake, moving rubble and debris in search of life, following his own survival and escape from the collapsed concrete building in which he lived, creating yardsticks for value, worth, cost, and consequence.

The exhibition also highlights Gander’s ongoing fascination with the attention economy. Heavily influenced by James Williams, whose book, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*, was the official “pre-read” for the incoming Class of 2024 at Princeton, Gander hints at how many social problems could be improved from within, by a fundamental societal change in the way we perceive the value of time. In ancient Greek civilization, there were two words for time; *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* refers to chronological or sequential time, while *kairos* speaks of a proper or opportune time for action, or a “readiness.” While *chronos* is quantitative, *kairos* has a qualitative, permanent nature. Many ancient civilizations valued equilibrium or a notion of “stasis” over an accelerating rate of “growth.” Gander notes his belief in valuing the ephemerality of time as opposed to the physicality of stuff, is a noble one but also perhaps unrealistic.

*Spending time going backwards*, 2020, is one of Gander’s most telling works attesting to this notion. A sterling silver cast of an extinguished cigarillo butt and left discarded on top of another work, it highlights the disrespect and impartiality to the consequences of our individual actions while evoking the image of and a poetic narrative of a moment of reflection. This seemingly forgettable and inconsequential natural sign in fact represents a moment, a capsule of time, limited by the parameters of *chronos* and liberated by the agency of its *kairos*.

Ryan Gander has established an international reputation through artworks that materialize in many different forms, ranging from sculpture, apparel and writing, to architecture, painting, typefaces, publications and performance. In addition to curating exhibitions, he is a committed educator, having taught at international art institutions and universities, and has written and presented television programs on and about contemporary art and culture for the BBC. Through associative thought processes that connect the everyday and the esoteric, the overlooked and the commonplace, Gander’s work involves a questioning of language and knowledge, as well as a reinvention of both the modes of appearance and the creation of an artwork. His work can be reminiscent of a puzzle, or a network with multiple connections and the fragments of an embedded story, encouraging viewers to make their own associations and invent their own narrative in order to unravel the complexities staged by the artist. Gander lives and works in Suffolk and London. He studied at Manchester Metropolitan University in the U.K., the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, and the Jan van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht in the Netherlands. He has been a professor of visual art at the University of Huddersfield and holds an honorary Doctor of the Arts at the Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Suffolk. In 2017 he was awarded The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) or services to contemporary arts.

The live guided tour and conversation will be hosted by graphic designer and Princeton Lecturer in Visual Arts, David Reinfurt.

For more information about this event and the more than 100 events presented by the Lewis Center each year, visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://arts.princeton.edu/).

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