

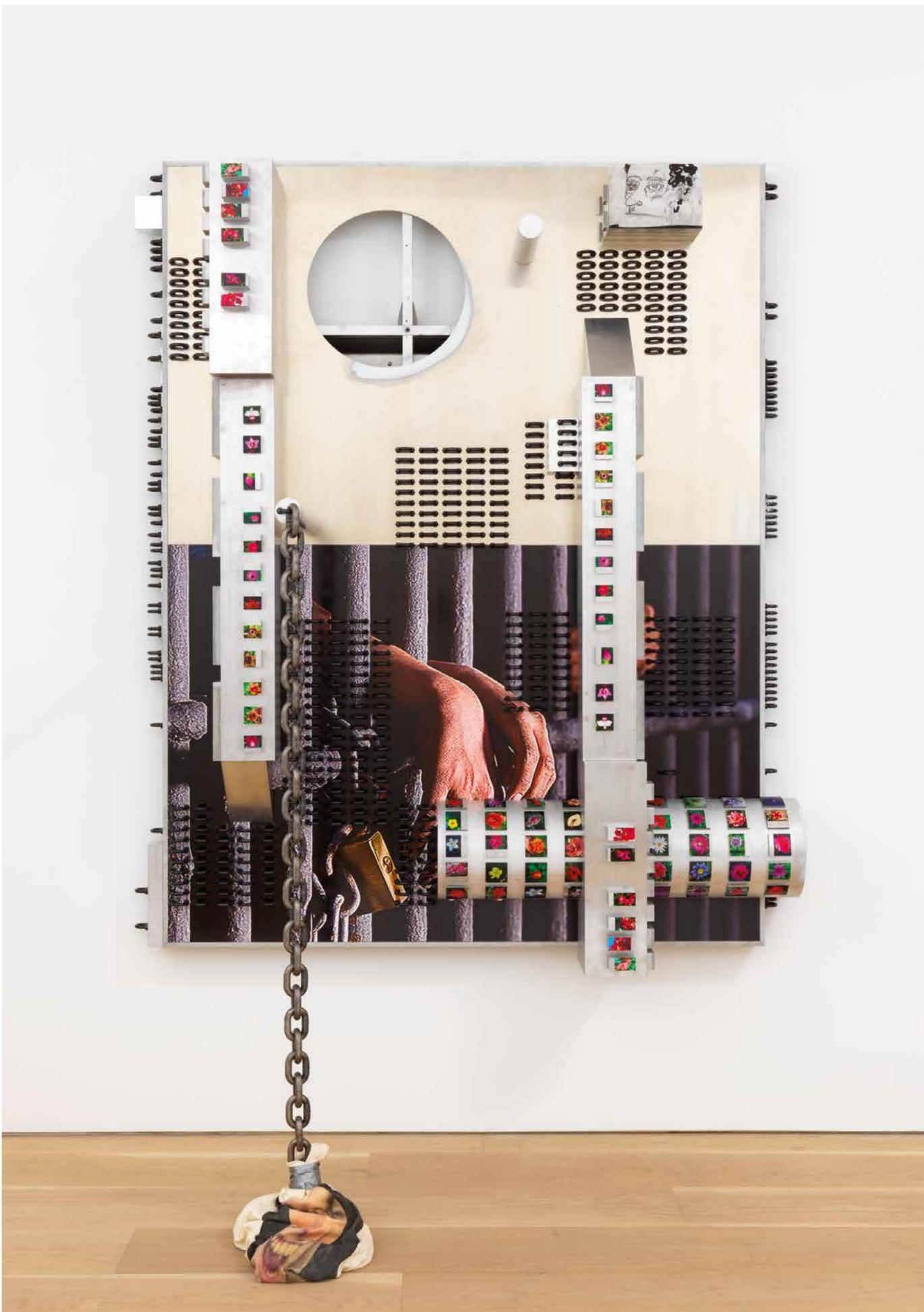
Build It Up So It Collapses and Falls Back on Itself

Eric Wesley in conversation with Jordan Wolfson



JORDAN WOLFSON
met his artistic “unsung hero,”
ERIC WESLEY, on the
occasion of his latest solo show,
Timbuctoo—named
after Timbuctoo, California,
not Timbuktu, Africa
(he “can’t really go there”).
They chat about symmetry and
asymmetry; materials,
be they real or fake, natural or
artificial; the practice of stack-
ing rocks on top of each
other; and a certain attitude
in decor as an
“adult contemporary” gestalt.





Jordan Wolfson, *Untitled*, 2018. Courtesy: the artist and David Zwirner Gallery, New York / London / Hong Kong. Photo: John Smith



Eric Wesley, *Timbucto*, 2019. Courtesy: Pio Pico, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua White

JORDAN WOLFSON
How is it to be fifty?
ERIC WESLEY
I'll tell you in four years.
JORDAN
You're from California, right?
ERIC
Yes. And you're from New York, right?
JORDAN
Yes. I love this camping model, man. *Timbuctoo* [2019].
Who's that figure in it? What's on his head?
ERIC
That's me with a wig. I've been somewhat obsessed with this idea: I think that we've seen our last cult. Since the beginnings this project was this whole cult thing.
JORDAN
Are these trees made from real wood?
ERIC
Yes. There's black oak and madrone, and some walnut.
JORDAN
Beautiful.
ERIC
Yes, but that's the idea—the physical beauty and complex formalism of the ubiquitous hardwood floor. It's a modern marvel, and we walk on it without thinking about it. We take these things for granted.
JORDAN
Where are the rocks from?
ERIC
They're collected from Timbuctoo. The sconces on the walls are continuing the verticality. The trees that were once vertical are now horizontal, and the stones, which are usually in a horizontal array, are configured vertically.
JORDAN
The stones were once horizontal—if not abstract and asymmetrical to one another horizontally—are now vertical and symmetrical. The tree is now symmetrically horizontal in the wooden square.
ERIC
That's right. Good observation. That's also why the floor is not a perfect square. There's this idea that it conforms to whatever space it's in: this is a sculpture, *sticks* [2019]. What happened was, once we got these trees, we slabbed them up and brought them here and did our business. Then basically I just left things here.
JORDAN
The back room containing the camping model is not really part of the exhibition. You used a similar strategy at Metro Pictures in 2002.
ERIC
Yes. There is definitely a formula: the whole front room and back room as separate entities. It's a way to encode an otherwise esoteric concept. The idea was to make a business out of this, to produce hardwood flooring for art collectors or just the adult contemporary demographic.
JORDAN
Have you sold any?
ERIC
Three floors so far, in various houses.
JORDAN
For houses?
ERIC
Yes. The idea with this particular one is that it goes to a

museum. It's conceived to act as a display model for future floors. The original should be housed at a museum.
JORDAN
I get it.
ERIC
This is all wood from Timbuctoo.
JORDAN
Timbuctoo, California, where you were camping?
ERIC
Correct. Originally I wanted to go to Timbuktu, Africa. Can't really go there.
JORDAN
What's the painting with a rainbow in it about?
ERIC
Do you see the woman there?
JORDAN
Yes. It's like a halo around her.
ERIC
It's actually a still from my Super 8 film. That mark is from a device called a spectrometer. I shot a lot of Super 8 footage on this project. The woman—she's my girlfriend—is sitting in one of the chairs, tilted. It's based on the notion of loitering. I'm *really* into this notion of loitering. That's a military term as well, so there's a proactive nature to this idea of loitering. She's seated in front of a hotel room.
JORDAN
Loitering in front of a hotel room.
ERIC
A certain attitude of holding a position, without action or real intent.
JORDAN
What about the tank with the chainsaw on it?
ERIC
This is the chainsaw I used to cut the trees.
JORDAN
Why did you engrave it with the word “Timbuctoo” upside down?
ERIC
That was an accident.
JORDAN
Why are the chairs decorative?
ERIC
Why not? I've got this theory of what I call “adult contemporary.” Like the music, but more about equating what we do, fine art, high art, with deck culture, for instance. The idea that if you're into the middle-class lifestyle, you should have a decorative suite of deck chairs. I'm trying to equate these kinds of things. I thought of this technique. A lot of these decorations are based on one of my favorites, Hans Jean Arp. I don't know if you know his work *Untitled (Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)* [1917]. It's one of my favorites. These felt pieces are taken straight from the package. They come from the same place as Dada. It's this “adult contemporary” idea. I don't know how to describe it.
JORDAN
I can describe it back to you. It's the gestalt of being an upper-middle-class person in society and how they would decorate their home when in fact they have no taste.
ERIC
Right. As the Dada artists wanted to destroy this idea of taste, let's say.

JORDAN
Or not it's not art. It's not all chance.
ERIC
You're right, but it flips itself.
JORDAN
They are using chance and they think chance has intention. Chance has intention in their life. It's like some IKEA thing.
ERIC
Yes. Totally. As a matter of fact, the original chair was an IKEA. But its design comes from the lounge, the deck chair, and what that says about chance and intention.
JORDAN
But also, it's a kind of adult play.
ERIC
Yes, “adult contemporary.”
JORDAN
I get it. I know. I understand. The gestalt of “adult contemporary.” Let's walk through the show one more time now.
ERIC
My works with stones come from this hippie-type thing of stacking rocks on the trail.
JORDAN
My art teacher in high school made stacked rock sculptures.
ERIC
Somebody was telling me that there's an artist who does only that. But they are real stones with a steel rod connecting them.
JORDAN
Hmm, that may be him, but it also may be someone else, because I know it's a popular thing to do.
ERIC
Yes, both in the art world and outside.
JORDAN
Mind if I ask you something? When I look at this work, it feels almost conventional in a gallery. But if it were in someone's home, it would appear very obscene. Do you fear that it would appear obscene in a home?
ERIC
In a gallery, it's almost like a joke about art.
ERIC
Right. But you also have to consider the ambition of the museum. It's intentional, this Formica on all the pedestals. It's supposed to also be about a “Jeff Koons type” sculpture or something. There's a certain aesthetic running through the show. If you take it from a gallery and put it in a museum, that's a thing. Take it from the gallery and put it in a house, it's a thing. But does any of this recontextualizing really matter?
ERIC
I'm more concerned with the formalism of the tree, from vertical to horizontal; the rocks are horizontal, the stones become vertical. The important thing with the artwork is the formal aspect. I'm a formalist artist and the things we're talking about are secondary to that energy.
JORDAN
I understand.
ERIC
I try to build it up so it collapses and falls back on itself. I don't pretend to know. We can't know, but I'm attracted to this energy. Do you see what I mean or no?
JORDAN
I see what you mean. I do think I have a relationship to your work and I am a fan of it.

ERIC
Well, likewise. Do you feel respected? Your peers like your work?
JORDAN
I don't think about it.
ERIC
Do you work mostly with computers?
JORDAN
I'm all on the computer.
ERIC
Do you know how to do the work on computers?
JORDAN
I have people who work in my studio, but I'm also working in my studio using programs. I troubleshot a corrupted file for two hours today.
ERIC
How do you think technology like Neuralink will react with what we do?
JORDAN
I think it will help us, and might lead to an advancement in spirituality. Maybe we can deprogram psychological pain and agitation from our minds. I also look forward to being smarter and communicating with more people.
ERIC
Would you get the procedure done if it was available today?
JORDAN
Yes.
ERIC
Performance art is still a thing, Conceptual art is still a thing. Do you think Pop art is still a thing?
JORDAN
Yes, but the gestalt has tilted: it can appear ironic now rather than generated from a collective consciousness. I find it smaller, less interesting, and more aggressive now. Pop art now is very dark; if not in actual pain, it suggests much pain. By the way, are you and Piero Golia still good friends?
ERIC
Piero and I are like brothers. We're quite different people and fight sometimes but that's usually within the context of art, not life.
JORDAN
Los Angeles has filled so quickly with artists. It's not the same small community. But for many of us you are still an unsung hero. The myth of you breaking the table and getting booted from Metro Pictures upon your first show. Will you recount that story in detail?
ERIC
I didn't break anything all those years ago in New York; the whole thing was just a big misunderstanding with civilians that escalated within the art world context. Also understand that this was coupled with the tragedy of Giovanni Intra's untimely death, which I was completely unaware of at the time. An unfortunate and unrelated string of events that reflected poorly and unfairly on me. The gallery had a history of this “bad boy” activity, which I was not aware of at the time. I believe they felt they had to distance themselves from potential guilt by association. No hard feelings.



Jordan Wolfson, *Untitled*, 2019. Courtesy: the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London. Photo: Mario De Lopez

ERIC WESLEY (b. 1973, Los Angeles) has had solo exhibitions internationally, including at MOCA, Los Angeles, and Fondazione Morra Greco, Naples. His work has been included in exhibitions at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; Museo d'Arte, Benevento; the 2004 Whitney Biennial, New York; the Prague Biennale; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; MoMA PS1, New York; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. He is a cofounder of the Los Angeles Mountain School of Arts.

Eric Wesley, *I Beam U Channel*, 2015. Courtesy: the artist and Bortolami, New York



Over the past decade, JORDAN WOLFSON (b. 1980, New York; lives and works in New York and Los Angeles) has become known for his work in video, sculpture, installation, photography, and performance. He pulls from the world of advertising, the internet, and the technology industries to produce ambitious and enigmatic narratives involving a series of invented, animated characters. Recent exhibitions include *Riverboat song*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2019); *Female Figure*, The Broad, Los Angeles (2018); *360: Jordan Wolfson*, Zabudowicz Collection, London (2018); *Colored sculpture*, The Tanks, Tate Modern, London (2018); *Riverboat song*, David Zwirner, New York (2018); *Riverboat song*, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2018); *Riverboat song*, Pond Society, Shanghai (2017); *Riverboat song*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2017);

TRUTH / LOVE, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2017); *MANIC / LOVE*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2016); *Jordan Wolfson: Colored sculpture*, LUMA Foundation, Arles (2016); David Zwirner, New York (2016). In 2013, *Jordan Wolfson: Ecce Homo/le Poseur* marked the most comprehensive survey of his work to date, organized by the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent, Belgium. Also in 2013 was his first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom presented at the Chisenhale Gallery in London. Other institutions that have previously hosted solo shows include the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; REDCAT, Los Angeles (both 2012); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2011); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2009); Swiss Institute of Contemporary Art, New York (2008); Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo (2007); and the Kunsthalle Zürich (2004). Work by Wolfson is held in public collections worldwide, including the Broad, Los Angeles; Cleveland Museum of Art; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo; Fonds national d'art contemporain (FNAC); LUMA Foundation, Zurich; Magasin III Museum and Foundation for Contemporary Art, Stockholm; the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent; Tate, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



Eric Wesley, *Mona Lisa*, 2018. Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Fonti, Naples



Jordan Wolfson, *Untitled* (detail), 2018. Courtesy: the artist and David Zwirner Gallery, New York / London / Hong Kong. Photo: John Smith