

# Gordon Hall's *Hands and Knees*

Group Visit Teaching Guide to exhibition *Hands and Knees* at The Kitchen at Westbeth

## What is *Hands and Knees*?

Five pairs of sculptures wrought from chrome cantilever chair structures stand in impermanent positions throughout The Kitchen's sunlit loft. These abstracted chairs hold horizontal platforms that allow bodies to recline in specific and unexpected ways. The sculptures wait for bodies to reshape themselves around them, anticipating the possibility of use. Prostrate on these unconventional supports, suspended performers likewise await further movement. Animated by a transgender politics that questions the norms that govern embodied life, *Hands and Knees* extends Gordon Hall's investigation into the politics of vulnerability and corporeal support. Performers demonstrate possible engagements with the sculptures in weekly performances that emerge from Hall's inquiry into the paradoxical interplay of dependency and liberation in moments of waiting.

Hall's approach to sculpture is shaped by their background in dance, emphasizing how we coexist with objects in shared space: "From the start, I was thinking about our bodies as incredible objects that can be trained and transformed—not in a degrading way, but as a way of respecting the fundamental power of the physical world, our bodies included. I make sculpture as a way of exploring these embodied possibilities." For that reason, Hall's sculptures always precede their accompanying choreography, which is generated in response to the sculptures. Ultimately, *Hands and Knees* imagines bodies emancipated from their prescribed uses. "Part of what I love about objects is that they always exceed what we might hope for them, even as the maker," says Hall. "There's a politics of taking materiality seriously on its own terms, not as a mere tool for our goals."

Stripped of their seats and backs and reshaped into new geometric structures, the hardware of the Breuer-popularized and mass-reproduced chair is both recognizable and abstract. The snaking steel forms once designed for support now open themselves to new uses. Draped over the sculptures, performers carry one another throughout the space, ultimately reorganizing the object's positions in the gallery. They rest in their new arrangement—static but animated with potential—until they, once again, encounter other constantly transforming objects: human bodies.

Learn more about the [exhibition here](#).

## Pre-Visit

Before you visit, think about:

1. Do you have a favorite piece of furniture? What does it mean to you? What memories do you associate with it?
2. Reimagine a chair. How would it need to look for a body different from your own? Could you make it as comfy as possible? As uncomfortable as possible?
3. What can performance mean? In what ways are you performing in your daily life; for example: your clothes, how you walk, how you change your tone of voice for different occasions?
4. What is your experience with waiting? When have you hated it most? Have you ever enjoyed waiting?

## Important Words and Terms to Define

Below are some key terms used in the exhibition. Some of these terms are subjective and depend on different historical connotations. Read the below definitions and use your own research to expand upon them. Maybe you have your own definition of them!

1. Abstract: artwork that is not a realistic representation of something, but uses shape and gesture to evoke a feeling or discuss a concept
2. Breuer: Marcel Lajos Breuer was an architect and furniture designer famous for his design of modern chairs inspired by bicycles.
3. Emancipated: free from, liberated

## During your visit

Engage with artist Gordon Hall's [lecture and accompanying images](#).

- This Lecture-performance was originally presented in conjunction with *Scott Burton: Shape Shift* at The Pulitzer Arts Foundation, October 19, 2024. Re-presented at *Tom Burr: The Torrington Project* on October 25, 2024.
- Find a printed copy of this lecture and a wall of images in the back right corner of the gallery space.

## Post-Visit

### Reflection

1. In artist Gordon Hall and Curator Mathew Lyon's wall text, they discuss gender and identity and their relation to the sculptures. Now that you've spent time with the sculptures, how do you think they comment on gender and identity?
2. Did you recognize the sculptures as chairs? What was recognizable? What was new?
3. As you walked through Hall's sculptures, could you imagine yourself using them as seats? How would your body need to move to use them?
4. In Hall's 1-2pm Lecture, they speak about waiting and its diverse political contexts. After spending time with this exhibition and Hall's lecture, has your perspective on waiting changed? How can you change your relationship to waiting?

### Activity

Timekeeping Meditation: Artist Gordon Hall asks us to re-evaluate our relationship with the passage of time. This activity is designed to calibrate your internal clock and get comfortable with waiting.

#### Materials:

1. Timer, watch, or clock

#### Steps:

1. Set your timer for one minute
2. Try to keep the time without looking or listening to the timer
3. When you think it has been a minute, check and see if you are right
4. Continue this meditation practice until you are able to track a minute correctly
5. Try it with 30 seconds, or 2 minutes, or even an hour!