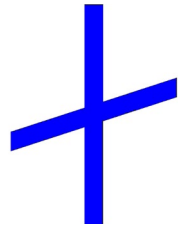


LIVE / WORK
Brad Troemel
October 12 - November 9, 2014

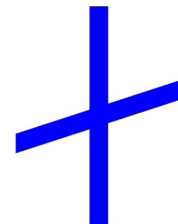


So what's this exhibition all about, anyway? Well, these are infertile female harvester worker ants! The gel they're tunneling through is edible and provides them with all necessary nutrients and water. When tunneling, these workers complete each task from start to finish: biting into the gel, chewing and packing smaller bits into larger spheres, carrying gel chunks up to the surface, and storing refuse in designated piles. Some gel is eaten along the way, but most is excavated and organized in the process of burrowing downward. Individual ants take turns completing each task alone to completion. One must wonder – when will ant labor evolve to incorporate collaborative just-in-time tunnel building strategies, or even Fordist production lines? Are disruptive innovations even possible species-wide if made within isolated habitats? These are just some of the questions this generation of ants faces.

At the present moment it's difficult to discern whether the ants' chosen inefficiency is due to pride or survival. Is it dignity they feel in their varied knowledge? Or does long-form work serve as the stimulation that staves off the looming realization that their circumstances are infinite? Some people say ants build tunnels aimlessly, but those people haven't watched ants for as long as I have. Ants tend to tunnel from the furthest ends of their homes downwards, eventually connecting all eight corners. I found the ants stopped digging as productively when placed in larger, 30" x 22" homes. "If the ants have forsaken efficiency, then what incentive structures can I create to provide for maximum productivity?" I frantically asked myself. I tried sprinkling additional food sources, using different gel brands, varying the water amounts- all to no avail.

As a last ditch effort, I drilled 1/16" holes through the clear acrylic ant homes. Incisions were made at the very ends of previously abandoned tunnels. These turned out to be aspirational holes, the types of holes that inspire those around them. The ants could see the outside world again and they would even jam their little legs and antennae out of the openings. Maybe the ants believed they were the ones who created the holes and that if they just kept digging onward there would be bigger and better holes laying ahead. At any rate, the ants sprung to action, chewing viciously to clear space around the drilled holes then continuing further outward in the direction the tunnel was going previously. I suspect the holes allowed for greater air flow, decreasing the humidity levels and stickiness of the gel in surrounding areas, allowing for greater mobility when transporting gel. Ants communicate via secreted hormone trails, and I believe the excitement of a new air source leads to a re-routing of communal pathways. "It's a good tunnel now!" they'd say cheerfully. 1/16" is large enough to ventilate but too small for the body of a harvester ant to fit through. Over time the ants would lose interest in the drilled holes, and newer, more appealing holes would need to be made.

If the ants could fit their bodies through the drilled holes they would be able to get far enough from their homes to step back and see the names and colors of the organizations their hard work supports. You see, each team of ants is working on behalf of three not-for-profit organizations. The striped colors of the homes represent the colors of the not-for-profits' logos. These organizations range from the Earth Liberation Front to Edward Snowden's Legal Defense Fund to Planned Parenthood. At the end of this exhibition, each home's piled up refuse from tunneling is weighed as a proxy for which team of ants did the most work digging. Whichever team's displaced gel weighs the most wins the prize for their three organizations, splitting 10% of the proceeds from this exhibition three ways. Maybe if the ants knew about all of the good their tunnels are doing for the world they wouldn't even need aspirational holes, but some probably still would.



1. "Victory Yellow Rose Blank Check", 2014
Framed Erasable PVC, liquid chalk, frame
31 x 60.5 inches
2. "Victory Red Rose Blank Check", 2014
Framed erasable PVC, liquid chalk, frame
31 x 60.5 inches
3. "Victory Pink Rose Blank Check", 2014
Framed Erasable PVC, liquid chalk, frame
31 x 60.5 inches
4. "Frontline / Chelsea Manning Defense Fund / Oxfam", 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount
22 x 30 x 1 inches
5. 'ELF / Planned Parenthood / Edward Snowden Defense Fund', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
6. 'Wikipedia / Stem Cell Network / PBS, 2014', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
7. 'Greenpeace / Drug Policy Alliance / ACLU', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
8. 'Free State Project / Harlem Children's Zone / Rolling Jubilee Fund', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
9. 'Gay and Lesbian Leadership Institute / Feeding America / Teach for America', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
10. 'The Tor project / Take Back the Land / Earth First!', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
11. 'Critical Resistance / Environmental Defense Fund / Iraq Veterans Against the War', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches
12. 'Bitcoin Foundation / Sunlight Foundation / Center for American Progress', 2014
Acrylic, ant chow, polished aluminum wire mount, ants
22 x 30 x 1 inches

