

Ezra Venditti

PARTY GIRL BOY GIRL

May 12, 2024

Art 301: Senior Project

Gordon Hall

I have spent the last four years learning how to party. In high school I wasn't socially relevant in my small, conservative Georgia town, so I never went out. Coming into college at Vassar, I knew I would be reconstructing myself, so I quickly found and became part of the campus music scene. I did go to a lot of concerts in high school, and more than anything else I think watching the crowd gave me a model of who I wanted to be in the future. I wanted to be uninhibited, in a friend group, watching live music. Of the organizations I joined at Vassar, VC Sound System, the DJ club, was the most important. It's where I first met party people who would end up becoming mentors to me.

There are many different ways to engage in partying. For most people it's a hobby. It's something that's done thoughtlessly, to release stress, socialize, dance, and get drunk or high in a socially acceptable space. There is nothing wrong with this, but for some people parties mean a lot more than just a chance to let go - in fact, for me, parties are often when I feel most present and thoughtful.

I have ADHD, and the cluttered stimuli of a party is often enough to overwhelm my fragmented ways of thinking - while my thoughts are still going in every direction, each of those directions leads to something that's going on around me: "is the guy throwing up in the backyard okay," or "who is my friend making out with across the room," or "what track is the DJ playing," or "why is the floor so bouncy?" I often refer to myself as a "party spectator." In the context of Vassar parties, where spaces are crowded and full of people that I know, I tend not to enjoy dancing, so instead I watch. The parties which happen (just about every weekend) here are usually the social events of the week. If you pay attention, you can figure out what sort of social situations everyone is in - maybe this is a smarter way of saying that I love to gossip and I'm perceptive.

Beyond just the individual social situations, you can read the vibe of the campus as a whole. Especially this last year, I've been noticing the energy that each individual party has. Functions which happened, for example, near midterms weeks were generally noted as less fulfilling than those that happened when people were less engaged in classwork. This seems obvious to say, but I think most people just noted those parties as being randomly worse than others. As a party watcher, I am able to see these connections which may go disregarded otherwise.

It makes sense that when I found more academic writings about partying, I became hooked. Books such as *Raving* by McKenzie Wark and *Playing with Something That Runs* by Mark J. Butler provided me with a deeper way of thinking about parties. *Raving* is a personal narrative on the Brooklyn techno/rave scene which largely describes raving as a dissociative act in which you are meant to "get fucked by the music," while *Playing with Something that Runs* is a music theory book on the nature of Electronic Dancing performance, largely focussing on a concept of "liveness" which is called into question when so much of what electronic artists do is focused on digital production. For the past year especially, a lot of my free time has been spent trying to understand the phenomena of the party.

In my time reading "party theory," I found a surprising lack of literature about the college party, which surprised me. So many people reflect on college as their "party years," but maybe it's too early for people to try to understand it in a theoretical sense. This gap feels significant to me, and so I decided that I would make a piece of literature on the college party, in the form of a magazine. This form feels ideal to me because it allows for the presentation of multiple different ideas in one space. I wanted to put my own research into use in a few articles about specific party phenomena, from setting up to DJing.

I don't want this magazine to just be from my perspective, though, so I also interviewed many friends and figures in the campus party scene. Parties at Vassar are often curated spaces, with a specific guest list (though most parties get leaked and end up with more than just who was invited at them) - these interviews function as a sort of guest list to me. It's a selection of people from the community whose opinions felt relevant to me. This isn't to say only the people I interviewed have meaningful thoughts, this is really just a sampling. This wasn't a sociological experiment. I tried, at one point, to open it up to the community with a QR code asking people's best party memory, which got only two responses, and one Fizz (anonymous Vassar-specific app) post, asking the same question, which got one response: "leaving."

The amount of text which I've generated in making this magazine is actually more than the physical magazine can contain, so I also have made a corresponding blog to serve as an "expanded edition." This blog, lasergazing.blog, contains longer cuts of interviews (as well as a few which didn't make it to the physical version), a few more articles (and some poetry) from me, an archive of party emails that I've received at Vassar, a reading list, and a glossary of relevant terms, places, and people.

Literature is a solitary object. Reading is generally something that you do by yourself - having to keep pace with someone else as they turn the page is usually annoying. Both magazines and websites are things that you can carry with you (in the case of websites, through the vessel of a phone or laptop) and engage with as you please. Partying is almost the opposite of that - it requires some mass of people and at least a little bit of planning. I've found that my own experiences with throwing parties and events are actually very similar to the ways that I think about art, and, more specifically, sculpture.

The sculptural practice which I have developed in the past two years relies heavily on the

theme of balance. The majority of my recent sculptures are only freestanding when placed in the exact correct way, and a slight bump could knock over most of them. This balance places the individual pieces of the sculpture - usually two pieces of wood, some with various accouterments (rope, metal rods, wigs, and chain), in a direct relationship with each other. If the angle cut on the bottom of a piece of wood is wrong, or if a wig shifts on its stand, or a chain is too short, the sculpture will fall and become dysfunctional. Parties are the same. They're spaces constructed by relationships - hookups and best friends and people you would rather not talk to. A good party, especially at Vassar, depends on me having at least one person that I'm actively interested in talking to there.

On a more work-oriented train of thought, the relationships between factors such as time, the music that is played, having the right cords, and curating the right guest list, are vital in making a party "work." Pulling up to the basement of Fairmont and playing exclusively noise might be fun for me, but it would not work for the whole party - I maintain the balance with techno remixes of Lana Del Rey.

The main theme of my installation, titled PARTY GIRL BOY GIRL is largely about my relationship with gender in the party scene. I have recently realized that, more than in any other space, at parties I perform femininity. When I'm wearing a wig I feel like I DJ better. I put on skimpy clothes that show off features which I actively try to hide in my day-to-day life. My dancing, when I choose to do it, is flowy and open (if you've ever tried to observe the differences between the way that people of different genders dance, especially when given space, men generally tend to close off their bodies and do more rigid movements).

I do, on a personal level, like to get dressed up and wear badly applied makeup and cheap wigs, but I think part of the reason that I trend towards femininity at parties is because I want to

be wanted. Parties are sexual spaces for many people, though my experiences, specifically at Vassar parties, are devoid of that notion. I don't want to go too deep into the reasons why, but there is some part of me that believes, in a deeply socially ingrained way, that if I could figure out how to be a girl at a party my luck might be better.

The installation is lit by LED par lights as opposed to the expected track lighting which is native to the installation space. The aesthetic which I've taken on in my own work is fairly minimalist, and I am hoping to liven up the scene of lightly gray washed wooden arrangements with colorful lighting which is typical of the party scenes that the work is about.

Additionally, I made the decision to have all of the cords in the room be very visually obvious, some taped to the wall with thick black bars of gaff tape, others piled on the floor or around the object they're connected to. In my time setting up parties I've always found it interesting how quickly my labor becomes invisible. It makes sense - you don't want a ton of loose cords lying around on a dancefloor. Since the gallery is a space where people move around more intentionally, I wanted to take the chance to leave the cords out so as to make my own work more obvious. Obviously it's clear that I made the sculptures, but the presence of cords makes the labor of installing the show more visible, and I want to have that level of transparency.

The magazine will be getting some space in the installation as well - I am planning to have a laptop with the Laser Gazing blog open and perusable on-site.

Image List

Audio 1 + Video 1 + Image 1:

A Presence in the Room

Subwoofer, aux to XLR cable, extension cord, audio recording (edited)

26 in x 266 in x 26 in

2024

Video 2 + Image 2:

Good Enough to Eat

CRT, single channel video

48 in x 32 in x 30 in

2023

Image 3 + 4:

A Culture That I Understand

Drug bags, club + concert wristbands, thread, fabric, wooden dowel

45 in x 32 in x ¼ in

2024

Image 5+6:

Self Portrait with a Budweiser (or, the most masculine thing i do at a party)

Wood, screws, hinges, my dad's "Acid Sweater", an open Budweiser

20 in x 26 in x 17 in

2024

Image 7+8+9:

Beat Loop (2x)

Broken ¾ in. cable (found)

115 in x 91 in x 35 in

2023

Image 10+11:

Perched/Watching

Wood, handcuffs, acrylic paint, airbrush paint, latex paint

27 in x 36 ¼ in x 3 ½ in

2023

Image 12+13+14:

Wig Bitch (before the party)

Neon Green Wig, wood, plastic chain, metal rods

55 in x 80 in x 10 in

2023

Image 15+16+17+18:

Latched/Leaning Post

Wood, hinge, screws, latch

65 in x 2 ½ in x 14 in

2023

Image 19+20+21:

Conversation

Wigs, metal rods, wood

50 in x 27 in x 7 in

2024

Image 22:

The End of the Night

Stretched latex, grommets, airbrush paint, nails

40 in x 40 in

2023

Image 23+24+25:

Single Dosage

Drug bags, pill casings, wig hair, rhinestones

2024

Image 26+27:

Triptych for a Bathroom

Wooden panel, plexiglass mirror, paper, india ink, graphite pencils, oil pastels, nails, screws, staples

21 in x 44 in x 3 in

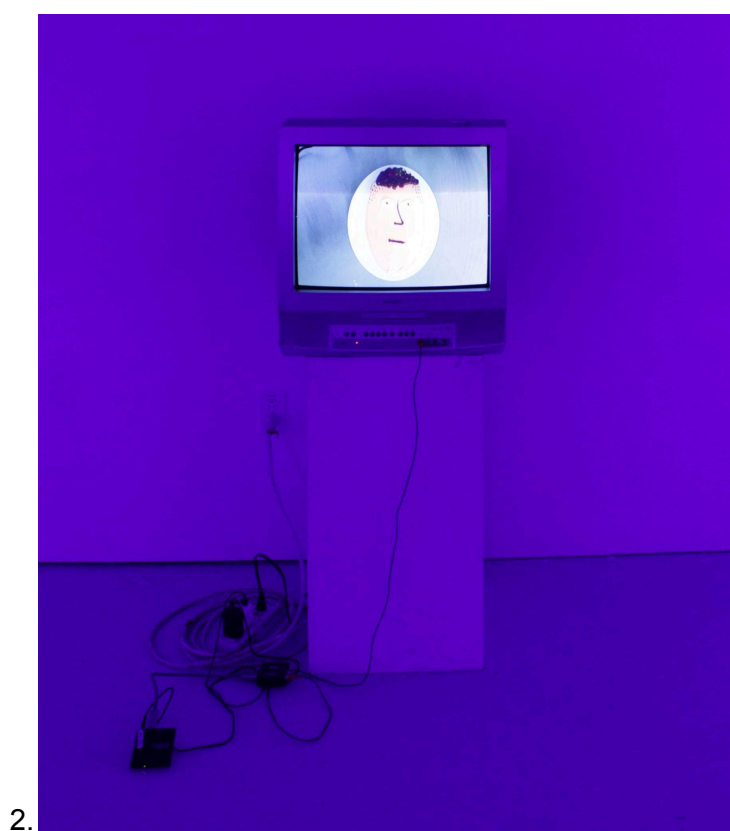
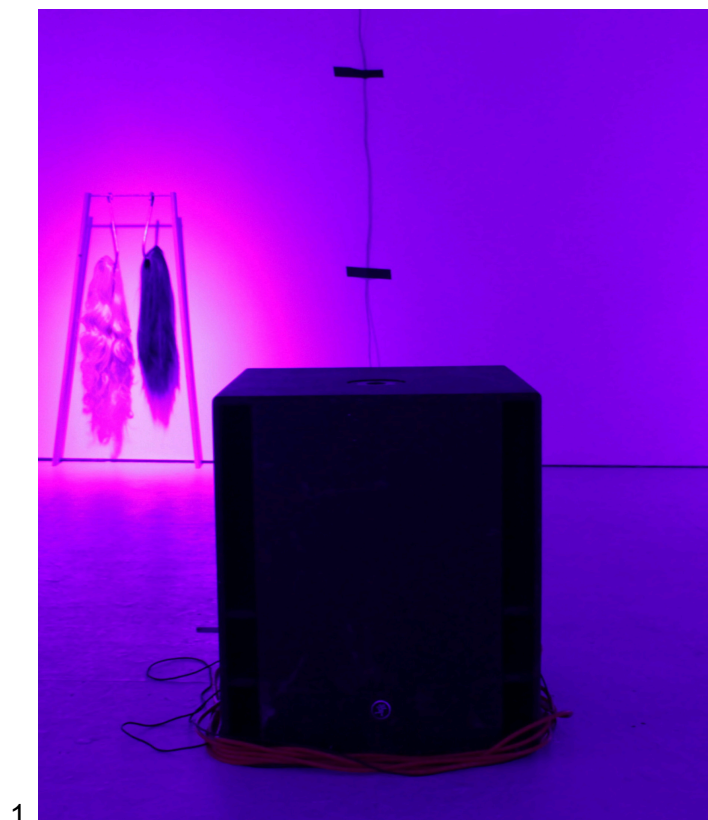
2023

Image 28 + 29:

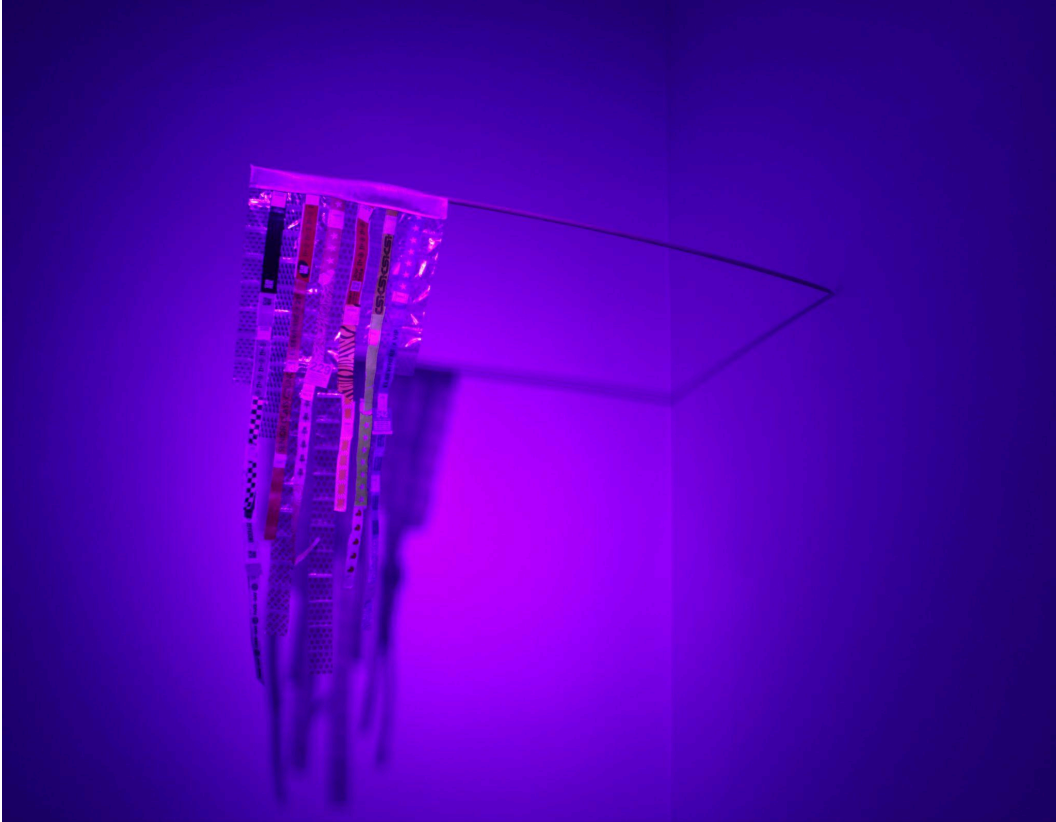
Laser Gazing Blog/Reading Station

Image 30+31+32+33:

Installation Views

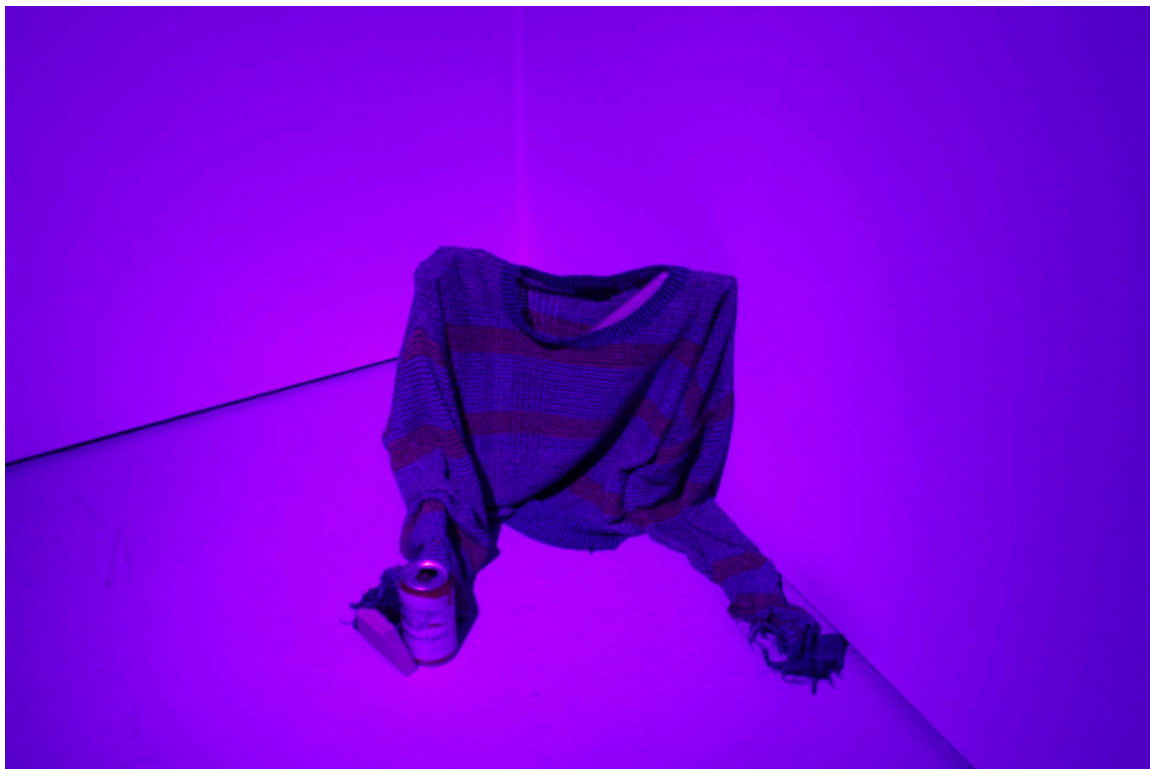


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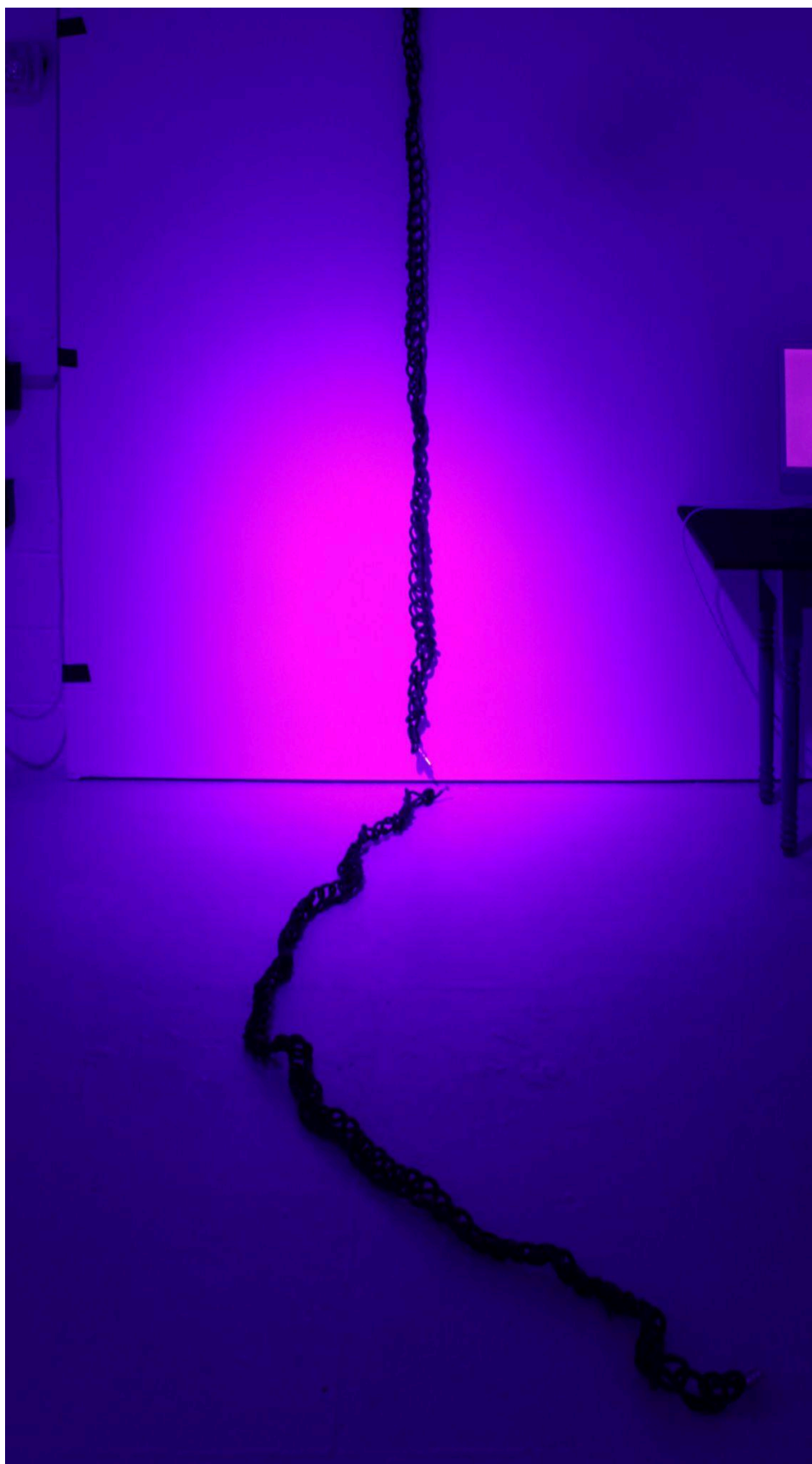




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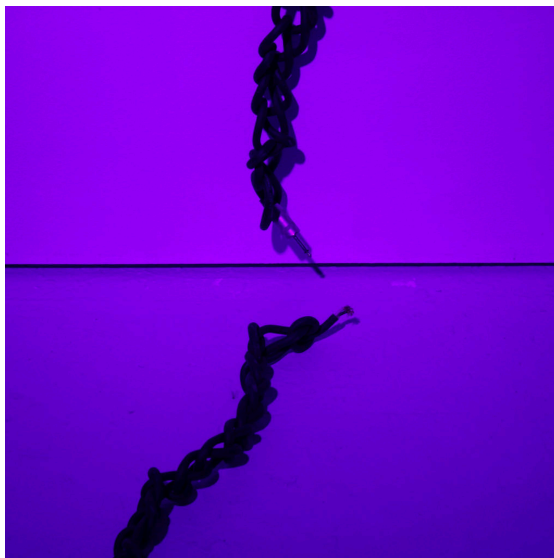


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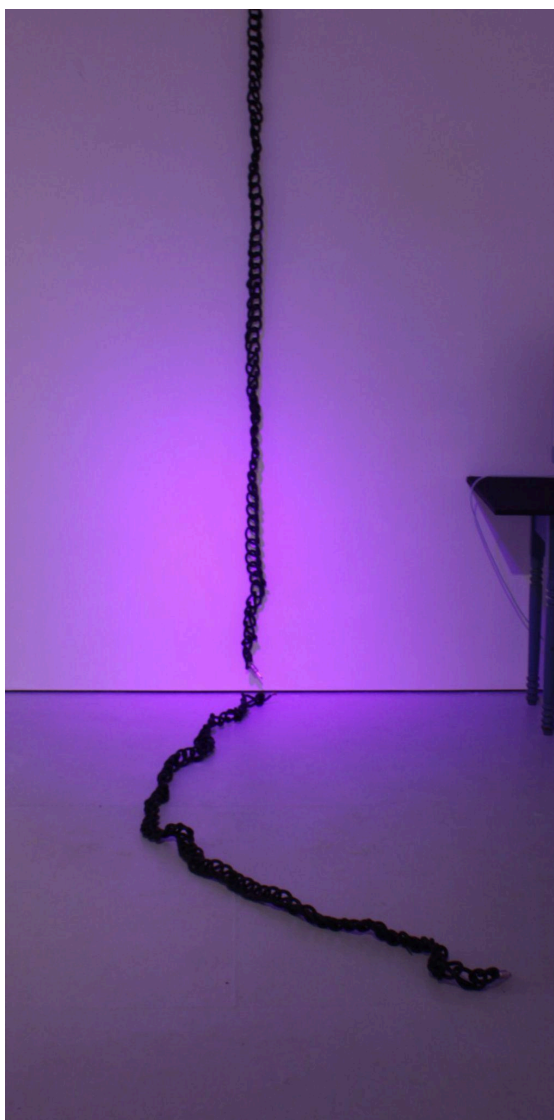


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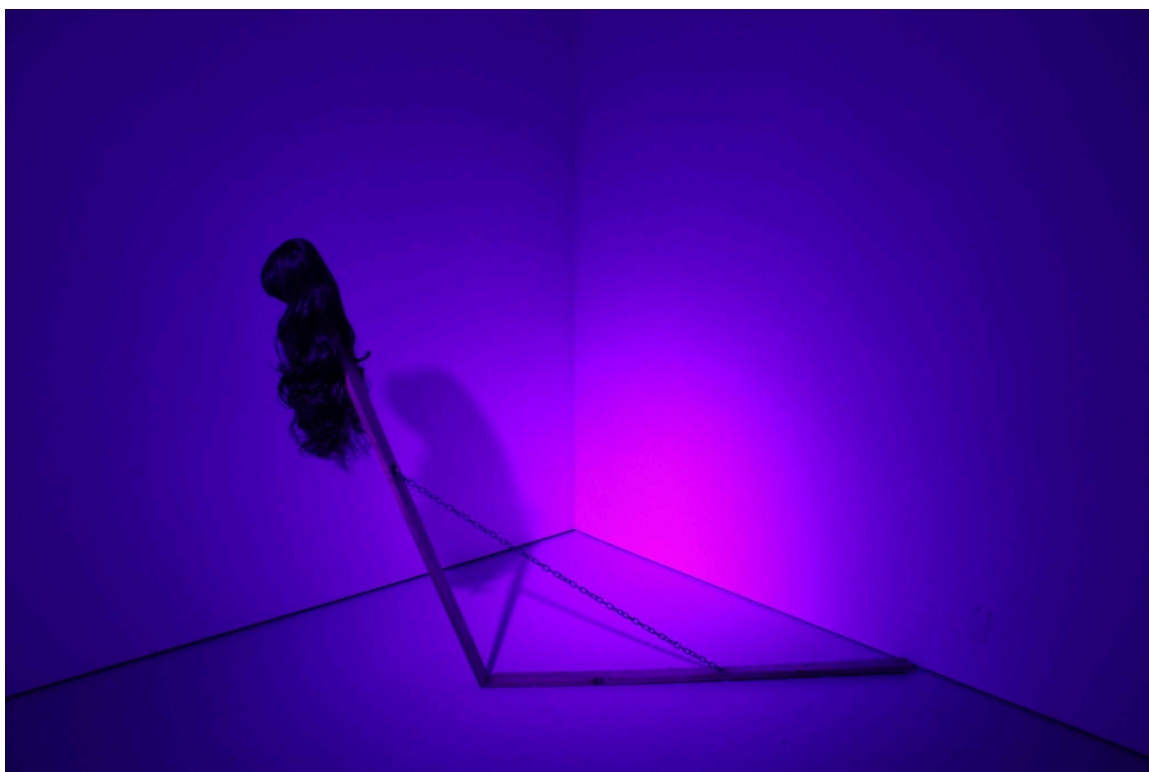


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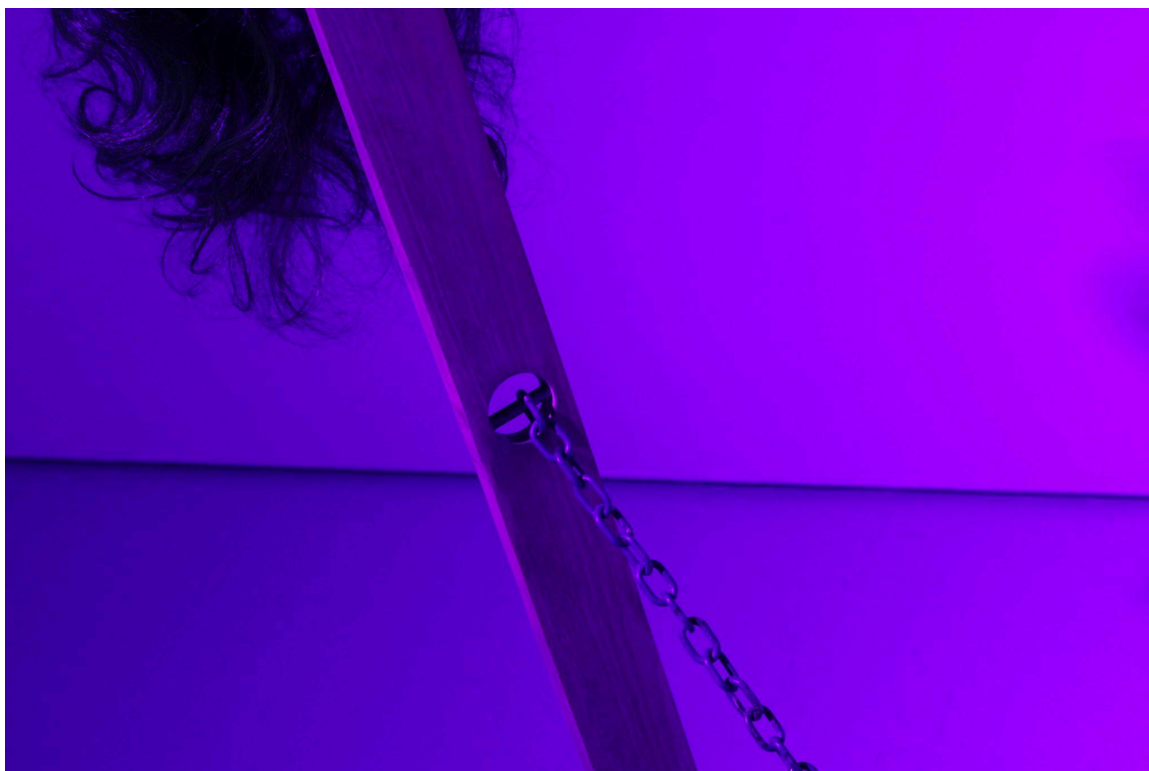


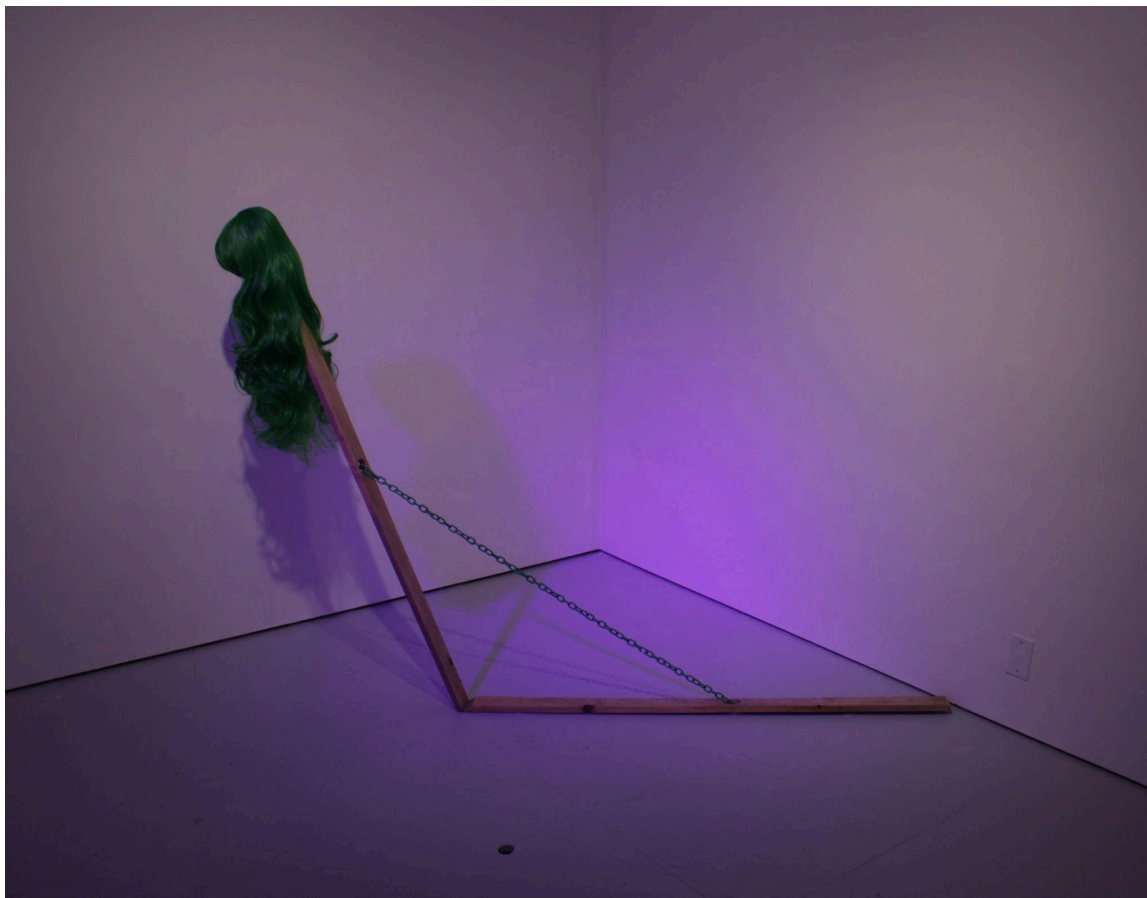
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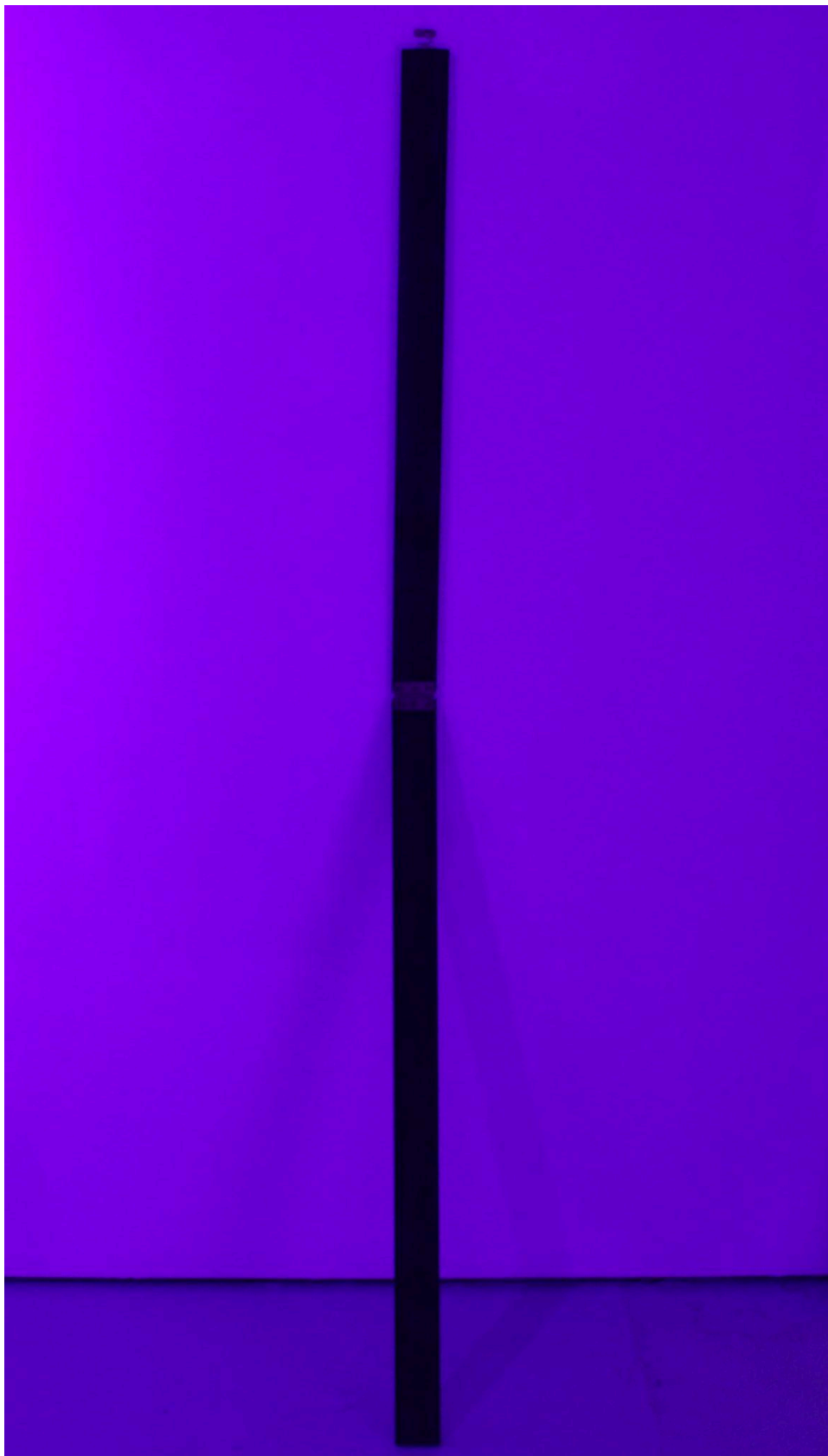
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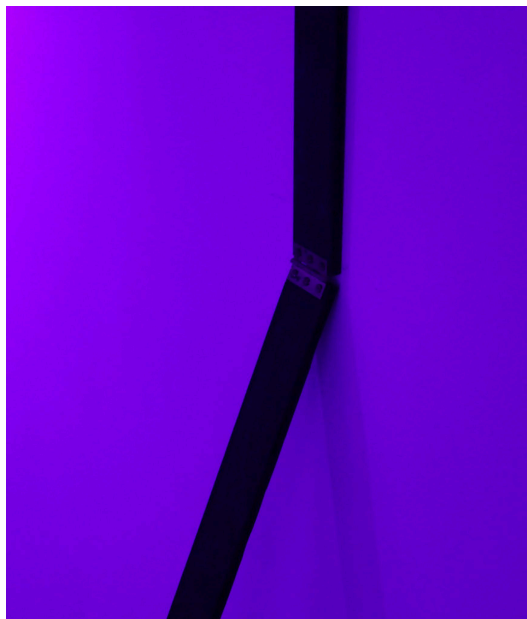


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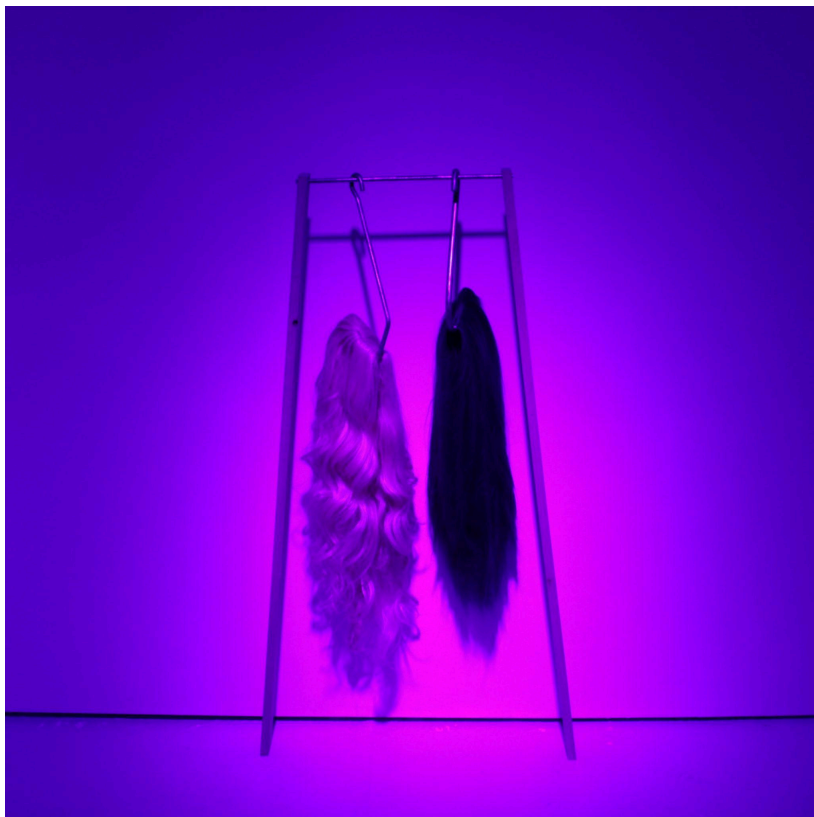


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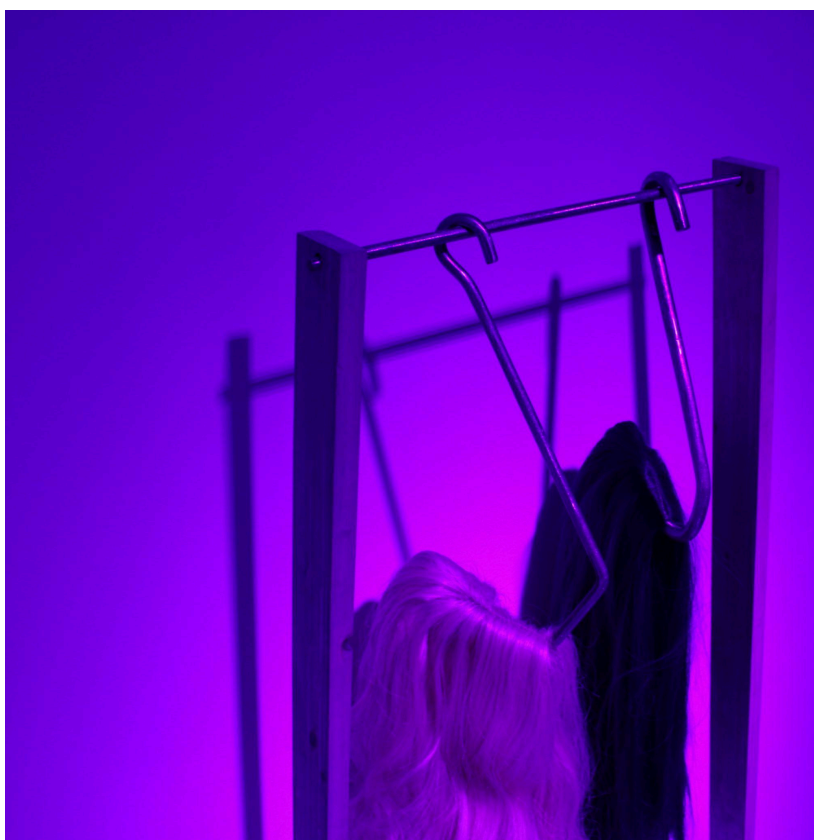




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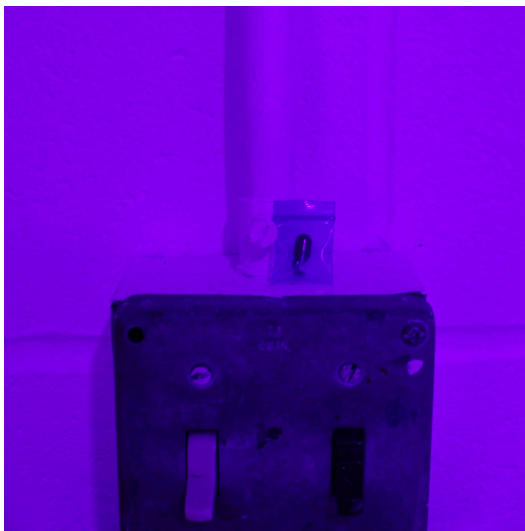


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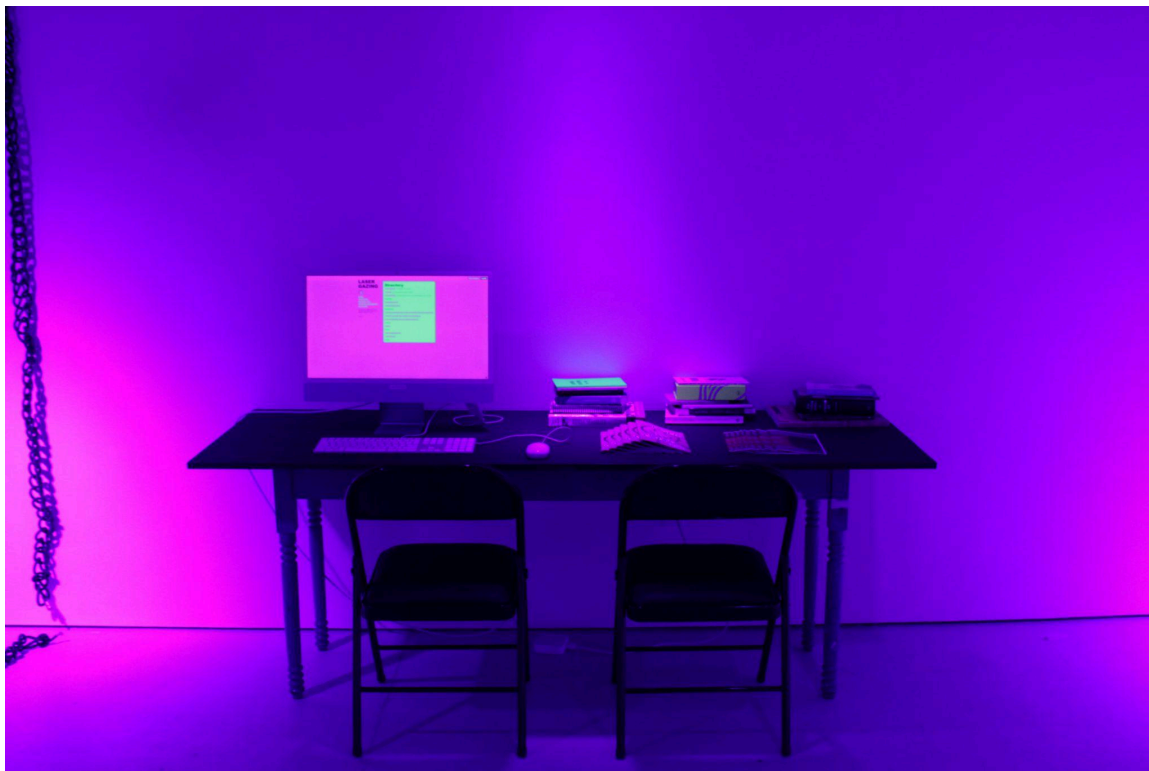
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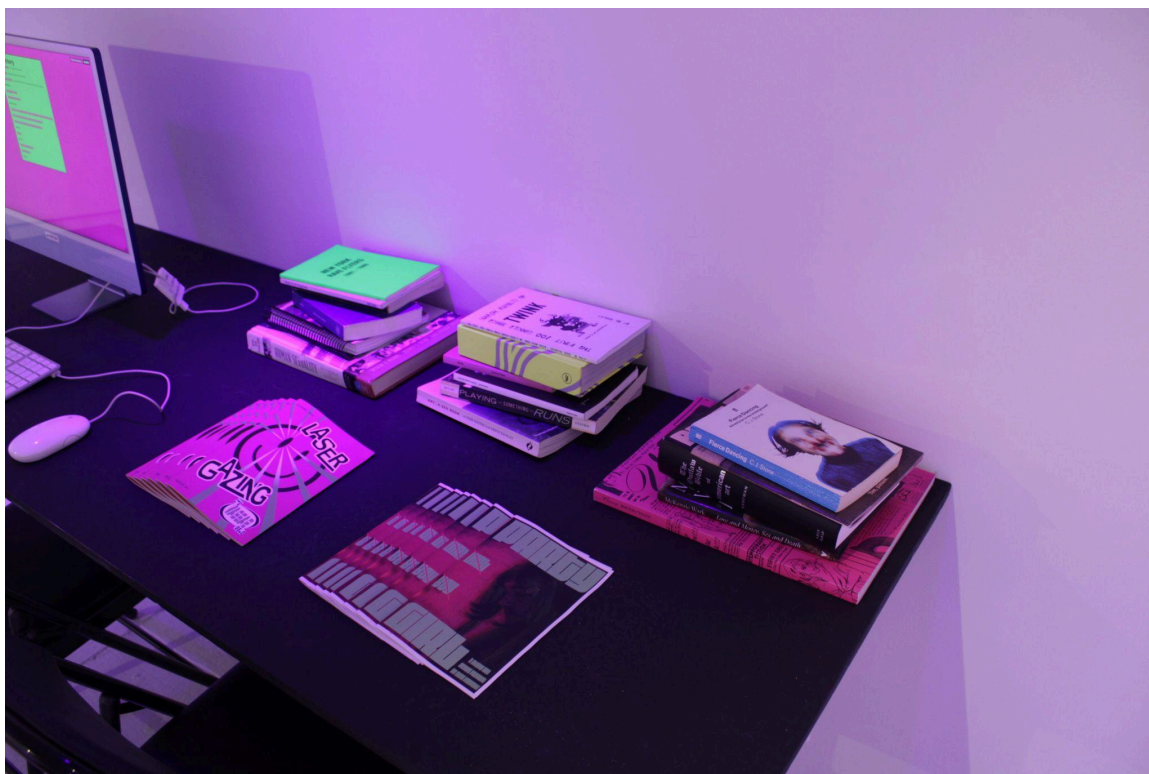
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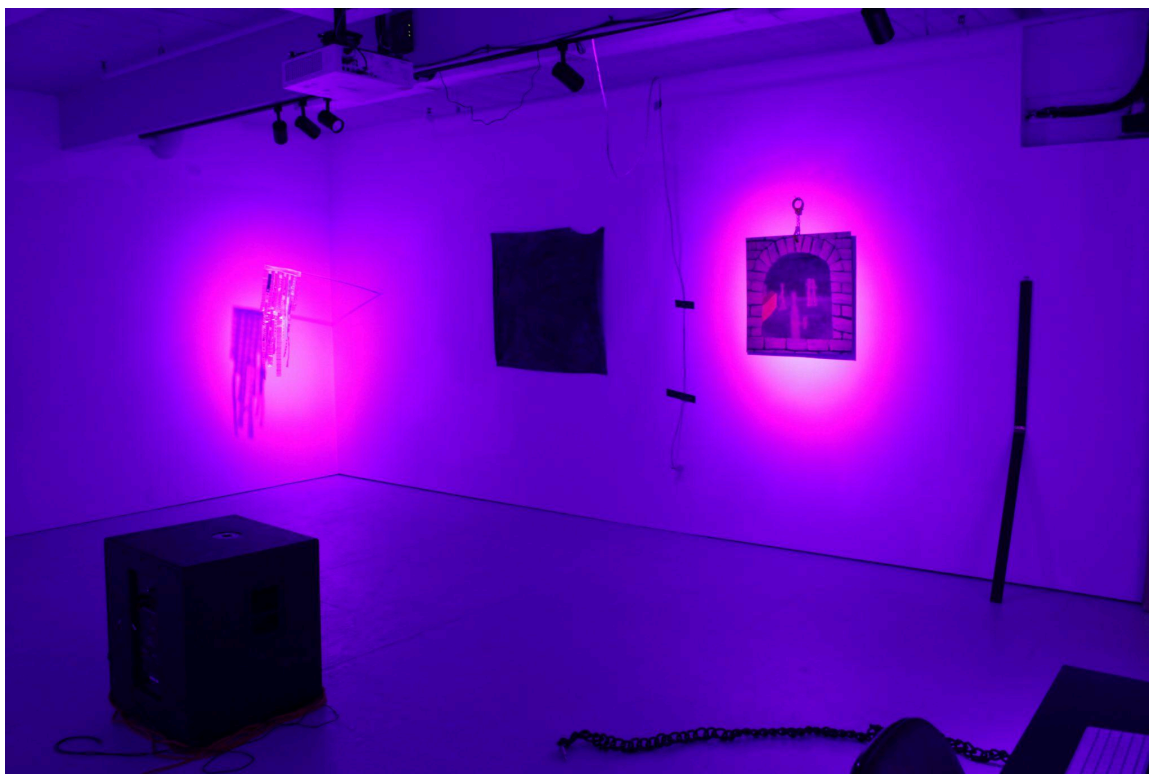


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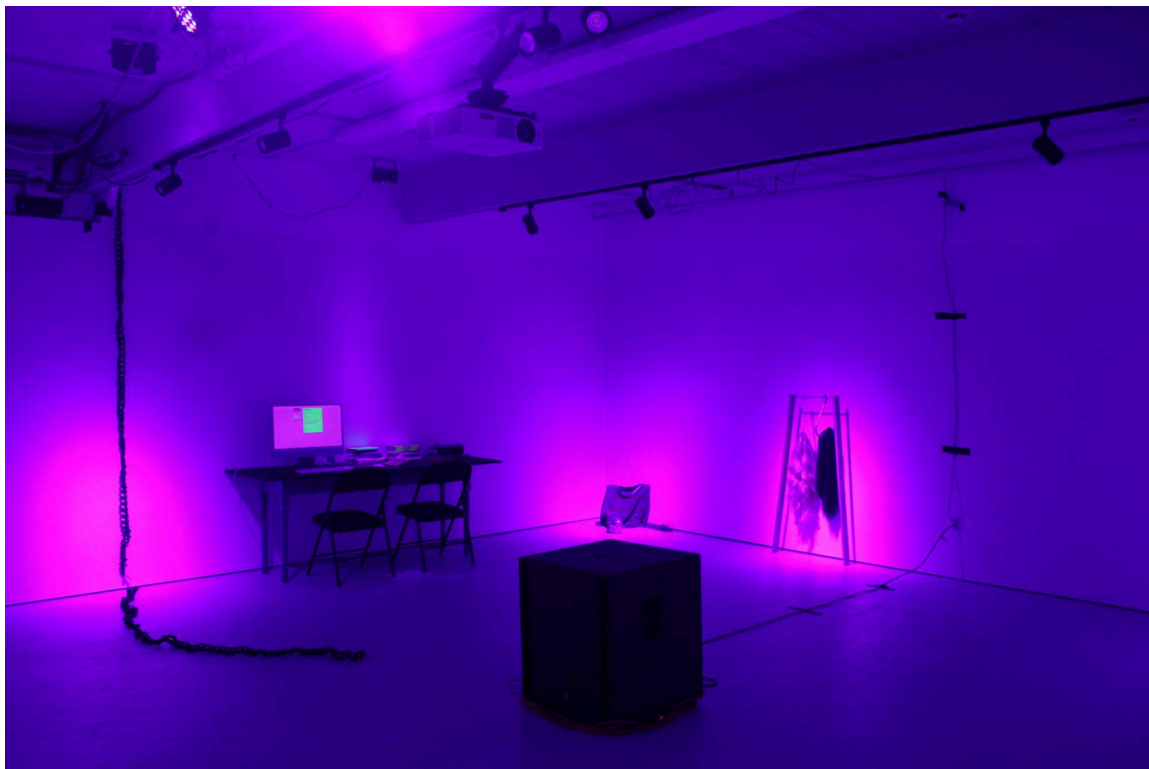


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