



LINDSAY ARNOLD

TEDIUM

ART GALLERY OF REGINA



Lift, 2018, acrylic on panel, 24 x 18 inches



Mess 2, 2018, acrylic on panel, 12 x 18 inches



Anniversary, 2018, acrylic on panel, 24 x 36 inches

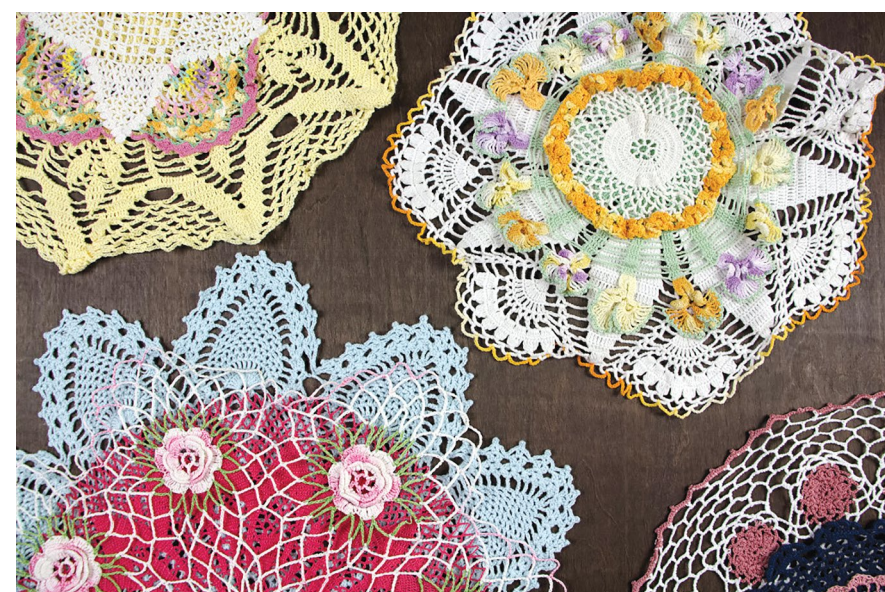


Table Dance (video still), 2017, stop motion video, 3:12 minutes

Lindsay Arnold: Tedium

- C. *Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.)
The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The
culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs =
minimum wages, housewives = no pay.*

*clean your desk, wash the dishes, clean the floor,
wash your clothes, wash your toes, change the baby's
diaper, finish the report, correct the typos, mend
the fence, keep the customer happy, throw out the
stinking garbage, watch out don't put things in your
nose, what shall I wear, I have no sox, pay your bills,
don't litter, save string, wash your hair, change the
sheets, go to the store, I'm out of perfume, say it
again--he doesn't understand, seal it again-- it leaks,
go to work, this art is dusty, clear the table, call
him again, flush the toilet, stay young.*

- Mierle Laderman Ukeles "Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969"

I am sitting at my dining room table as I begin to write this essay. There are dishes that need to be cleared away but they will have to wait. I type but am distracted by the sounds of the house; my daughter watching a cartoon, the crackling fireplace, my husband strumming a guitar softly so as not to wake up the toddler sleeping in the other room. I am a writer (and curator and artist) who has spent the last six years working around the realities of life with small children. Between pouring glasses of milk and searching for missing toys, it's been far from glamorous. But this domestic work, long tagged "traditional women's work," has served to solidify existing elements of feminism, identity politics, labour theory, and social practice within my professional work.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles' "Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969" was created while she was grappling with the meaning of "maintenance work" as a full-time mom and artist. She felt as if the work that she and others were doing to provide care and maintenance to the operations of everyday life was being overlooked and silenced. "This is 1968, there was no valuing of 'maintenance' in Western Culture. The trajectory was: make something new, always move forward."¹ The prevailing sentiment has not changed much today. Maintenance work is still seen as tedious, outdated even, and not often celebrated. And yet the artwork of Lindsay Arnold fixes its gaze upon the tedium of women's domestic contributions as represented by the traditional crocheted doily.

The doily of course is a small ornamental mat used for decoration or to protect surfaces. It is a handicraft that has fallen away from the popularity it once enjoyed. Piles of doilies can now be found in the backs of closets and on thrift store shelves. They are themselves neglected and overlooked. But the work they represent, whether the actual skill put into their creation or their daily function in keeping stains off of tables, speaks of a repetitive service, of maintenance, of tedium. It is this quality which intrigues Arnold and anchors the work in her exhibition *Tedium*.

Tedium is made up of a series of paintings as well as a stop motion animation, all of which take the doily as its starting point and inspiration. Arnold's paintings, which are done in a trompe l'oeil style, are an act of repetitive tedium in themselves with the artist painstakingly reproducing the look of the tiny hooks and twists that make up the doily's lacy filigree. But the doilies represented here are themselves imperfect. They are torn and snagged, some tugged by threads weighed down by heavier objects like scissors and hammers. Alongside the doilies are a variety of ephemera; pins, sewing notions, rusty hinges, rubber bands, pieces of tape. In one piece there's a note about cake affixed with a yellow pushpin to the wooden tabletop background. It's as if a messy domestic workspace has gone mad and taken on a crazed life of its own.

Arnold's stop-motion animation "Table Dance" sees the doilies in a more celebratory mood, waltzing across the tabletop. A cavalcade of doilies enter and exit in turn, each offering its own unique style and dance step. White lacy numbers spin around like swirling snowflakes, long table runners dive across the tableau, bright colourful mats pirouette through the scene, and it all ends with a veritable waterfall of doilies. It is playful and beautiful. But it is also overwhelming to consider Arnold as the caretaker to this stunning collection and the maintenance required in keeping this cacophony of pieces organized in order to produce such a project.

I am back at my dining room table now on a different night. There is a new set of dishes needing to be cleared away. The kids are playing in the basement, they come upstairs from time to time and interrupt me for a snack. This back and forth between my computer screen and the pressing needs of little ones brings me back to the start of this essay. Maintenance, whether of a writing practice or a domestic sphere, can indeed be a drag. It can take all the time. It does not stop and it is tedious. But the tedium as Lindsay Arnold shows us, has its role in art and in life. In her work she has allowed the tedium of her subject to push through and past itself, revealing a vibrancy that is surprising and glorious. Make something new, always move forward? Maybe now is the time to reach into the forgotten recesses and reexamine the lacy frills of tedium anew.

Jenny Western

¹ Bartholomew Ryan, "A Manifesto for Maintenance: A Conversation with Mierle Laderman Ukeles" *Art In America*. <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/draft-mierle-interview/> March 18, 2009.

ART GALLERY OF REGINA

Lindsay Arnold: Tedium

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Curator: Holly Fay

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