

Christopher Lynn

# Misplaced Walls

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Walls are points of articulation. They physically adjust the horizontal to a vertical, changing the traversable to an obstacle. Walls also articulate an intent and an attitude. They can signal protection and guidance or aggression and separatism. The action of razing a wall is a re-articulation of priorities and perceptions. It may be determined that a wall is no longer needed to differentiate between an interior and an exterior, or that the point of differentiation needs to be relocated to better reflect current ideas, attitudes, ownership, or politics. In response to these ideas I created a clownishly colored wall system that can be built, razed, and relocated to highlight the constantly shifting priorities of protection, separation, and unification. This *Misplaced Wall* appears in desert landscapes, suburban homes, and basketball courts as an awkward and obtrusive guest, but one that will inevitably fall and be placed, or rather misplaced, elsewhere.

In the work I created, *Misplaced Wall* functions as a character in various videos and photographs—always recognizable as the same wall. It postures as an impenetrable barrier, but lacks the breadth, permanence, and gravitas of the Berlin Wall, the Great Wall of China, or the proposed fence along the United States' southern border. In fact, during video shooting of *Misplaced Wall* on the Bonneville Salt Flats, a light breeze caught the corner of the cardboard boxes that comprise the barrier and toppled a quarter of the faux bricks. Although I initially cursed this bad luck, it led to a video work (figure 1) wherein a portion of the wall collapses to reveal an identical section of wall behind it, which also falls, revealing its twin behind it, and so on. The impermanence and fragility of my wall revealed itself, like the stoic Queen's guard caught in a sneeze.

BUILD THE WALL! TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!

There is rarely a current home improvement program on television that does not advocate for tearing down an interior wall to "open up a space" whereas two decades prior, that wall was seen as necessary to help delineate the space within the home. Although this may be a sanitized analogy to contemporary calls to build and tear down geopolitical walls, it points out that although these governmental policies play out over decades, change is inevitable. What was once seen as a necessity (the enclosure of space) is now passé and demolished. In the current political discourse, there are often two competing voices that demand more or fewer walls. These clarion calls to close or open up a space are focused largely on the action of building more structures or razing the current structures based on current thinking, which will later change again.

"Close the borders" and "build a wall" express a vertical and hierarchical desire to differentiate, while "destroy the patriarchy" and "tear down the wall" seek horizontality and egalitarianism. What these arguments privilege is the action of building (verticality) or razing (horizontality), but they lack follow-through or trajectories, leaving only a cascade of questions. What will happen once a border wall is built? What will be the criteria to filter migrants? What happens when you come to the end of the wall? What about ladders to climb over or shovels to burrow under? What conditions are necessary to maintain or abandon the wall? What happens after the wall comes down? What comes after the patriarchy? A matriarchy? A queer version for which we do not yet have a name? There is a proposal for change, but no articulation of the



Figure 1. Author, Misplaced Wall (Desert, Cascade), video still, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

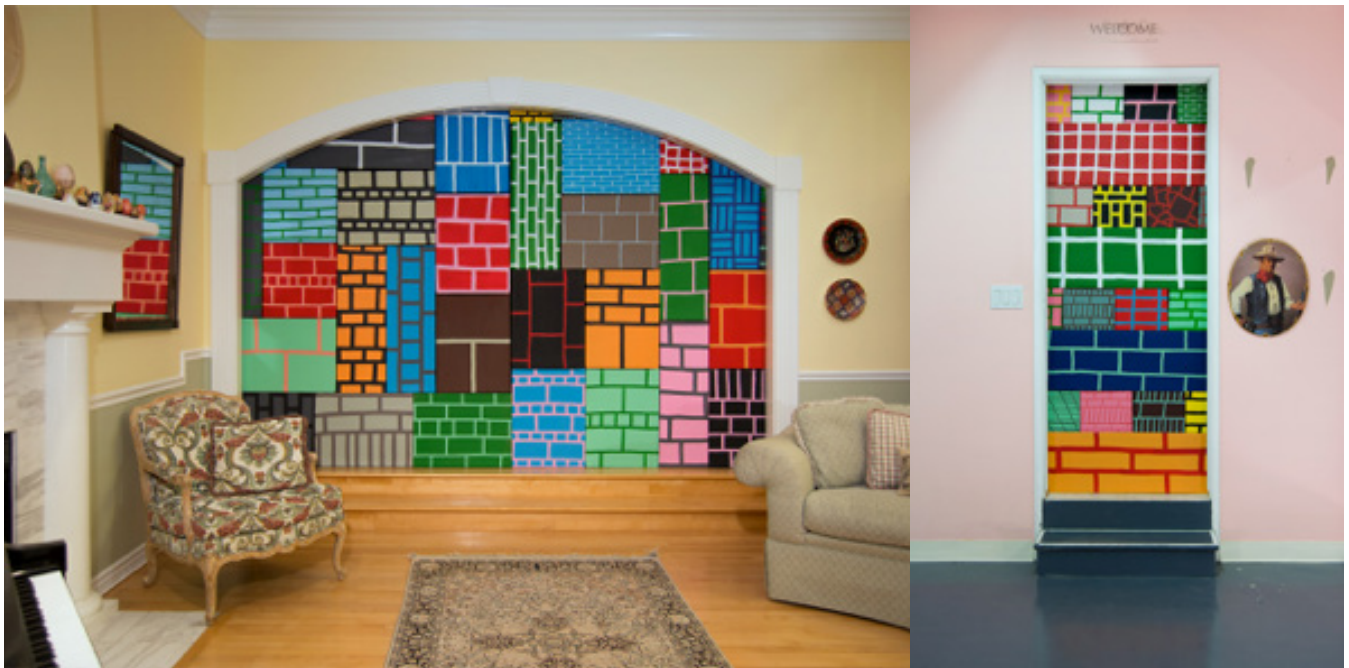


Figure 2. Author, Misplaced Wall (Suburbs), inkjet print on paper, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 3. Author, Misplaced Wall (Basement), inkjet print on paper, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

direct or indirect results of that change. What is promised by subversion of borders is an opportunity to redefine a space and trajectories. That is the grist of art and educators: to play in the liminal space of questions, possibilities, and the opening up of a space. This is why artists and educators shun rigidity and embrace impermanence because it sings of promise.

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

In a follow-up video to *Misplaced Wall* (Desert, Cascade) (figure 1), *Misplaced Wall* (Wall Fall) (figure 6) fills the screen with the colorful cardboard bricks which then tumble to the ground with a loud and dramatic crash, revealing another wall just behind it. This toppling and reveling happens again and again on an endless loop. Behind each structure is another structure.

*Misplaced Wall*, as its name insinuates, has no pretense of permanency or absolutism. The wall knows it is as temporary as current thinking and will immediately be dispossessed. It is its very transience that invites creative play with the inevitable questions of trajectory, whereas a permanent structure intends to close off discussions of what comes next. *Misplaced Wall* speeds up the process of building, reevaluating, razing, and relocating that takes civilizations decades or centuries to fully negotiate.

Artists and educators model possible futures by subverting existing boundaries through symbolic and narrative fictions or direct practice. Cultural producers ask and show what might come next. They speed up slow processes to prototype potentialities without the pretense of permanency. Both vertical and horizontal practices—building and erasing—are welcome in studios and classrooms because, within experimental environments, all practices are provisional and up for negotiation to be placed, misplaced, and replaced.

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Figure 5. Author, Misplaced Wall (Ball Wall), inkjet print on paper, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. Author, Misplaced Wall (B-Ball), inkjet print on paper, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. Author, *Misplaced Wall (Wall Fall)*, video still, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.