

► CONTINUED genres, or conceptual frameworks. It's easy to imagine these two figures suspended in the same loop as Henry—trying to solve an unsolvable problem. This raises the obvious question: What more is to be gained by these practices? If art really is defined by its utter uselessness, what criteria do we point to as still vital in abstract painting or free jazz? Harvey herself addresses this when she talks about the “meta-hole in the bucket” of her engagement with the tradition of painting: “Sometimes abstraction just seems selfish and self-serving, as all has really been done in painting. And abstraction is really just about painting. So what do I have to offer? For some reason, I still feel like I want to make paintings to find out for myself; there is something universal I am trying to get at, but it still eludes me.... I want to make abstraction that is about more than formalism, but I have yet to solve the problem.” We could look at the practices of painterly abstraction and free improvised music as spaces where particular kinds of *techné* or know-how are cultivated, where holes are made in the bucket so that nothing can be resolved but neither can things remain static.

The first time I stepped into Elastic was in early 2008, at the old location above a Chinese restaurant. Having just moved to Chicago, I was eager to find spaces where the city's notoriously prolific free jazz scene held court, wanting to bear live witness to a musical form that I had for years encountered primarily through recordings. I mapped out the various bars and clubs that hosted weekly jazz nights, but Elastic distinguished itself fairly quickly as a space dedicated to the ritualistic performance of this music—it was almost, dare I say, like a temple. There's a running inside joke in Chicago's improvised music community (one that may actually circulate in other cities as well) that it is not uncommon for musicians to play for incredibly small audiences or even a single person, and within a few months of discovering Elastic, I found myself on a Thursday night in the role of that single audience member. It would be easy for someone not versed in this musical context to see such a situation as a futile event, as though the performance of music had utility only in proportion to the number of people present to receive it. But for me in that moment, it was like watching a flame being kept alive, with the musicians propelling themselves back into a familiar loop where buckets have holes, the straw is too long, the axe is too dull, the stone is too dry, and the water needs to be carried...

Jordan Martins is a Chicago-based visual artist, curator, educator, and musician. He received his MFA in visual arts from the Universidade Federal da Bahia in Salvador, Brazil, in 2007 and has been an instructor at North Park University since 2008. He co-founded the Comfort Music series in 2011 and is currently executive director of the Comfort Station. He serves on the programming committee for the Chicago Jazz Festival and curates visual art at Elastic Arts.

Originally from Vermont, **Cameron Harvey** now calls Chicago home. She graduated cum laude from Wellesley College in 1999 with a BA in Studio Art. After graduation, Cameron held an assistantship in printmaking at La Scuola Internazionale di Grafica, in Venice, Italy, and then returned to the States in 2006 to focus on painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has participated in residencies at the Vermont Studio Center and at the Lijiang Studio in China, and received grants from DCASE, the Illinois Arts Council, and the Alice C. Cole Alumnae Foundation. Her work has been exhibited in the United States, Italy, China, and India. *A Hole in My Bucket*, her latest show, is on view at Elastic Arts through March 4.

UPCOMING		
THURSDAY, DEC 1ST 9 PM Improvised Music Series Matt Piet Solo, Atticus Lazen by Group	SATURDAY, DEC 17TH 9 PM Arc Iris Health&Beauty Solo	SUNDAY, JAN 28TH 9:00PM ShooBooty Studios Series Maestro, Ross Augusta
FRIDAY, DEC 2ND 9 PM Night Terror (w/ Whitney Johnson, Nick Broste) Matchess + TALsounds	MONDAY, DEC 19TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series + Elastic Holiday Party Charlie Kirchen Trio Paul Bedal Quartet	MONDAY, JAN 30TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series - Piano Festival Rob Clearfield Trio Ron Perrillo Trio
SATURDAY, DEC 3RD 3 PM Bystander Intervention and De-Escalation Tactics Workshop with Jes Skolnik	SATURDAY, DEC 31ST 8 PM House Music Dance Party Come2gether NYE	THURSDAY, FEB 2ND 9 PM Improvised Music Series Stein/Giallorenzo Duo plus Quartet with Kirchen/Kirshner
SUNDAY, DEC 4TH 7 PM Soft Ledges Album Release Show	MONDAY, JAN 2ND 9 PM Anagram Music Series - Piano Festival Gene Kniflic Trio Chinchano Trio	MONDAY, FEB 6TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series Katie Ernst Solo Moods
MONDAY, DEC 5TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series Unknown New Stu Mindeman Trio	THURSDAY, JAN 5TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Bruce Lamont/Adam Tramposh/ Skyler Rowe Dave Rempis/Peter Maunu/ Phil Sudderberg	THURSDAY, FEB 9TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Darren Johnston/Tim Daisy
TUESDAY, DEC 6TH 9PM Michael Zerang/Biliana Voutchkova Lia Kohl	MONDAY, JAN 9TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series - Piano Festival Jo Ann Daugherty Quartet Gene Kniflic Trio	FRIDAY, FEB 10TH 9:30 PM Elastic Hip-Hop Series Rap Battles: No Coast Valentine's Day Massacre 4
WEDNESDAY, DEC 7TH 7 PM SAIC Presents Real(Good)Time	THURSDAY, JAN 12TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Jake Wark/Bill Harris Charles Rumback Quartet	MONDAY, FEB 13TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series Zac Nunnery Trio, Ishmael All Quartet
THURSDAY, DEC 8TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Michael Zerang/Benjamin Vergara Duo Keefe Jackson/Jason Adasiewicz Duo	SATURDAY, JAN 14TH 7 PM Elastic Vision Gallery Exhibition Reception for Cameron Harvey's <i>A Hole in My Bucket</i>	THURSDAY, FEB 16TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Hatcher/Kohl/Kirshner Four Letter Words
FRIDAY, DEC 9TH 9 PM Elastro Electro/Acoustic Series Jessica Aszodi/Jenna Lyle Samuel Dunscombe/Curt Miller	MONDAY, JAN 16TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series - Piano Festival Paul Giallorenzo Trio Paul Bedal Quintet	FRIDAY, FEB 17TH 4 PM First Defense Legal Aid Workshop Know Your Rights!
SATURDAY, DEC 10TH 9 PM Dark Matter Series The Arts Palette and Still Music presents Artform: DJs Ron Trent and Jerome Derradji; photo exhibit by Tiphanie Spencer	THURSDAY, JAN 19TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Toastmasters TV Pow	SATURDAY, FEB 18TH 9 PM DARK MATTER SERIES Immensity of the Territory w/ Marvin Tate
SUNDAY, DEC 11TH 5 PM Dark Matter Series Etc Records presents Electronic Buffet	FRIDAY, JAN 20TH 7 PM A-Squared Theatre Fundraiser	MONDAY, FEB 20TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series Avreeayl Ra Septet
MONDAY, DEC 12TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series Black Diamond Chris Dammann/John Niekrasz Jeff Swanson Quartet	SATURDAY, JAN 21ST 7:30 PM Hit The Ground Running Fest A Fundraiser for Planned Parenthood of Illinois	THURSDAY, FEB 23RD 9 PM Improvised Music Series Anne La Berge/Dana Jessen/ Katherine Young/Sam Pluta
TUESDAY, DEC 13TH 7 PM Technical Images — Exhibition Launch MrDougDoug (Hausu Mountain) David Hall	WEDNESDAY, JAN 25TH 9 PM Max Ellbacher, Headband, Lia Kohl, Jared Brown	FRIDAY, FEB 24TH 9 PM Elastro Electro/Acoustic Music Series Stephen Dorocke/John Abbey/ Jason Adasiewicz/Adam Vida Jonathan Chen/Tatsu Aoki Adam Sonderberg/Joseph Clayton Mills
THURSDAY, DEC 15TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Dave Rempis/Joshua Abrams/ Avreeayl Ra + Jim Baker	THURSDAY, JAN 26TH 9 PM Improvised Music Series Stein/Rempis/Flaten/Damon/ Zerang Boneshaker (Mars Williams, Kent Kessler, Paal Nilssen-Love)	SATURDAY, FEB 25TH 9 PM Watchword, Andrew Kirshner, Bottomed, Venomenema
FRIDAY, DEC 16TH 9 PM Jon Cates Terran Wretch wrtch Jason Hoffman	FRIDAY, JAN 27TH 9 PM Elastro Electro/Acoustic Music Series Peter Speer, Forest Management, Alex Ingilizian	MONDAY, FEB 27TH 9 PM Anagram Music Series Room Full of Chairs, Rooms Trio +1



This publication was made possible in partnership with Spudnik Press Cooperative. | Publisher Elastic Arts, 3429 W Diversey Ave #208, Chicago, IL 60647, elasticarts.org | ©2017 Elastic Arts. The content of this edition may not be produced in whole or in part, in any form, without the written permission from the publisher, author, or artists. | Elastic Arts is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization fostering artistic exploration from a versatile Chicago venue by programming and presenting multifaceted performance and exhibition. | Edition 500 | Publications director Jordan Martins, Paul Giallorenzo | COPY EDITOR Irma Nuñez Sless-Kitain | Publication design Sonnenzimmer | Printed in 2-color Risograph at Spudnik Press Cooperative, Chicago



ELASTIC

ARTS

Futilities and Utilities

Cameron Harvey's circular investigations

by JORDAN MARTINS

*There's a hole in my bucket.
Well, fix it.
With what shall I fix it?
With straw.
The straw is too long.
Then cut it.
With what shall I cut it?
With an axe.
The axe is too dull.
Then sharpen it.
The stone is too dry.
Then wet it.
With what shall I wet it?
With water.
In what shall I carry it?
In a bucket...*

I once heard someone define “art” simply as the making of objects that have no purpose. The notion that art is inherently purposeless struck me as both profound and disconcerting. We are accustomed to pondering the production of artwork—its formal questions, conceptual struggles, semiotic encodings—as though there is some alternate plane where spiritual wars are fought by questioning the surface and jousting with theory-encrusted forms. It is not uncommon for the otherwise inert materials of artworks to be animated in artist statements as not only “questioning” societal norms but “interrogating” and “deconstructing” them. If we accept the essential uselessness of art, it is all the more peculiar that we have the habit of loading it with so much didactic burden and power when we talk about what it “does” once finished. Or maybe these claims of its power are simply overcompensating for a fundamental anxiety that making art *is*, in fact, futile?

The irony of all of this deepens when we remember that the ancient Greek word for art was *techné*, which is the etymological root of “technology,” that is, human-made objects that possess utility, purpose, and function. But this was before “art” and “craft,” as we define them today, were separate things. Rather, *techné* was anything human made that brought forth something into the world, whether a statue reproducing the human form for visual enjoyment or a bucket designed to carry water. We might not see much similarity between a statue and a bucket as finished objects, but they have

something basic in common, no matter how complex the statue or how simple the bucket: you have to know how to make them. Or rather, you must have the right know-how, a kind of embedded knowledge from working through the making process.

In titling her exhibition *A Hole in My Bucket*, Cameron Harvey points to this tension between art's feeling of purpose and its ultimate futility. The most familiar version of the song from which the title was pulled involves a dense man, Henry, asking his wife, Liza, how to fix a hole in his bucket. Liza provides him with the know-how of each object required and the process involved in fixing the problem, at the same time leading him in a circle, with each solution creating a new problem that brings him back to where he started: to fix the bucket, it turns out, he needs a bucket; hence, he gets nowhere despite Liza's self-evident direction. I like to imagine Henry suspended in this infinitely circular regression, charged with the impetus to make something happen but paralyzed by the sudden realization that he is caught in a loop with no exit. The song might just be a cruel joke about how inept poor Henry is—a fool standing there with a bucket whose hole is the very thing that prevents him from fixing it. Or, maybe Liza is some kind of Zen master, providing Henry with an unsolvable riddle designed to jolt him to some higher level. Because when a bucket is deprived of its purpose, what else can it be but a work of art? Perhaps Henry's predicament is actually some kind of liberation.

The futile circle of Henry's quest to fix the hole in his bucket also echoes the way in which Cameron Harvey—like many artists whose studio practices are characterized by a certain open-endedness—needs some unsolvable problem in order to gain motion. That is to say, if the bucket didn't already have a hole, she would have to create one. Insofar as a finished piece has “solved” some formal problem, that solution in turn becomes a new problem that kicks off another piece. For a long time, Harvey explored spray insulation foam (which, incidentally, is a functional material) as a sculptural mass and as appendages on two-dimensional surfaces.

Leftover fragments of these experiments are now used as stencils for new paintings, wherein their three-dimensional shapes are converted

into flat absences on the surface. In other works, Harvey uses one material to tease out a nebulous abstract form and then attempts to translate that form in another material. These jumps between processes seem to be all about the indeterminacy that inevitably leaks into the process, like little bits of information that become corrupted with noise when they are transmitted across distances. “That is what I like about abstraction,” she says. “The idea that you can have skill and experience and know your own tricks and weaknesses and have an idea of what you want to create, but until you actually do it, you don't really know what it is going to look like—there are surprises along the way.”

Harvey's work in this exhibition is spread out in a nuanced network of objects, arranged intimately in Elastic's space with a feng shui-like attention to detail and balance. Though each individual element seems to have its own unique set of materials, scale, and weight, there are also palpable lines of communication that jump out between them. One quickly sees alternating positive and negative spaces, even between vaginal and phallic forms. Her placement of live orchids on the shelf amid ceramic pieces suggests a process of pollination, a living connection formed across objects in a space. Many of the pieces seem to be integrating into the space decoratively as much as they are hung for display, and *Bolstered Argument* might be the pinnacle of the show's ambition to fully blend in with Elastic's environment: it is at once an installation, a painting on a wall, a wall transformed into a painting, and a sculpture. The canvas itself is tilted at a 20-degree angle, suggesting in a literal sense that there is a problem to be solved (straightening the canvas), even as it solves the problem within the painting—a skewed shape within the frame becomes straightened by the tilt of the canvas, which rests aslant on plaster-cast pillows.

In many ways, an abstract painter in 2017 is in the same boat as an improvising musician, both of which are engaged in radical practices that were once galvanized by high modernism and its relentless push toward the limits. Both traditions have been pronounced dead on multiple occasions and passed over as the disciplines of experimentalism followed tangents into new materials, instruments,



CAMERON HARVEY

December 3rd, 2016 - March 4th, 2017

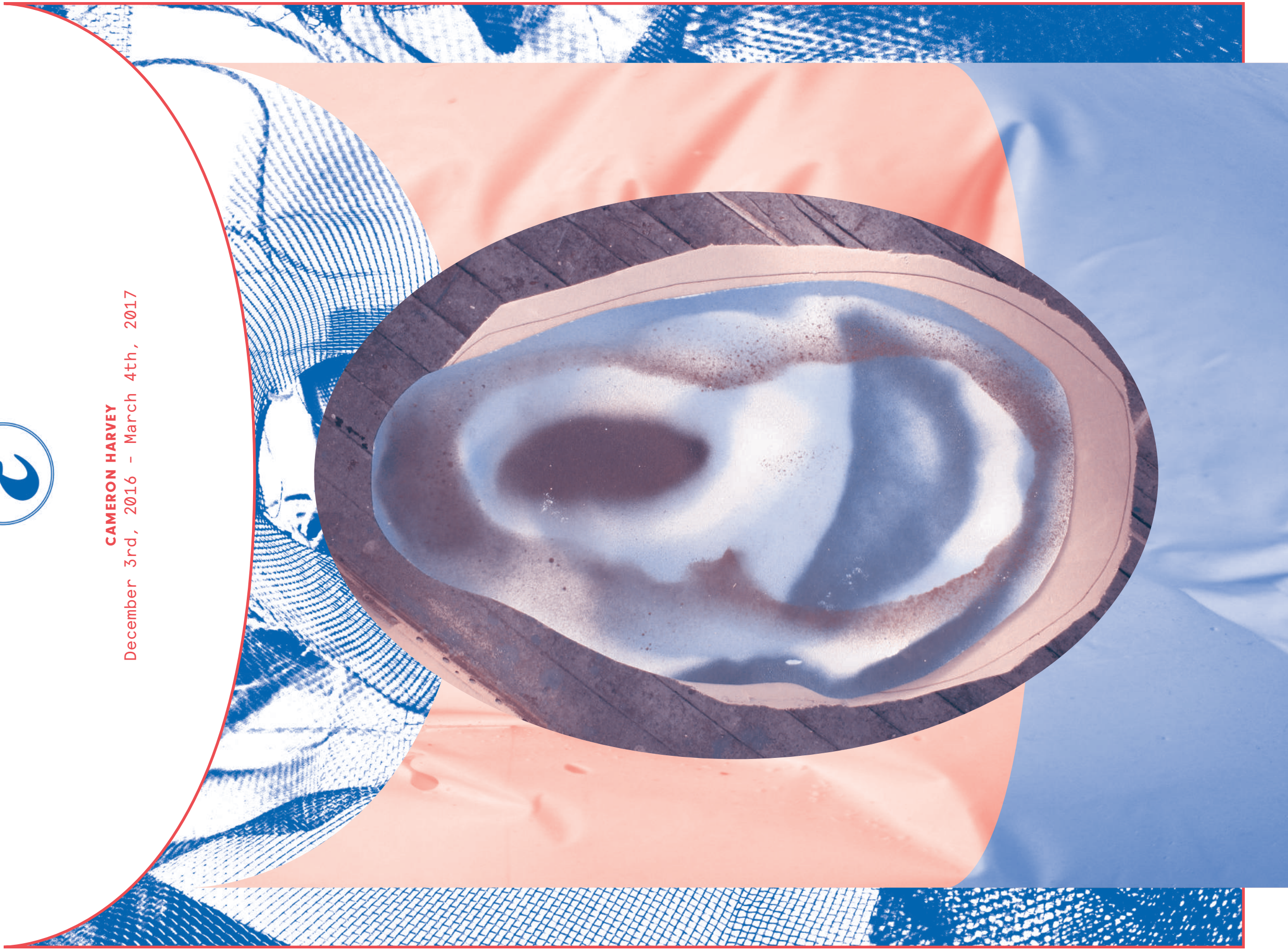


Image source, courtesy Cameron Harvey.

**Sessions
from
theArchive:**



LIVE at Elastic:

08-11-2008 Fred Lonberg-Holm, solo cello, electronics
05-06-2010 Matt Schneider, solo guitar
09-16-2016 Jason Soliday, solo electronics

Or listen here:

<http://elasticarts.org/graphic-notes-v7-dec-2016-feb-2017/#from-the-archive>

elasticarts.org