

Bobby Anspach
Place For Continuous Eye Contact



Place for Continuous Eye Contact

Bobby Anspach
1987–2022







*Place for Continuous
Eye Contact
(with artist), 2022
Mixed Media
(unfinished work)
Newburgh, NY Studio
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts*

Dedicated to Jimmy, Phoebe, and Liz.

The Anspach Family would like to thank the following people for their contribution and hard work in bringing together Bobby's estate and securing his work and legacy.

Saul Ostrow for his expertise, advice, guidance and organization of Bobby's estate. To Elizabeth Ferrer for her continued support of Bobby's work and vision, as well as her contribution to this publication. To Ethan Bond-Watts who for many years worked by Bobby's side and without whose input and knowledge securing Bobby's legacy would have been impossible. Paula Baldoni for her continued support of Bobby's vision. Caryn Keppler for her guidance and legal advice as the estate's lawyer. Susan Bowman for her creative input in designing and overseeing the production of this catalog.



Second Edition, October 2025

Honoring the Legacy of Bobby Anspach

The Bobby Anspach Studios Foundation proudly presents this catalog, commemorating the launch of the organization established to honor the life and work of Bobby Anspach, a visionary artist, whose passion and dedication continues to inspire us all. Bobby’s artistic journey was one of boundless creativity, unwavering commitment, and a profound desire to empower and uplift others. Through his evocative “machines,” he explored art’s transformative power to foster personal awareness and social change.

The foundation is dedicated to carrying forward Bobby’s vision. It will cultivate initiatives in the areas of art & science, wellness, and meditation, as well as support emerging creatives who embody Bobby’s values. Through the foundation’s programs, exhibitions, and outreach, we aim to inspire others to follow in his footsteps, using their creative voices to challenge, enlighten, and uplift.

With gratitude from the members of the Board,

**Bob Anspach
Jane Anspach
John Anspach
Michael Anspach
Lane Cooper
Adam Adelson
Jimmy Avari**

Vulnerability and Vision

Taylor Baldwin

Guest Curator

Everything is Change

Newport Art Museum 2025

Bobby Anspach was someone who asked strangers to look each other in the eyes for long periods of time. He asked these strangers to be vulnerable and present with one another in a way that he believed would cause an extraordinary sense of presence and consciousness to happen for both people involved in this strange kind of eye contact. He believed it had the potential to leave a viewer's mind forever changed.

If the works in the exhibition *Everything is Change* are anything, they are devices to assist us users in the changing of our own minds, if only we open ourselves to it.

Everything is Change brings together a range of works from across the artistic life of Bobby Anspach (1987–2022). At its core are two large-scale experiential sculptures—what Bobby called “places for continuous eye contact”—which he refined and reimagined repeatedly over the course of his life.

Uniquely, the exhibition also features a selection of drawings, paintings, small-scale sculptures, and video works developed in parallel, offering insight into the ideas and experiments that shaped the evolution of his most ambitious pieces. *Everything is Change* offers a rare opportunity to encounter these monumental sculptural installations within the context of Bobby's broader studio process—charting his vision through experimentation, persistence, and transformation.

Taken as a whole, this is a life's work on display. The exhibition offers viewers a granular understanding of how a

visionary artist actually develops their work over time; step by step, through small discoveries, iterative experiments, risky bets, and patient refinement. The everyday acts accumulate over years and across many works, until they become something that a viewer might experience as otherworldly and singular. This show reveals how something transcendental and magical can come together through a series of everyday materials, ordinary decisions, and time.

In Bobby Anspach's studio practice, the transcendent possibility of his work is made possible by his extraordinary commitment to a singular vision, and by a faith that these works could catalyze important, meaningful, and even transformative experiences for someone. In this case, we hope that someone is you.

From fall 2015 to spring 2017, Bobby Anspach was a graduate student in the MFA sculpture program at RISD that I ran. Because of this, for a time, I knew Bobby very well as an artist. Also because of this, I did not know Bobby as a whole person; at its beginning, our relationship was shaped by the roles of teacher and student.

These roles meant that for a sustained period of years, he and I had weekly conversations about nearly every facet of the creative life of an artist, and his specific vision as an artist in particular. It is these conversations I am relying on to curate this exhibition, using them to help to organize this exhibition in a way that channels his vision as faithfully as I can, and to help viewers better know the compassionate, thoughtful, and principled human who made the work in this exhibition.

Everything is Change exhibition
Newport Art Museum, RI
June 21 – September 28, 2025
All photos in this essay: Pernille Loof





Bobby Anspach was a serenely implacable, deeply committed artist. He and his art had a special intensity reserved for true believers of a creative path. These are people who are willing to meet their talent with a tireless effort, their vision with openness and fluidity, and meet their insecurity with a fearless willingness to venture far, far out to the edges of experience, perception, and consciousness and report back.

Bobby went truly far out. And he brought back something he thought we urgently needed to know; he brought back something he believed would help us. His work is shaped by this joyful belief in the visionary experience: that if we all allow ourselves a special type of freedom, of vulnerability and risk, of connection, that we—and maybe the world—could be forever changed. In an often cynical and difficult world, Bobby tried—with sincerity and care—to give us that experience.

The first time I met Bobby was at an in-person interview for graduate study in the RISD MFA Program. I was in a shabby critique room behind a folding table with several of my faculty colleagues. Bobby walked in for his interview with us, sat down on the opposite side of this table, and proceeded to listen very intently to our questions, and answer all of them, all while leaning slightly forward with an open-mouthed smile, and making direct, sustained, and unblinking eye contact with everyone throughout the entire interview.

This would not be the last time I would experience, or talk about, continuous eye contact with Bobby. Afterward, one of my colleagues leaned back in their chair, let out a breath and said, “Well, that was intense.” It was clear to everyone that this was an artist of a particularly focused presence. The vulnerability and immediacy in that type of eye contact is not something that everyone is ready for, and I remember the effect it had in the room.

We were deeply interested in whatever was going on with this young artist. I had a colleague who had taught

Bobby the prior year, and I called her as a reference for him. She told me that she thought Bobby was a genius, and that we were lucky to have him study with us. I would learn that we were.

I worked closely with him over the next two years. I found Bobby to be more deeply connected to his artistic vision than almost any artist I’ve known—out of hundreds. During his time in graduate school, he made artwork like his life depended on it. I think if you had asked him, he might have said he felt it did.

As I said, our relationship was shaped by the roles we occupied when we met—student and teacher—though we were likely closer in age and experience than those titles suggest. Over time, especially after he graduated, those roles began to blur. But for most of our relationship, my job—and my genuine interest—was to have long, regular conversations with Bobby about what he was making, how and why he was making it, and what mattered to him. If you knew Bobby, you know that meant a series of profoundly intense, far-ranging, and deeply felt conversations.

At that point in my life as an educator and an artist, I was very ready for this. We had many wild conversations.

A few notes from that time:

1. His was the only artist talk I ever saw that left some members of the audience openly weeping.
2. He is the only student I have had to ask to wear shoes in class.
3. He made an absolutely incredible stop motion animation.
4. He made scrappy, deeply engaging psychographic experiments.
5. But mostly, he made one amazing sculpture, over and over and over again.

As I understood it, he was only ever trying to make this one sculpture. In fact, as he put it, he was trying to make “the most beautiful sculpture in the world.” His “place for continuous eye contact.” He made it again and again, with different formats and materials, for an audience of one person, then two people.

Slight adjustments in how viewers would approach and interact with it, or in how the colored pom poms would hang, or how the sound and light would sync. Once for a museum, once for a parking lot, once for an art fair. He never seemed fully satisfied with any of the outcomes, but he was never deflated either. Each was one more step towards actually making this one sculpture.

He once told me that if he finally made this one sculpture right, he wouldn’t ever need to make another one. He would be done. He told me that this sculpture, if he was ever finally able to fully make it right, would save the world.

His unfailing belief that art was capable of creating a sense of unity, empathy, and understanding in viewers is the kind of optimism and faith in creative expression that the art world is in desperate need of.

I say “unfailing belief,” but that isn’t quite right; I had many conversations with Bobby about doubt. He did have doubts and fears. He talked with me about his doubt that anything—let alone something as feeble as a work of art—could connect deeply to anyone at a broad scale. Or that anything would be capable of changing and opening the minds of powerful people in a position to address existential world problems in time. Or that what he was doing as an artist was anything but self-focused and ineffectual.

These are insecurities familiar to any artist. Doubt is an important and necessary part of a creative life, even though it can threaten creativity. But through these moments of doubt, Bobby always seemed to choose to believe that (as cliché as



it sounds, and of which he was fully aware) he would choose to believe that art could change minds.

That was not an easy choice. He came to it not without struggle. But when he had to choose, he chose to believe and to hope that the work he was making would impact people in meaningful ways. And that is what I would call artistic faith. In this sense, Bobby was one of the most faithful artists I know.

To get very specific about what I know of Bobby’s faith in the artwork in *Everything is Change*—I know that he had a deep belief that an otherworldly, dissociative experience, one where you were encouraged to suspend normal social rules and stare directly and vulnerably into someone else’s eyes (or maybe your own) for a long, long time, that experience could possibly leave you permanently changed.





He had faith that it was possible that you could leave with a clear and unshakable understanding that you were inherently connected to the universe around you. He had faith that you would see yourself in a stranger's eyes, recognize that the separation you felt from the world around you was an illusion, and that you would finally understand that you and others were just different parts of the same interconnected thing. He was hoping for true empathy, and he believed that profound experience would free all of us to make the changes needed for a better world.

The work in *Everything is Change* is the culmination of his efforts to make these places for us. The two 'Place for Continuous Eye Contact' sculptures are nearly a decade in the making, and the result of countless cycles of trial and error, tinkering and tearing down, innovation and development, making and remaking.

Having passed through that cauldron, they are phenomena unto themselves at this point, capable of producing an experience unlike nearly anything else. In a world where social media is driving us further and further from the present moment, these works anchor you in this time and place. This is more important than ever, offering a kind of singular experience that can only be had by being here, now, and by paying very close attention to your own sense of consciousness. The paintings, drawings, sculptures, and videos that surround them act as a prism on the singular experience of the large

sculptural installations, fracturing them into constituent parts, like focused individual beams of color. In total, this exhibition charts the path of Bobby's creative life, through inspiration, innovation, doubt, and ultimately belief.

After graduating, Bobby went to New York to set up his professional studio. We stayed in touch regularly and I saw him several times after, as his emerging career found traction and recognition in the city. It was gratifying to see the larger art world begin to have their minds blown open by work that we knew so well by that point. It was exactly what you would hope for someone after working with them in the special and particular cauldron of art graduate school.

The last time I saw Bobby was at the Home Depot in Red Hook, appropriately enough. I ran into him in the plywood aisle. I was caught off guard seeing him unexpectedly, but there he was in his glasses, putter vest, and sandals. He told me all about his work at the moment and what he had been doing. I asked him what his plans for the future were. He was working furiously, but also joyful and at peace. He seemed good. He passed not that long after.

Bobby Anspach's artistic faith lives in this exhibition. It lives in the objects, it lives in the images, it lives in the writing, and it lives in the people who experience them. If we are lucky, it will live on in our minds, forever changed by the experience of staring deeply and continuously into a stranger's eyes.





Manufacturing the Miracle

William Corwin

"Yesterday it snowed. And now I am crying," artist Bobby Anspach wrote in his master's thesis for the Rhode Island School of Design in April 2017. It was his dramatic and poetic response to the emotional conflict caused by a spring turned upside-down by climate change. He was unable to pretend he was excited to see the spring come, because it wasn't the way spring was supposed to arrive—unnaturally warm, then a few days later, snow. Anspach's work exists between two starkly contradictory sentiments: a deep uneasiness born from very real portents that herald the end of our world, and an ecstatic joy in the psychic union of all minds that just might allow us to head-off our self-inflicted apocalypse. He felt that a simple and visceral proof of the interconnectedness of all human beings would be capable of waking up humanity to the dire situation of the planet: a miracle. Miracles are usually credited with converting the viewer instantaneously, but then how does one create a miracle? Anspach's career, which spanned 2017–2022, focused on a single idea that was manifest in multiple iterations: *The Place for Continuous Eye Contact*. Fitting neatly into a performance art tradition of poignant but simple gestures, as in the text directives of Yoko Ono or the physical acts of Marina Abramovic, The idea of

Left:
Newburgh, NY
2022



Place for Continual Eye Contact is the loss of self and ego caused by staring unflinchingly into one's or another's eyes.

How could Anspach's miracle be steered into the service of saving the world? The earliest iteration of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* comprised positioning two individuals face-to-face, cordoned off via ear-buds from the world and its distractions with the mellifluous strains of Max Richter's mesmerizing re-orchestration of Vivaldi's *Primavera* from the *Four Seasons*. Or the individual alone, wearing an eye-patch and staring into a tiny mirror the same dimensions as one's cornea. Like Emerson's invisible eyeball—all other manifestations of the viewer's presence disappeared, they were engulfed in a miasma of colored pom-poms and twinkling LEDs. The idea morphed drastically over five years of intense experimentation and refinement, often paused by the artist's valiant battles with addiction, recovery and neurodivergence.

Anspach's *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* was first presented to the public at Microscope Gallery in New York in The RISD MFA exhibition in August 2017, then in March of the following year, at the Spring Break Art Show. In 2019, Anspach created a tent project for two individuals, exhibited at the Portal Art Fair on Governor's Island, experimenting with the idea of making the piece a sculptural object both in terms of exterior and interior. *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* was presented at the BRIC Art Biennial in Brooklyn in 2019, and that version appeared again at Spring Break in 2020. After that point, Anspach began to produce guerilla-style exhibitions outdoors, with stream-lined mobile machines that could be quickly set up and taken away and fit into a trailer. This coincided both with the Covid Pandemic which shuttered most galleries and art spaces, and also an increasing sense of urgency within the artist himself, that he needed to move beyond the constraints of the art world and reach a wider audience.

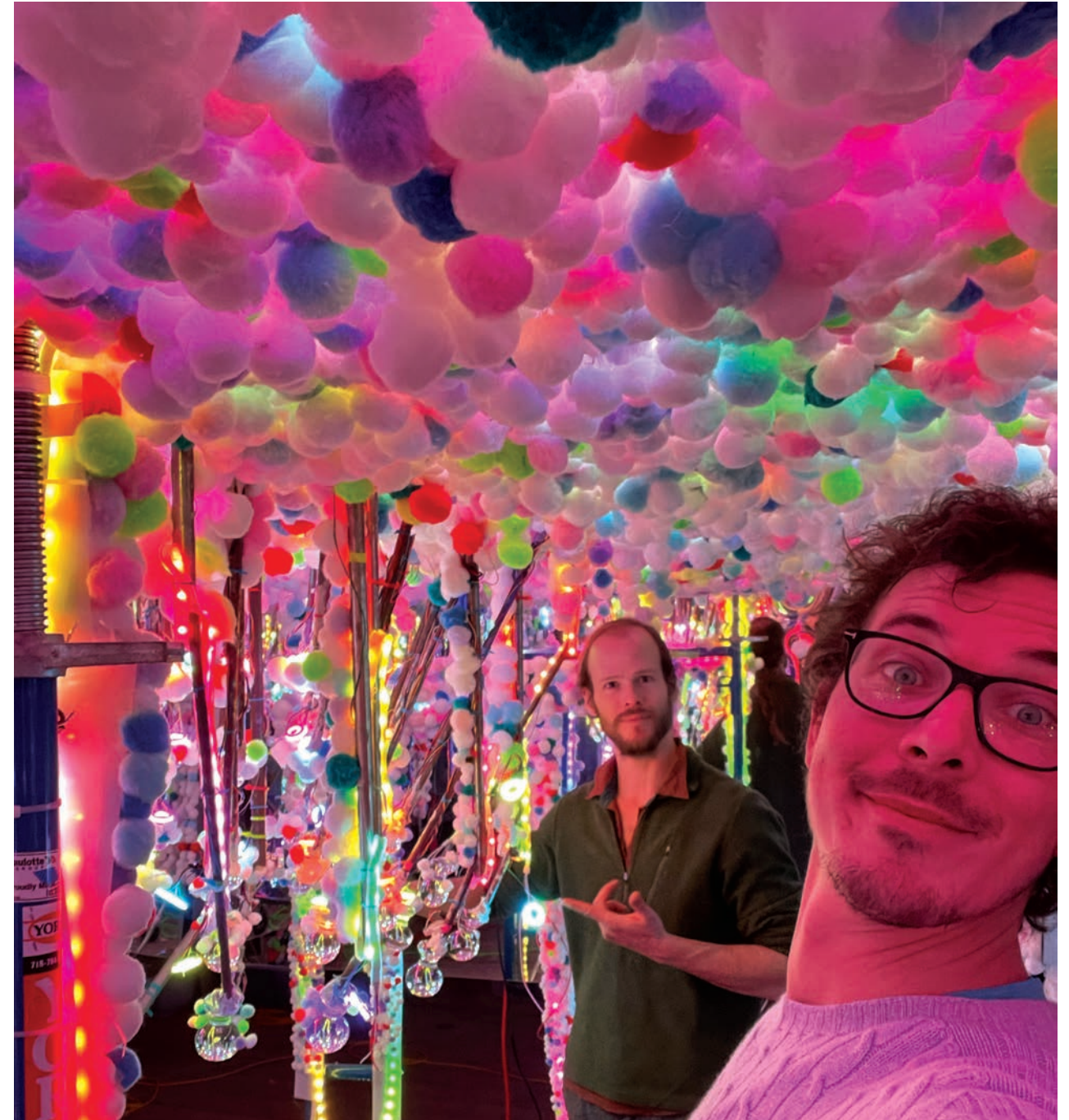
Bobby Anspach was born in Toledo Ohio in 1987 to Jane and Robert "Bob" Anspach, the middle child of three brothers. Bob is a lawyer and Jane is heavily involved in local philanthropic activities and the arts. Jane's father, Bob Friedman (1923–2013) managed a family company, National Machinery Company, a manufacturer of monumental forging machines for industry. Friedman also had a simultaneous career as a jazz composer, performer, and arranger. He was well-known for big band music whose songs were performed by Lou Rawls, Joe Williams, and Quincy Jones. Bob Friedman, who combined monumental-scale machines with a jazz career, offered his grandson, artist Bobby Anspach, a template for an ambitious set of artistic goals; the idea of reaching a world-wide audience and converting them through his immersive miracle machines. Bobby would have been aware of what his grandfather's company produced, having visited the factory with his

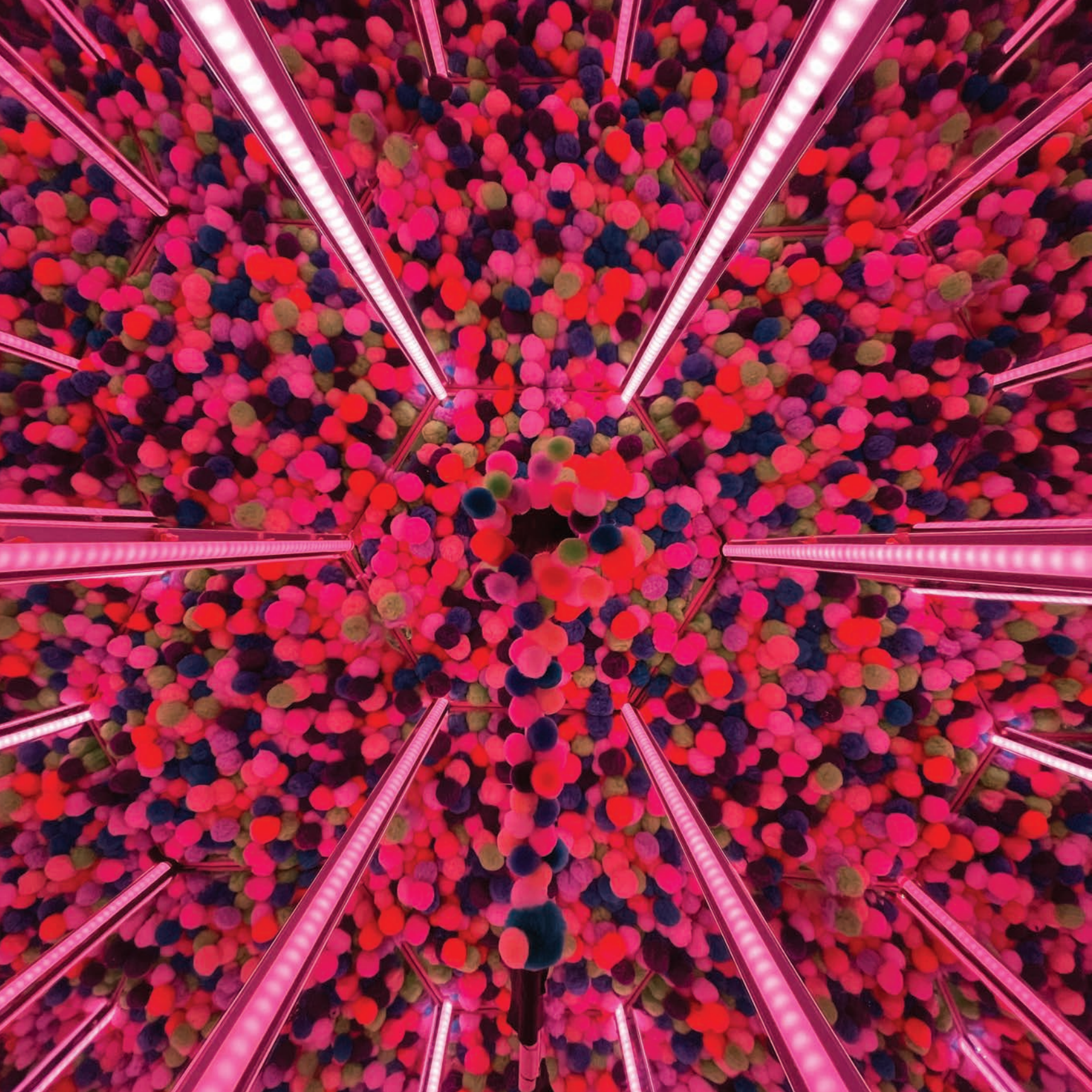
parents and two brothers, and he would have seen the awe-inspiring machines, sometimes multiple stories in size, which in effect produced other machines—all-encompassing mechanisms that would be emulated in shimmering flickering LEDs that Bobby produced to induce a blissful out-of-body state in the viewer.

Jane Anspach also had a hand in influencing Bobby's artistic decisions. She had written her thesis on Whistler and worked at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston after college. There was also an impressive family art collection which highlighted the notions of art finding a place in the home, and having an effect on the daily lives of its collectors. The Anspach family visited New York regularly in order to take in museums and musical and theatrical productions. Jane Anspach also began to source works of art for a gallery which she set up and managed in Toledo for several years in the mid-1990s. Her son Bobby began not only to consider an art career and gain deep and wide experience in meditation techniques, but he also began to see how galleries and art markets functioned, and to develop a strategy for his insertion and establishment into contemporary art culture which combined industrial-scale production with an art-world business model of identifying key players and influencers, and raising visibility for his transformational idea.

Anspach was intrigued by art early on, building computers and taking classes in architecture for high school students at the Toledo Museum of Art. He studied, like his mother and brothers, at Boston College, majoring in art as well as taking classes in theology and religion. He graduated in 2011 and applied to MFA programs. Always a mix of poet and businessman, Anspach zeroed in on the specific graduate

Right:
Bobby and Ethan
Newburgh, NY
2022





programs which would cast him in the best possible light for a successful art-world career. He applied to Yale and RISD among other programs, but failed to gain access the first time around, instead beginning his studies at California College of Art. He was accepted at and attended RISD the following year. Taylor Baldwin, his thesis advisor in the Sculpture Department, worked closely with Anspach in his two years at RISD and felt that *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* was always present in the artist's mind. Perhaps he had started working on it at CCA, or even earlier. Anspach also created stop-motion animations at RISD, but he quickly began focusing on *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* exclusively. He exhibited a version in 2016 at the Extra Credit Gallery at RISD in Providence, and began to refine the idea in preparation for his final thesis exhibition in New York. Anspach also discussed with Baldwin the urgency of his project—a recurring theme in Anspach's life—the notion of who needed to see it: the CEO's of corporations, Alice Walton, Vladimir Putin, that the miracle could be most effective if it was presented to influential people.

The RISD MFA exhibition took place at Microscope Gallery in Brooklyn and *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* had an immediate positive effect—visitors to the gallery began lining up to experience the immersive sculpture—a mattress which positioned the viewer horizontally as they gazed into a cardboard box outfitted with colored Pompoms and sparkling LEDs (there were two such set-ups). Patrick Mohundo, an artist who happened to be in the building, stopped into the RISD thesis show and ran into Jules Johnston, a friend of his, who was also studying at RISD as an undergrad and who was working with Anspach on presenting

the installation. Visitors were sometimes wary and nervous going through the disarming experience, and so there were guides, often Anspach, who assisted with this. Mohundo was guided by Anspach and was transfixed. Artists networks are very open, generous, and fluid, meeting Mohundo, who was studying in the Hunter MFA program, introduced Anspach to a network of New York artists and art spaces.

After graduation, Bobby Anspach relocated to New York. He set up a studio in Gowanus and began working on his machines. Through his friendship with Mohundo, he became friends with many artists at the Hunter program and began to connect with artists, curators, and art dealers such as David Lindsay, Emily Janovic, Anna Tome, Jack Barrett. It was Mohundo, who had previous experience with the artist/curator-friendly Spring Break Art Fair who felt that this would be a good venue for Anspach to present his work. The art Fair takes place in April, and early in 2018, Anspach began to plan for a much more ambitious version of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*. He ordered a hospital bed through family friends back in the mid-west and the entire scale of the project was similarly elevated. Mohundo and a group of classmates proposed an exhibition of a single artist's work—Anspach—with half a dozen curators, an amusing conceit that was perfect for spring break. All of the artists pitched in labor and planning-wise for production. In December of 2017, Anspach met Ethan Bond-Watts through David Lindsay. Bond-Watts was an artist who would become Anspach's studio manager and guide production of the machines for the next four years.

Bobby's World was the most popular "booth" at the 2018 Spring Break Art Fair, and taught the artist valuable lessons: while the assistance of fellow artists had been invaluable, Anspach's message was watered-down and contorted through multiple voices. A recurring theme mentioned by his professors and colleagues was his level of personal involve-

Left:
Newburgh, NY
2022

ment in the project: an enthusiasm that at times verged on mania. Bobby's work caught the attention of Massimo Gioni, director of The New Museum, and Talking Heads front man David Byrne. But, on one hand, Anspach's collaborators on the project presented it at Spring Break with an irony that was not actually the artist's intention, on the other hand he faced criticism for a certain level of corporate efficiency in his presentation which was frowned on by some art work influencers. While Anspach saw the value in continuing to work within the parameters of the art world, he also saw its limits, and the limits of artistic collaborations.

Curator Elizabeth Ferrer saw Bobby's World at Spring Break 2018 and included it in the third BRIC Biennial the following year, with the fitting title *The Impossible Possible*. Curator and art producer Anita Durst of Chashama also supported Anspach's work and gave him a place to exhibit *Place for continuous Eye Contact* for several months after Spring Break 2018. For the 2019 Portal Art Fair on Governors Island, he and Ethan began designing a much bigger machine that would allow two individuals to look into each other's eyes. While scouting for textiles in the D & D building in Midtown Manhattan, they met Christopher Hyland, who has a textile showroom, and is also deeply involved with social and artistic projects. Connecting with Anspach on a philosophical level, Hyland suggested bringing a sense of history into the machines by incorporating a symbolic textile that would reference a momentous peace summit in 1520 between Henry VIII and Françoise I: The Field of the Cloth of Gold. One of the purported goals of the summit was outlawing war (amongst Christians). Anspach clad his enlarged two-person *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* in this sumptuous fabric, and exhibited it at Portal.

Anspach's 2019 iteration of the *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*, a bed with a glowing spherical zone of concentration created for the 2019 Bric Biennial, was then featured in

the 2020 installment of the Spring Break Art Fair, the fair's "booth" again curated by Ferrer. The fair opened in March at the start of the Covid pandemic. Anspach soon after relocated his studio to Newburgh New York, and began living across the Hudson in Beacon, joined frequently by his studio manager Bond-Watts. Events had conspired to make it clear to Anspach that the machines needed to move out of the realm of the art world and begin to impact a wider public. Feeling comfortable about reducing his carbon footprint now that he had a Tesla, Bobby created a versatile machine that could be set up outdoors, thus abiding by pandemic guidelines, and powered by a car battery.

Using social media (mostly Instagram) as the method of getting the word out, a pair of guerilla installations took place, first in the parking lot of the Newburgh Walmart in March 2021, and then in front of the Metropolitan Museum of art, in May. Walmart was a particularly targeted site: Anspach knew that billionaire Walmart heir Alice Walton was both an influential figure socially and politically, as well as a major art collector, and the founder of Crystal Bridges Art Museum. He hoped that the publicity surrounding his action in the parking lots of Walmarts (there was more than one action planned) would get back to her. This was not a completely unreasonable expectation since the project was very distinctive, and Anspach had achieved art-world notoriety, and even seen his work advertised in the pages of Artforum (for the 2019 BRIC Biennial). Both guerilla actions brought non-art world viewers into the machines, and from anecdotal reports, seemed to have had the usual poignant effect on those who experienced the *Place For Continuous Eye Contact*. The mobile machines seemed to have a future, according to Bond-Watts, there was an imminent plan to drive the Tesla to the capital, with the machine in an attached trailer, and present it in front of the Capitol. The project ended suddenly when Anspach died while swimming in the Beacon Reservoir on July 5, 2022.

*He believed that the most beautiful state of mind is that where
we control our thoughts, and that we sit in appreciation and reverence for what
we have, and through this, the world will not have wars. He believed
he could bring that to people through a shortcut to perfect joy,
even if it is just three minutes.*

— Jane Anspach



“Enter an MRI-like apparatus and experience a psychedelic awakening.”

“I am probably one of the few critics that did experience his work — which was very interactive, phenomenological, and impressive.”

Excerpts from Martha Schwendener’s email to the author

Bobby Anspach: the next thing you know someone is telling you, your session is over

Saul Ostrow

I did not know Bobby Anspach (1987–2022) nor was I familiar with his work when asked to take on this project. To acquaint myself I have been going through his digital archive—files downloaded off of his various laptops, drives, and iPhone. Among these files, I have found drafts of artist statements written over the years, memos to self, playlists, and hundreds of unidentified photos taken of what I will refer to as Bobby’s “machines.” These are either informal pictures taken in his Brooklyn or Newburgh, NY studios, or installed in the various exhibitions where his work had been included in the years before Covid shut down the art world.

Besides his digital footprint, Bobby left behind a storage unit in Providence, RI filled with the sets for his unfinished stop-motion animation and an early installation, a vast quantity of pom-poms, and a dozen or so of his machines—half of which were in the Brooklyn studio he was using for storage, and the others in the studio he maintained in Newburgh. All

these works were in differing states of completion and disrepair, though given Bobby’s DIY aesthetic, this is hard to tell until you try to activate them. Ethan Bond-Watts, who worked alongside Bobby in Brooklyn and then in his Newburgh studio, told me the reason for this state of affairs was because Bobby would cannibalize one machine to make the next one, which was always going to be better than the previous one.

It appears, given the documents left behind as well as those statements made for public consumption, Bobby was on a mission to save the world, which he perceived as being on the edge of climatic self-destruction. A secondary mission was one of personal salvation and bliss. While he seems to have been sincere about both his missions, he also acknowledged there was a touch of madness in each. Perhaps this insight concerning seriousness of purpose and madness is what he most wanted to share through his art. He had other ambitions as well; one was to, in the most eccentric of manners, draw attention to himself. Much like Jack Smith, the outrageous performance artist of the 1960s, Bobby railed against the duplicity and corruption of the art world while seeking its

*Left – pg.17:
Place for Continuous
Eye Contact, 2016
Mixed Media
Providence, RI.*

recognition. His logics were immaculately circular—one needed to make a point of not wanting to be complicit—for how else do you save the world if people don't know where to go to have their transcendent moment?

Just before Covid, Bobby was on a roll. His *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* was curated into the “BRIC Biennial: Volume III, South Brooklyn Edition” in 2019, with the full-page advertisement for the exhibition in *Artforum* featuring only Bobby's work. That same year, he was curated into the Spring/Break Art Show, a project organized by No Longer Empty, as well as “Portal: Governors Island.” According to an undated document, he had also worked on a proposal for the Shed at Hudson Yards, which was to be a collaborative project with composer/musician Matthew Cooper (Eluvium). I was also told a story about how when an art dealer proposed including Bobby's work in their booth at an art fair, Bobby told the dealer he would only do it if the booth was exclusively dedicated to his work. Yet in keeping with his DIY aesthetic, he in his own manner also sought out a less-than-elite audience. His plan was to go straight to the people and to do this, he and Ethan hooked up one of his machines to batteries in order to make it portable, allowing them to set up in a Walmart parking lot, an abandoned church in Beacon, NY and then again outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Unannounced, passing strangers were solicited to experience Bobby's machine. After all, Bobby understood it is upon such actions that legends are built.

Neither Bobby's ambitions nor his means are without precedence in Western art. From the late-19th through the mid-20th century, starting with the Symbolists and the Decadents, there have been artists who sought to move themselves and their audience beyond the rational world. With the advent of photography, moving pictures, the phonograph, and telephone, the world became a place of ephemeral images and disembodied voices. One consequence of

this was Spiritualism, whose mediums communicated with nether-worldly beings, and the Theosophy of the Russian-born mystic Madame Blavatsky, which drew on various esoteric practices and older European philosophies such as Neoplatonism, as well as Hinduism and Buddhism. Early adherents to abstract art including af Klint, Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian were attracted to Theosophy's belief in the existence of a single, divine Absolute in which the universe as perceived is nothing more than an illusionary projection of a four-dimensional real.

At the same time other early promoters of abstract art embraced the technological as a means to break with the conventions of the traditional static artwork by introducing movement and temporal change. As early as 1913, the Synchronists Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell envisioned the production of machines that would project color and light in sequences composed like music. By the late 1910s–20s the Russian Constructivists and Laszlo Maholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus had begun to make mechanized art. This was the beginning of Kinetic art, a term coined in the 1920s by artists Naum Gabo (1890–1977) and his brother Antoine Pevsner (1886–1962). Artists continued to experiment with new technologies through the 1950s, bringing about new relationships between artworks and viewer. By the late 1950s, Aldo Tambellini and Otto Piene opened Black Gate, an alternative gallery space for new media experimentation where artists could create immersive, interactive multimedia, time-based installations. The goal of such artists was to relocate the viewer, to place them inside the artwork so as to intensify their experience.

In the mid-60s, Stan VanDerBeek an experimental filmmaker known for his pioneering work in art and technology, ordered a grain silo kit. He used the top section, which was a 31-foot-high dome, to build a theater in a field in rural New York state, where he lived. At its core was a rotating, circular





tray 10 feet or 12 feet in diameter on which he arranged an assortment of slide and 16mm projectors. The audience would lie down beneath it and watch an ever-changing, overhead collage of images. Ironically, some 60 years later, given the virtuality digital technologies afford, the notion of such immersive experiences are at the heart of such ventures as the Hall des Lumières in New York, which showcase immersive environments featuring the works of Van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Counter to these trends, Bobby moved away from such communalized hallucinatory realities. Instead, he created an immersive space where viewers themselves are the spectacle.

Given that this history of art's exploration of sound, light (color), motion, and intra-media has been marginalized, traces of it have come to be associated with experimental music, set and lighting design, animation, and film. Such concerns were largely excluded from those histories that shaped the practices of artists, art historians, and critics, the principal reason being that such experimentation challenged Western society's commitment to a pre-industrial vision of art rooted in Renaissance humanism and the traditions of the academy. It stands counter to the craft notion of the artist as a skilled maker whose studio is an alchemical lab where base materials are transformed into something precious. The avant-garde's endeavor to harness technology and the vision of the artist as tinkerer collaborating with technicians does not easily fit this historical model.

It doesn't matter if Bobby was aware of this genealogy, or if he was intuitively reinventing it as he went along; either way to a great extent he would have been working blind. What is of interest is the way his mind worked in that his physical objects—these machines—carry within them a wide array of associations and references running from ancient concepts of transcendental geometry to the visionary concepts of Buckminster Fuller, mixed in with the look of con-

temporary Sci-Fi. The web of electronic hardware that covers the dome and the harsh, eerie glow of its network of LED lights offers up a mad scientist laboratory image of the real world as a chaotic realm of runaway technology and stimuli. But while such appearances were important to Bobby, more important was what motivated all of this: he wanted to stimulate the experience of blissful, meditative consciousness in others. At the time of his death, he was working on a smaller, less cumbersome, head-sized box version of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*.

From what I can gather from his archive Bobby was not a mystic. If anything, he was a sensualist who sought not to be overwhelmed or lose control—who wanted to be able to maintain his focus. Working in a manner that was both intuitive and empirically rational the seeming excess of electronic paraphernalia (all functional elements of the work) point to utterly contradictory quality. His domes, tent-like structures, and boxes whose interiors are covered with multicolored pom-poms in patterns resembling a mandala, the Buddhist symbol of the universe, and lit by a cycle of programmed LED lights, offer the user a reprieve—a place of momentary retreat into a calmer inner world—a *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*. So, while lying in the machine the way one would in an MRI apparatus, the user, wearing a patch over one eye, gazes into a small mirror affixed above them, while listening to ambient music. Time and space seem to collapse and the next thing one is aware of is being told your trip is over. In this conspicuous contrast between exterior and interior we perhaps discover an analogy for how Bobby understood the act transforming one's state of being from the mundane to the transcendent.





Bobby Anspach:

I Saw the Most Beautiful World In the World Inside My Head...

Elizabeth Ferrer

In a too-brief career, Bobby Anspach (b. 1987, Toledo, OH; d. 2022, Beacon, NY) was responsible for a singular body of work, multimedia sculptures devised to induce altered states of consciousness. He called his works “Places for Continuous Eye Contact” or “eye machines”; hemispherical domes, box-like hoods, and in one case, a large tent, to be inhabited by one or two persons. With the simple act of making sustained eye contact, Bobby aimed to simulate a sense of meditative peace, one that would give rise to greater peace and compassion, for one another and for the planet. In doing so, he also offered his audience moments of sheer, unexpected beauty.

I first encountered Bobby in 2018 while researching artists for the third edition of the BRIC Biennial, an ambitious, multi-venue survey exhibition of contemporary Brooklyn-based artists. The theme for this iteration of the show, “The Impossible Possible,” could not have been more apt for the work Bobby was making, what one critic described as a “pom-pom and LED-laced dome-cum-meditation, cham-

ber-cum-psychedelic, den-cum-laboratory of ophthalmic experience.”¹ I met Bobby in his Gowanus studio, located in a building at the end of a street largely taken up by auto mechanics and body shops. Meeting him, and seeing his work for the first time, was a revelation. His studio contained a few of his eye machines, intricate but chaotic-looking structures suspended from metal scaffolds and covered with thousands of glowing LED lights. Their scaffolding held a complex array of electronic and lighting components that to my eye appeared as an incomprehensible tangle of wires and devices. These structures actually involved a wild mashup of high and low, technology and DIY craftiness. Bobby covered their interiors with thousands of colorful pom-poms that he purchased in mass quantities, and the floors with an air mattress and kitschy fleece blanket, often, one emblazoned with the image of a tiger. A participant enters a dome, reclines on the mattress, and is then fitted with headphones and an eye patch. A guide instructs the participant to gaze continuously at a mirror ringed with pom-poms positioned a few inches above their eye. Within moments, the spatial planes one normally perceives dissolve into a cohesive field, giving way to a sense of disembodiment, and to an otherworldly calm.²

Bobby began developing the concepts around *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* (all of these works have the same title) while he was an MFA student at the Rhode Island School of Design from 2015 to 2017. He focused on sculpture, but his independent studies in philosophy and perceptual

Left:
*Place for Continuous
Eye Contact*, 2019
Mixed Media
“BRIC Biennial Volume III”
Brooklyn, NY.
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

Following page:
Bobby meditating in
his condo, 2022
Beacon, NY.
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

neuroscience, along with his practice of Buddhism and lengthy periods of silent meditation, were crucial to the elaboration of this project. Bobby was a serious student of meditation. He had suffered from severe bouts of mental illness and it helped to quell the over-abundance of thoughts—creative and disturbing—that spilled from his mind. Moreover, he saw the attainment of tranquility and of a less ego-driven sense of self as essential to his broader goal: to compel greater awareness of the true catastrophe of climate change.

Deeply fearing for the future of the planet, Bobby meant *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* to literally open people's eyes to new possibilities, away from self-focused ideas, from ego, and towards a spiritual unification with others and with all reality.³ As Bobby wrote, "I have had very deep experiences in this world which have shown me something profound. These experiences have shown me that there is a way of relating to this world that, if everyone could see it, we would all live our lives in a very different way. We would see that what we have is incredibly precious and we would go to great lengths to care for each other and for the planet."⁴

I was invited inside *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* by Bobby to experience what, as he has said, words cannot properly describe. He fitted me with headphones and I slid into the apparatus to rest on the air mattress. He instructed me to stare with one eye into the mirror positioned just a few inches away from my face; in other words, to make sustained contact with myself. Ambient music composed for this work by Matthew Cooper (also known as Eluvium) played, and as I gazed at my eye over the course of several minutes, the space softly glowed as foreground flowed into background and vice versa. Staring at my eye, colors and form blurred and merged. I beheld a wondrous space, leaving me euphoric, blissed out, at least temporarily. I was certain that *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* would be a highlight of the BRIC Biennial and a few months later, Bobby and team installed the work in the

Gallery at BRIC House. Beginning with the exhibition's opening reception, I witnessed the reactions of visitors, one after another. People entered the dome bemused, and exited often speechless, laughing, sighing, and at least once, with tears.

Contacting me several months later Bobby asked if I would sponsor his participation in the curator-driven Spring/Break Art Show, a kind of nomadic anti-fair known for over-the-top installations of mostly commercially unviable work. In 2020 it was held across two floors of vacant office space in midtown Manhattan. The proposal was accepted, and Bobby installed another version of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*, this time, employing a raised dome and adjustable gurney to facilitate easier entrance into the structure by what would be a constant flow of visitors. Spring/Break was momentous for Bobby; more people than ever before encountered his work, including influential members of the art world and those attracted to the contemporary art scene's more experimental currents. A week later, the pandemic lockdown began, and I would never see him again.

Bobby soon decamped to Newburgh, NY, where he had found a large workspace to continue to create his eye machines. He also began to pursue a new goal, of truly taking his art to the people. He had spoken of a national tour to Walmart parking lots, where he would set up the sculptures to engage passersby, people he would never encounter at New York galleries or art fairs. I took this as a pipe dream, but Bobby made it a reality. In March 2022 he installed *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* in the parking lot of a Walmart in Newburgh, and two months later, another on Fifth Avenue to attract tourists outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His final Instagram post contains snippets of videos made in Newburgh, of people experiencing his eye machine. In one, a man coming out of the dome speaks emotionally to Bobby, saying, "Wow, wow...I can't believe what I saw. I cried. The experience—I have never had that in my life."



With a painfully incomplete record of his life's work, Bobby Anspach drowned on July 5, 2022 at the age of 35. An emerging artist only five years out of graduate school, he was still experimenting with the concepts he had begun developing while at RISD. Bobby's intent can be best gleaned through the handful of (often confusing) statements he left in notebooks, as well as through his MFA thesis, a rambling declaration, but one that attests to the consistency of his vision from the beginning. In addition, his collaborators and friends, especially the artist Ethan Bond-Watts who worked with Bobby for nearly his entire career, are valuable sources of information and insight.

Bobby's production encompasses fifteen eye machines and a handful of other sculptures and working drawings. In addition, he left an uncompleted stop-animation film, an ingenious and darkly comic look at different forms of

planetary destruction, all set to the opening movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.⁵ This output may seem modest, but each project required a prodigious amount of planning and fabrication. Bobby relied heavily on trial and error, tinkering continuously with the eye machines as he combined kitschy playfulness with complex digital technology.

In addition to the domes, which accommodate only a single user, he designed rectangular "hoods" suspended from the ceiling for two people to stand inside. Rather than staring at one's own eye in a mirror, the participants would stare intently at each other for several minutes, a literal gesture towards the kind of intimate connection Bobby aimed to achieve.⁶ His largest and most elaborately decorated *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* is based on the contours of a camping tent and made with jacquard fabric. Two participants sit inside, draped with a pom-pom-covered blanket



Bobby guiding a viewer into *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*, 2019
Mixed Media
"BRIC Biennial Volume III,"
Brooklyn, NY.
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

to Bobby's own inner conflicts and contradictions. On the one hand, he approached his project with a nearly messianic zeal, earnestly believing that his quirky means of inducing altered states in others could lead to greater compassion, less ego. But he also acknowledged the grandiosity of his goals; from the time he was a graduate student, he struggled with understanding art's true capacity to critique and to enact change.

Assuming an alter ego for the performative aspects of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* (Bobby the artist playing a version of Bobby the artist and so on), was a way of recognizing his inner conflicts and doubts while still moving forward. Bobby even admitted as much. In planning for his Newburgh Walmart project, he wrote in an Instagram post, "Part of business plan as part of performance where person pretends to be privileged white boy who thinks he knows something that could save the world if only the peeps at the top would get on board with the whole big plan where all ppl r created equal etc. etc. but the performance is all a joke because of course it won't work but that doubt is just part of the performance and person doing performance knows it could (save world) ..." ⁸

Bobby understood that his career presented a conundrum: While he had a visionary streak and pursued his work with conviction, he was also an artist of ambition, frustrated by being largely outside the confines of the New York art world whose attention and respect he sought. But ultimately, I believe he came down on the side of altruism, on a persistent desire to share with others something he believed in, an experience that could open others' eyes. He did so by devising immersive environments, but his would never be the art of spectacle or of crowds that are hallmarks of the cur-

while wearing eye patches and headphones as they make sustained visual contact with one another. ⁷

Illuminated with thousands of multi-colored LED light-bulbs, each iteration of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* involved an array of electronic devices and other equipment (cables, ropes, ethernet cables, chargers, clamps, power strips, surge protectors, etc.), and, ironically, a massive amount of electricity to function. Bobby and team worked with gaming PCs, desktop computers, software, switchers, distributors, and pixel converters to distribute data and electrical current, as well as to control the lighting patterns designed for each eye machine—all toward the goals of transcendence and climate awareness.

Relishing the public display of his work, Bobby played out a sequence of steps and explanations that cast Bobby as guide, Bobby as seer. He also aimed to create converts out of those who expressed skepticism at first sight of these implausible structures. To carry out his more messianic objectives he assumed a persona, although not one who differed demonstrably from Bobby himself. This performative element points

rent phenomenon of immersive exhibitions (although on one level, he might have relished that). Ultimately, it was about the singularity of an experience, about an audience of one. And through pom-poms and glowing lights, it was also about activating moments of unexpected beauty, quite unlike anything his participants (or I) had ever known. Bobby feared climate change, he feared for an apocalyptic end of the world, but his aim was not to make a fearful art. Bobby knew he could not save the world, but he had offered up a means of making us feel as if we were melting away into the cosmos, even if fleetingly. In the end, this beauty, those glimpses into something reaching the sublime, would be enough.

• • •

¹Nina Wolpow, "BRIC Biennial: Volume III, "The Impossible Possible," *Brooklyn Rail*, March, 2019. <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/03/art-seen/Bric-Biennial-Volume-III-The-Impossible-Possible>.

²Bobby Anspach's studio manager, assistant, and closest collaborator, Ethan Bond-Watts, provided a wealth of information on the fabrication and technical aspects of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*.

³Ethan Bond-Watts and Wesley Cosby, Bobby's friend and meditation partner, provided useful insights on the influence of meditation on Bobby's work.

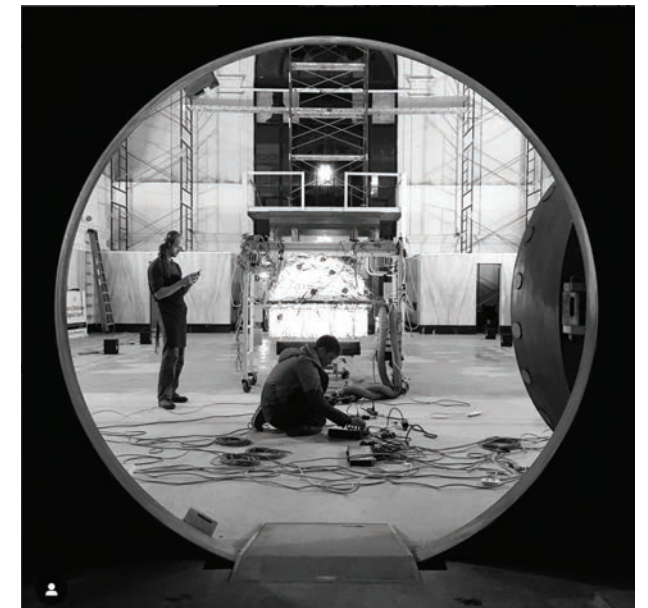
⁴Robert (Bobby) Anspach, Thesis, Rhode Island School of Design, 2017 (unpublished).

⁵A *Terrible Something is Destroying the Beautiful Nothing* can be accessed on Bobby's website, www.anspachart.com.

⁶Conversation with Wesley Cosby, April 10, 2023.

⁷Bobby exhibited this work on a single occasion, at the 2019 Portal: Governors Island

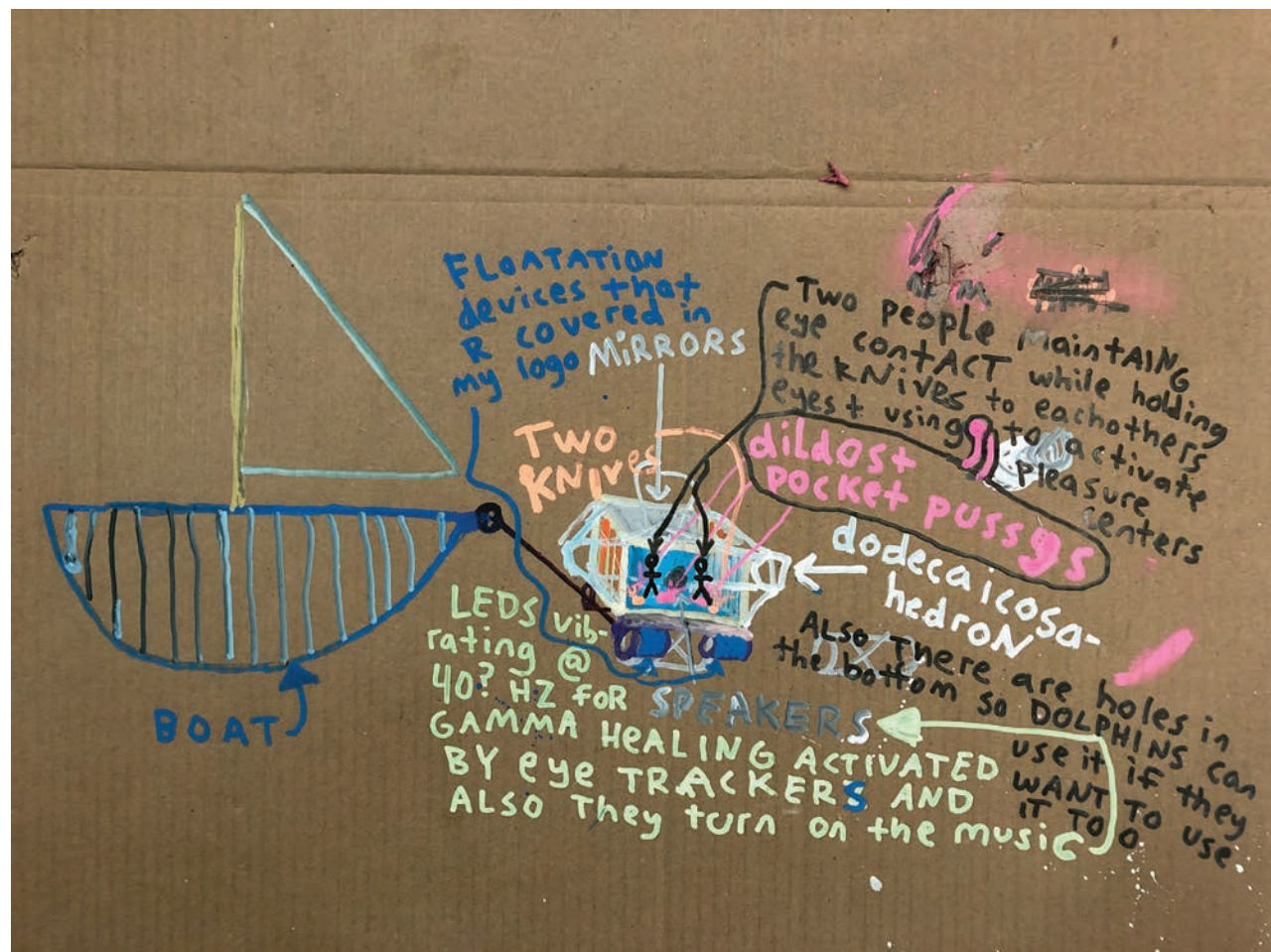
⁸Bobby Anspach, Instagram post, March 13, 2022.



Top:
Bobby (kneeling) and
Ethan installing *Place for
Continuous Eye Contact*
November, 2021
The Landmark, Beacon, NY.
Photo: Evan Samuelson

Bottom:
Digital drawing of *Piece for
Continuous Eye Contact*
Newburgh, NY.
Walmart parking lot, 2022



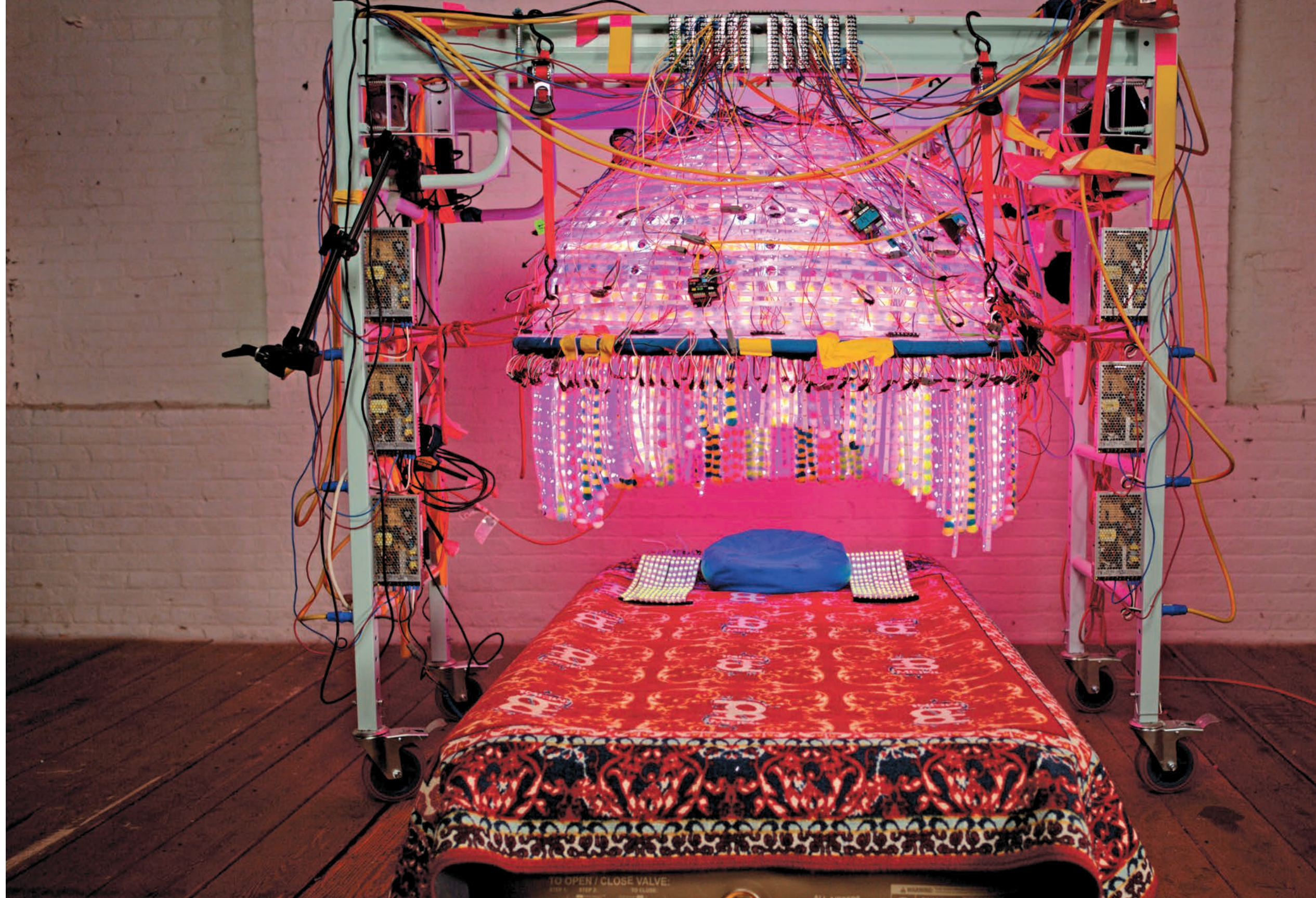


Above:
Proposal for installation at
Water McBeer Gallery
Art Ship maiden voyage
July 2019
Folly Tree Arboretum
East Hampton, NY.

Right:
Invitation to exhibition at
Extra Credit Gallery, 2016
Rhode Island School
of Design
Providence, RI.



*Place For Continuous
Eye Contact, 2021
Mixed Media
Newburgh, NY Studio
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts*





An apparently messianic artist statement in a world where acknowledging that you know that you are doing something that isn't really all that acceptable makes you more accepted because people think they are connected to their thoughts so pointing out that you think something similar to them makes them feel connected to you because everyone just wants to feel connected.

By Bobby Anspach

One time I saw the most beautiful world in the world inside my head. I told my brother to paint it. But he could only see the world inside of his head. So he didn't know what I was talking about. Then I traveled from one end of the universe to the other (it is shaped like a parabola).

I found out how to let go of words and become part of everything. But when the words came back there was something urgent that needed to be said. Because we are destroying the world. Which is needed in order to see the beautiful world in the back of your head.

So I decided I would make a giant painting to save the world from eating itself. I think it would have had like two p.o.v. paintings that are connected to each other and they would have been holding knives towards each other's eyes while maybe holding each other's penis, and it would have been instructions

*Place For Continuous
Eye Contact, 2021
Mixed Media
Newburgh, NY Studio
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts*

on how to see that when you hold onto beauty or run from fear you forget that you are part of everything and the world loses its color and it's really uncomfortable and it's what we have all been doing for the longest time.

I imagined that this would happen just before the world blows itself up, which would cause a chain reaction and space-time would begin to collapse because the U.S. has so many bombs and everything is connected and string theory and stuff, at which point I would fly into space with my friend, stop off to get the universe starting seed from the good aliens, then telepathically communicate with my friend (via the face) and decide that I must continue on without him to restart the whole thing (even though we both knew the terrible amount of suffering that would come with starting the whole thing over again (being that we now knew that we were everything and everyone that had ever existed and would soon be once again (but we knew that it was worth it because finding out it's all a dream and other people are real is pretty much the most beautiful thing that could ever happen (not to mention that there is only one moment so the suffering is sort of not real (but yes, I know, it sort of is, which is why I made the painting in the first place)))))).

*This page and
following spread:*
**Place For Continuous
Eye Contact, 2021**
Mixed Media
Newburgh, NY Studio
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts





Then I let go of the whole thing. And I wasn't Jesus anymore.

Then God told me to cut my eye out.

Then I ran away. But you can't really run away from God (oh and yeah, no God in the art world I think (see title))

Then I chased God. (but you can't chase God because God is everything and chasing God means something other than what is here).

Then I apologized to God for not cutting my eye out and solving the mystery of the universe.

And now I am going to make the most beautiful sculpture in the world.

This page:
Bobby guiding art writer
Adam Beal through
*Place For Continuous
Eye Contact*, 2018
Mixed Media
Spring/Break Art Fair
New York, March 2018
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

Following spread:
Bobby guiding
viewers through
*Place for Continuous
Eye Contact*, 2021
Mixed Media
Walmart parking lot
Newburgh, NY
March 18, 2022
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts











Previous spread pg. 38–39:
**Place for Continuous
 Eye Contact, 2022**
 Metropolitan Museum
 of Art, New York
 May 5, 2022

Top Left:
Bobby guiding a viewer
 Assistant Liz Yang
 in background.
 Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

Bottom Left:
Bobby testing
 Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

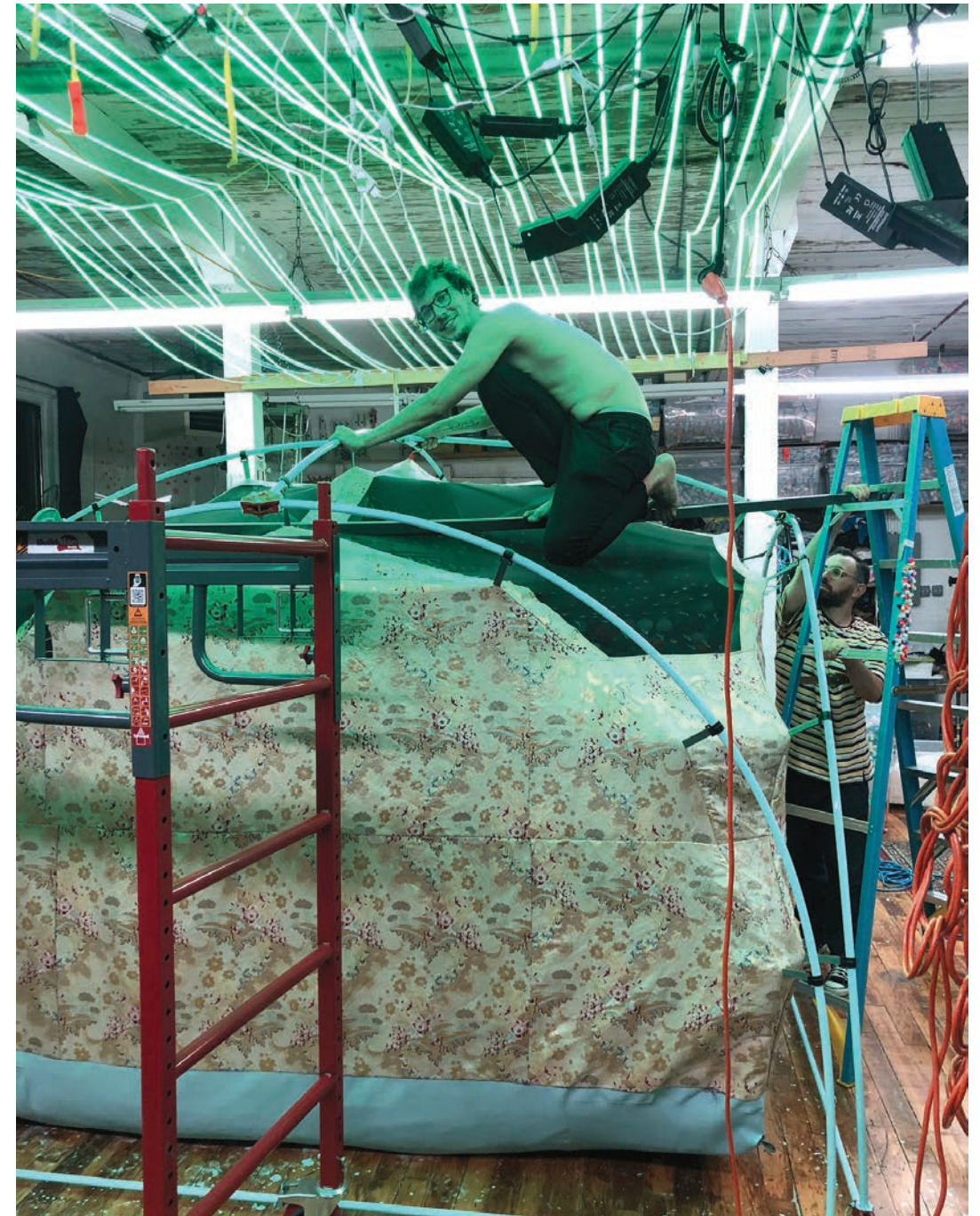
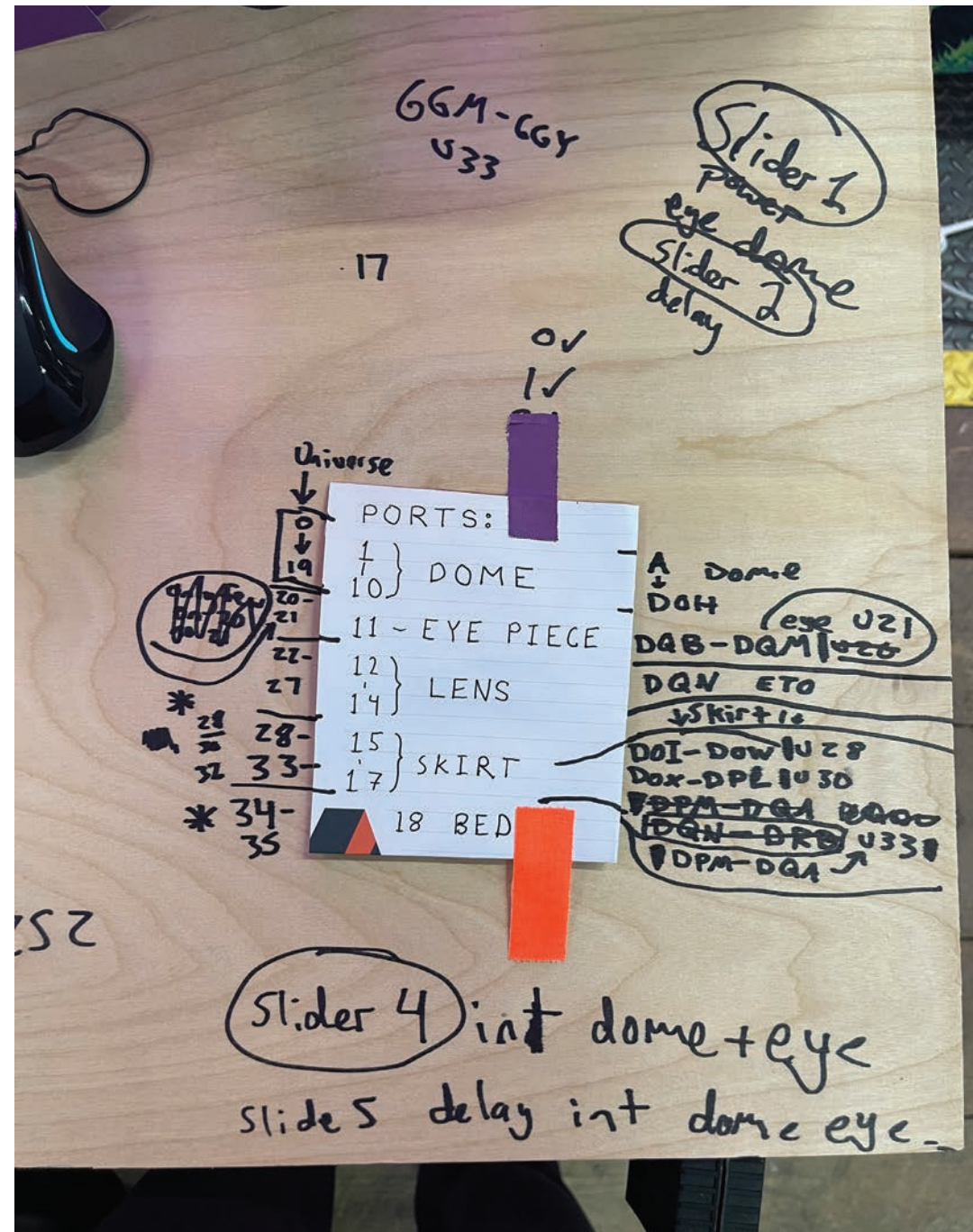
Right:
Bobby and Ethan installing
 Photo: Phoebe Mar

Previous spread pg. 40–41:
**Place for Continuous
 Eye Contact,**
 The Landmark, Beacon, NY
 November, 2021
 Photos: Ethan Bond-Watts

This page:
Bobby's Studio
 Providence, RI, 2017

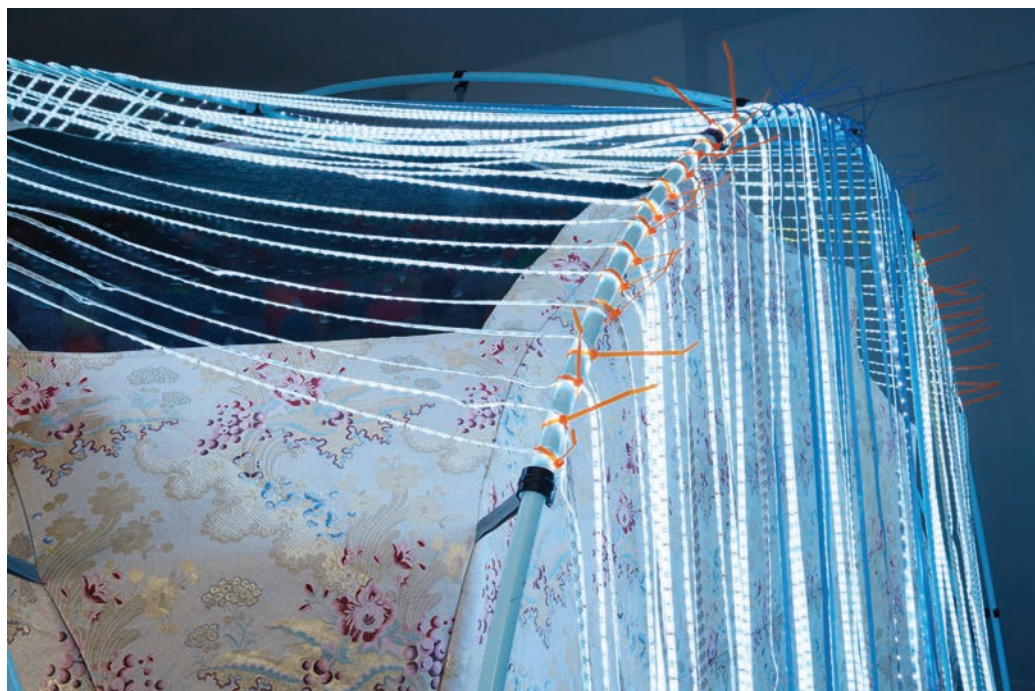
Following spread:
LED Network Map, 2021
 Newburgh Studio

**Bobby and friend Justin
 Gordon assembling**
**Place for Continuous
 Eye Contact, 2019**
 Brooklyn, NY Studio, 2019
 Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts





*Place for Continuous
Eye Contact, 2019
Installed at "Portal:
Governors Island Art Fair"
New York
September, 2019*



Above and right:
*Place for Continuous
 Eye Contact*, 2019
 Installed at "Portal:
 Governors Island Art Fair"
 New York
 September, 2019





Bobby testing head gear for
Place for Continuous Eye Contact
Brooklyn, NY Studio, 2019 (above)
Installed at Rhode Island School
of Design, 2016 (right)
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts







*This page and
previous spread:*
**Places for Continuous
Eye Contact**
Installed at
Rhode Island School
of Design, 2016



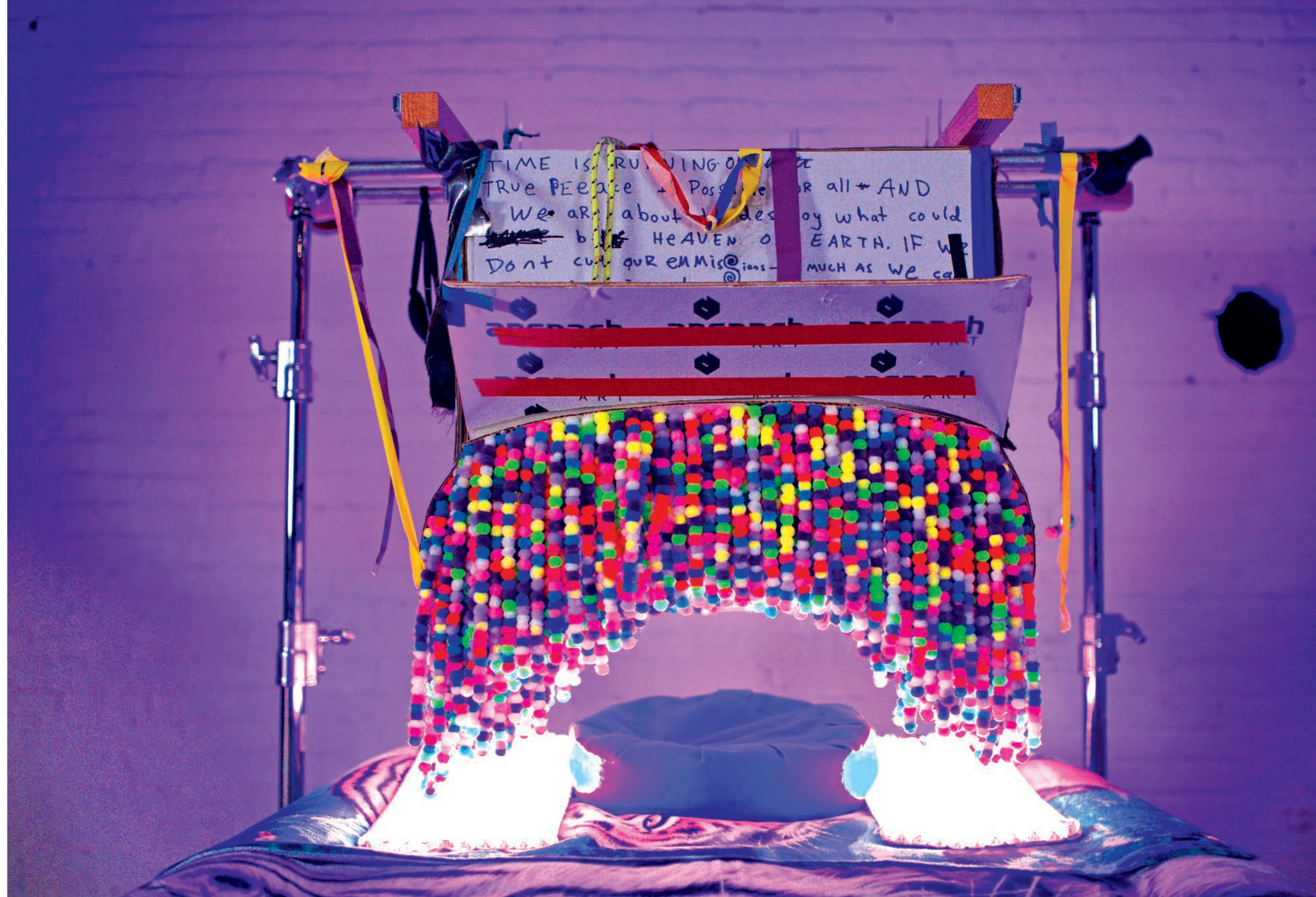
*Place for Continuous
 Eye Contact, 2022*
 Bobby routing the dome rim
 Brooklyn, NY Studio (above)
 Brooklyn, NY Studio (right)
 Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

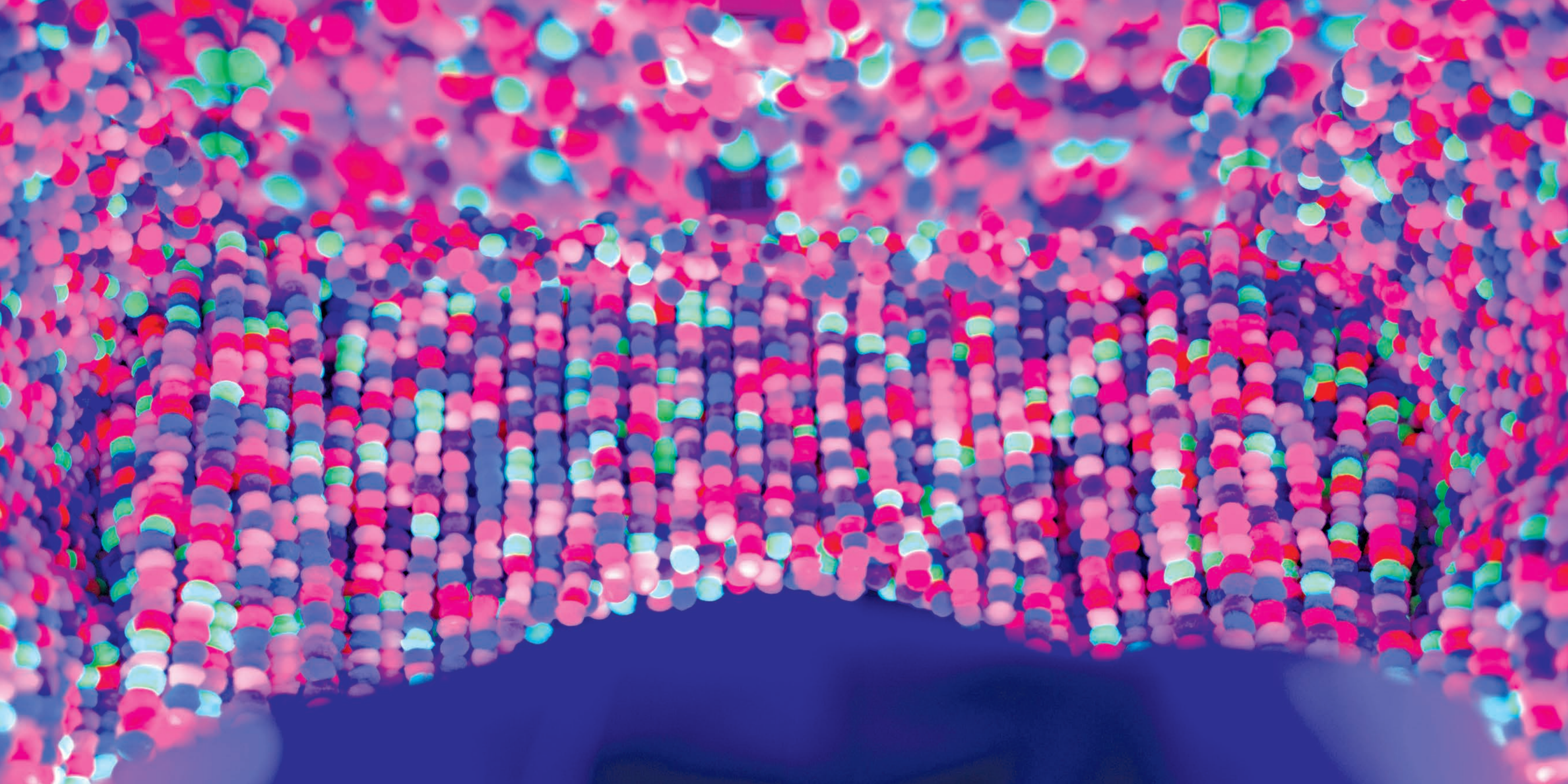




*Place for Continuous
Eye Contact, 2022
Mixed Media
Newburgh, NY Studio
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts*

This page and
following spread:
*Place for Continuous
Eye Contact*, 2022
Mixed Media
Newburgh, NY Studio
Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts





Bobby Anspach Memorial Exhibition

Fall 2023

In the fall of 2023, the captivating, transportive immersive installations by the late artist Bobby Anspach were on view and open to the public in a special memorial exhibition taking place in his former studio in Gowanus, Brooklyn. Titled *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*, the exhibition featured four of his machines, which viewers enter into for a fully immersive experience of consciousness and connectedness, akin to the journey of meditation.

From the opening on September 22 through the original end date of October 15, the exhibition welcomed over 300 guests, with incredible feedback from visitors on their personal experiences of the work. Due to high demand, the exhibition was extended through November 19, and continued to see appointment bookings roll in, as visitors, friends, and collaborators present ideas and inspirations for future ways to connect, build, and share Bobby's world — eventually resulting in over 700 visitors and consistently sold-out weekends.



I haven't been moved like this by an exhibit in so long. I can't put into words how healing it all feels. This is special and so important.

— Phil Bauer

Bobby was able to get truly far out, and he wanted to bring back to us what he thought was truly important and impactful.

— Taylor Baldwin, RISD

Mirroring Dali's account of paranoid-critical thinking, Anspach's works position the catch-all museum "experience" as a subjective, sensational phenomenon. And, reminiscent of Koolhaas' interpretation, Anspach's sculptures present paranoid-critical creativity as a collaboration between the visitor and their surroundings — while all viewers experience the same machines, each experience is entirely distinct.

While Place for Continuous Eye Contact sculptures should, at least in theory, be one of the most ubiquitous museum "experiences" on the market, how can one popularize and standardize Anspach's works without negating their inherent intimacy and subjectivity? Anspach's life was cut tragically short, ahead of the acclaim his work will continue to accumulate with time, leaving no obvious answers.

Hopefully, Anspach's apparatuses will be celebrated as innovative immersive art exhibition programming, reinforcing the fantastic capabilities of augmented reality while recognizing its most exciting, Surrealist potential — to visualize and plumb realms unique to the individual.

— Joanna Seifter, *Tussle*

Life changing.

— Daria Tavava

Looking in my eye stopped feeling like my own eye.

— Commentary overheard by guides

What a beautiful and unique experience.

The most present emotion was happiness.

— Michelle Kiefer

*Whatever his experience of life, he was able to, before his departure,
translate his suffering into a trip of emotions intense enough to befit a god,
the most beautiful machine in the world.*

— Noah Loiacano

*Bobby saw ultimately hope that he furthered through people literally
looking into each other's eyes. In this elemental, profound gesture, we are
transformed, broadly applied to communities, the human
condition improves. Bobby's machine sees hope in history,
Bobby's complex emotional experiences.*

— Christopher Hyland

*Inside the Brooklyn studio of the late artist Bobby Anspach,
four multi-sensory, immersive art machines open pathways to wondrously
psychedelic worlds — sometimes bringing the entire universe into your
own eye, sometimes requesting that you sustain an intimate connection,
amidst a blanket of rainbow orbs, for a few seconds longer.*

*Entitled "Place for Continuous Eye Contact," the astonishing exhibit
celebrates the life of the Beacon, New York-based artist, who passed July 2022.
And what a celebration it is — of human connectedness, consciousness and creativity*

— David Graver, *Cool Hunting*



*I finally got to see Bobby Anspach's work in person this week and to say
that photos of it don't do it justice would be a severe understatement.
His art has to be seen — experienced, really — to be believed. It's not only hard
to describe both the machines and the feelings they elicit, but trying to do so
almost feels like a transgression of some sort. You really just have to go yourself,
preferably with a friend as there is one piece that requires two people.*

— David Weiner, *Gossamer*

*I see people are hurting right now and lashing out.
This is an antidote for the pain. If you are in New York City you MUST
go see “A Place for Continuous Eye Contact”. It will change you. Bobby created
a legacy with his art. He truly believed in healing the world with his work.
I put a link in my bio for his website so you can learn more about him.*

— post from visitor @fatjaguar

The tent breathed. I saw every phase of our friendship together.

— Commentary overheard by guides

*At first, I was a bit resistant to all the sensory stimuli as my journey
is usually through silence, but once the resistance relaxed, it was delightful
to disappear into the experience, pompoms, color, and sound.*

It was a unique and powerful experience.

— Nancy Colier, Psychotherapist, Author, Interfaith Minister & Thought Leader

A truly captivating experience wondrous and beautiful!

— Chris Houin

*When I first visited Place for Continuous Eye Contact, I was struck by the
difference between encountering the machines from the outside, as objects,
and experiencing them from the inside, with music, and activated by your own
— and maybe someone else’s — gaze. Though the places to which Bobby’s
machines transported me were quite outside language, I have often felt poetry
works a similar magic when read with that kind of open attention.*

— Allyson Paty

*I’ve seen a lot of interactive experiences and none of them have really caught
my attention, but this one’s actually doing something here.*

— Commentary overheard by guides



In conjunction with the exhibition, there were a series of programs inspired by the work of Bobby Anspach. These were comprised of panel discussions, performances, and poetry readings. The program series explored Bobby’s works and the themes that motivated his practice. The programming collaborators included:

Allyson Paty, Poet
Ash North Compton, Artist and activist
Ben Ross Davis, Artist
Brooklyn Rail, Media outlet
Cameron Mesirow, Musician
Charlotte Kent, Critic
Elizabeth Ferrer, Curator

Ethan Bond Watts, Artist
George Fragopoulos, Poet
Gia Gonzales, Poet
Gossamer, Media outlet
James Barickman, Poet
Jules Johnston, Artist
Malloy James, Musician

Nina St. Pierre, Writer
Saul Ostrow, Critic
Taylor Baldwin, Artist & RISD Professor
Theo Martins, Artist & Musician
William Corwin, Journalist
XY Zhou, Poet



BIOGRAPHIES

Bobby Anspach was born in 1987 in Toledo, OH, and died in 2022 in Beacon, NY. He received his BA from Boston College in 2011, studied at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, and received an MFA in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2017. There, he produced the earliest versions of *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*. Prior to his passing, he was working on a film, *A Terrible Something is Destroying the Beautiful Nothing*.

His exhibitions include the Spring/Break Art Show, New York, 2018 and 2020; the "BRIC Biennial: Volume III, South Brooklyn Edition (The Impossible Possible)," Brooklyn, NY, 2019, and No Longer Empty, NLE Lab (after) care, New York, 2019; as well as those at "Portal: Governors Island," New York, 2019; Microscope Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, 2017; Space 369, St. Paul, MN, 2017; Sol Koffler Gallery Providence, RI, 2016; The Wurks Gallery, Providence, 2016; Gelman Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, 2016; Prisoners Cinema, Providence, RI, 2016; Campus Center Galleries at CCA, San Francisco, CA, 2015; Embark Gallery, San Francisco, 2015; and Distillery Gallery, Boston, MA, 2013, 2014, and 2015. In the public sphere, he presented *Place for Continuous Eye Contact* at a pop-up space in Beacon, NY, 2021; in a Walmart parking lot in Newburgh, NY, 2022; and on Fifth Avenue outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2022.

This page and following page:
Bobby soldering LEDs on *Place for Continuous Eye Contact*, 2020
 Brooklyn, NY Studio
 Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

Place for Continuous Eye Contact, 2020
 Mixed Media
 Spring/Break Art Fair, 2020
 Photo: Ethan Bond-Watts

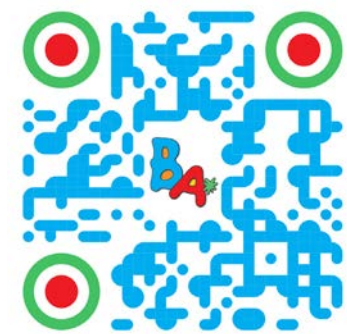
Publications include Nina Wolpow, "BRIC Biennial: Volume III, 'The Impossible Possible,'" *Brooklyn Rail*, March, 2019; Adam Beal, "Place for Continuous Eye Contact (8): A Test-Drive with Mindfulness," *Brooklyn Rail*, April, 2018; Scott Lynch, "The Best of Spring/Break, the Outré Art Fair in an Abandoned Times Square Office Building," *Bedford + Bowery*, March 7, 2018; and Elena Goukassian "Colorful and Immersive Experiences at the 2017 Gowanus Open Studios," *Hyperallergic*, Oct 23, 2017.

Will Corwin is a sculptor and writer from New York. He writes for the *Brooklyn Rail* and is co-editor of the Rail's Architecture section, and is also a frequent contributor to *Art Papers*, *Art & Antiques*, *Bomb*, and *Canvas* magazines.

Elizabeth Ferrer is a New York based curator and writer. Former Chief Curator at BRIC, a Brooklyn arts and media institution, she has also curated exhibitions for venues throughout the United States. Her writings have been published by the University of Washington Press, University of Texas Press, and the Museum of Modern Art, among others.

Independent curator and critic, **Saul Ostrow** has organized over 80 exhibitions since 1985 and his writings have appeared in art magazines, journals, and catalogues in the USA and Europe. He served as Art Editor at *Bomb Magazine*, Co-Editor of *Lusitania Press* (1996–2004) and as Editor of the book series *Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture* (1996–2006) published by Francis & Taylor.

Taylor Baldwin is an artist working in sculpture, video, and installation. He is Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director of Sculpture at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where he taught Bobby Anspach.



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