

Hannah Black, *Some Context*, Chisenhale Gallery, London, U.K.

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Hannah Black

← *The Situation*, detail, 2017.

Photo : Andy Keate, courtesy of
Chisenhale Gallery, London

↑ *Transitional Object 5 & 6*, 2017.

Photo : Andy Keate, courtesy of
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Hannah Black

Some Context

In Hannah Black's site-specific installation at Chisenhale Gallery, there is a "situation." The situation looms large: it is multi-vocal, fluid, collective, individual. It is literally bound and dispersed, at once legible and illegible. The situation arises within and without many contexts—some of which are made materially explicit, some of which haunt the margins of Black's work. *Some Context* is both a series of objects and a text; together and apart. In the centre of the room, a stack of 20,000 books forms a large, irregular shape. *The Situation* is the title of the book—fragmented narratives and ruminations compiled by Black through a series of conversations with peers. "I'm pretty sure there's a situation. But do you think there's only one situation?" asks one voice; "What's hard is describing the situation," states another.

Some contributors are named, while others are blacked out, as are portions of the text—an act that both interrupts and enriches the space of reading, the perverse pleasure of language to simultaneously make meaning and to question, to name and to obfuscate. The content of Black's conversations is myriad: race, gender, art, time, colonialism, capitalism, eco-consciousness, community, social governance, power, responsibility, violence, politics, protest, identity, embodiment—how *the body* is subject to, and by, all of these forces. The intersections of these issues are the locus of "the situation" around which the voices surge and ebb, circumlocute.

Around the central pile of texts, the floor is littered with shredded pages torn from the books—black and white strips of confetti-like paper, words upon words, disoriented and stripped of context. Whole redacted pages float amongst the scattered shreds, strips of black lines where language is at an impasse; paper sticks out of paper-shredders arranged in groups, in some cases with small cartoon-like eyes affixed so that the slim shredding openings of the machines appear as mouths, poised to masticate the textual core of the

exhibition. Elsewhere in the room, grinning clay faces and small animal-like footprints peek through the tattered text. The situation is comical; the situation is deadly serious. The situation requires words; the words are not enough.

Black is both a writer and an artist, often speaking of the two practices as fundamentally interlinked. In *Some Context*, language performs all of these roles through a series of elisions in which it can never be fully grasped, even as it gestures at longing to be cherished. Around the room are a series of plush toys stuffed with the shredded text. They sit alone or in pairs; leaning against walls or perched on stacks of books abutting the shredders. Some of the toys are supported and nestled by tiny lumpen clay figures, titled *Transitional Objects*—child psychologist D.W. Winnicott's term for the object that provides comfort in absence of the mother. Just inside the entrance to the exhibition is an empty, flesh-coloured toy that hangs limply from a hook on the wall—waiting, perhaps, to be filled with all that is left to be said, the ongoing voices of the "situation" and its ever-widening, urgent contexts.

Emily LaBarge

Chisenhale Gallery, London, U.K.

September 22—December 10, 2017