

Joey Piecuch, who was like a brother to Eli and I, had suddenly died. I flew from Los Angeles to be with Eli and we spent a week with our families and friends, drinking liquor and giving each other tattoos at the dining table. That was spring of this year.

It gives you an idea of how immersed I was in my own work that even during Joey's wake, my mind was elsewhere. Michele had invited Eli and I to do an exhibition together in the fall — this exhibition. We had some ideas, we had spoken by phone and begun the process of understanding what we wanted to do, but at that point nothing was decided. In the early stages of planning an exhibition, the options are literally infinite, so that it's possible to hold multiple, even contradictory versions of a project in your mind at the same time. Particularly in this case, where we each had our own visions of what the show should be, the task of bringing shape to this thing overwhelmed me. It had been three years since our last exhibition together and in the intervening time we had both rented studios for the first time. The point of having a studio is that you spend time by yourself, alone in an empty room. A white room. Like prison. White-collar prison. It makes you hard. You become a more intentional version of yourself, artificial. For us it meant that our work, and in some sense our lives, had diverged.

Almost ten years ago, when I still lived in New York, Eli and I started working on a project we called the Bottletwall. We were fascinated by Albert Heineken's unrealized plans for a beer bottle brick and, inspired by the strange nihilistic optimism of the project, we were determined to make a version of our own. The fact that the Heineken project had been a partial failure didn't deter us; we knew that we were capable of making the project a more definitive, absolute failure. When I moved in with Eli in Tacoma a few years later, we finally built a hexagonal blow mold and he blew as many bottles as he could, maybe two hundred. We glued them together into a kind of window, framed out in scrap lumber and drywall, which we exhibited in our first show together. When the show finished, the Bottletwall ended up in our backyard in Tacoma, slowly falling apart in the rain. The show was over, I was through with it and sick of seeing this thing on the lawn. I told Eli to take it to the dump. But of course he never did that. He held onto it. A couple years later Eli and Joey salvaged what was left of it and sent it to the gallery — a funny, failed, pathetic thing, unworkable, clearly idiotic, not at all an artwork. This was all we had to work with, a bunch of misshapen bottles with moss growing inside them, stuck together with silicone.

Joey was gone; there was nothing to do about that. I was still alive and I had work to do. To get away from everyone else, I went for a walk outside. Eli's place was up a gravel slope, a boggy lawn set in twelve acres of sparse maple, oak, and locust. I followed a path he had cut through the woods, away from the house. Nailed onto the trunk of a tree was a hand-painted sign, illegible but clearly in

my brother's hand, marking the entrance to a small clearing. At the center was a twisted linden tree with chains hanging from its branches and a small platform built between its limbs, a strange useless thing facing a plain wood bench on the other edge of the clearing. I sat down on the bench. I couldn't understand what I was seeing. There was nothing more to it than that, just a place to sit and look at this one tree, isolated from the woods around it. It is it. It isn't a sculpture; it wasn't even meant to be seen by anybody else. It was for Eli's own amusement, for fun. This must be how my brother spends his free time, wandering around the woods with a chainsaw and a paintbrush, carving out a free zone. Out of mind, out of sight.

I had found a place where Eli and I could work together. A collaboration makes space for itself, you can't do it in a studio. We work outside, always have I guess. If it is work. We each work alone; we work from home. I look at a thing and put my name on it. We tell each other what to do, is what it comes down to. Collaboration — it's an out of body experience, a way to see yourself from outside and do things you wouldn't do otherwise. You let yourself do what you shouldn't do. You use someone. You get through to someone. I do it, I do it a lot, working, working double double. I get that a lot, I do get lost. It's a license. I did, said, some things I shouldn't have. My brother knows what I'm capable of. Love. I took license, and I knew: I don't have to do anything.

— Oscar Tuazon, 2014

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