

enveloped

Small Editions, Brooklyn, NY
60 Sackett St, Brooklyn, NY 11231

September 30 – November 5, 2017
Reception September 30th 7-10pm

Andre Bradley, Boru O'Brien O'Connell, Jimena Sarno

Enveloped. Delays and interruptions are devices of time, moments that exist inside a temporary void. What develops when these suspensions soften and dissolve...and what happens when they do not? Taking as its subject the weight of latent knowledge, Enveloped concerns itself with the substance of the unknown.

Andre Bradley's paintings and photographs move between privacy and intimacy, familiarity and alienation, developing ideas of interiority through the artist's conception of himself as a 'Dark Archive' — an archive that is inaccessible to others. "No one knows the archival contents of a box from the outside..." In photos and memories drawn directly from Bradley's life and childhood, these works rebuff access to relations and remembrances unknown. In *Fingerprints* (2014), the back of a polaroid photograph, printed to scale, is marked with scratches, fingerprints, and small sweeps of black ink. Although these signs of wear suggest presence, their anonymity puts the viewer in darkness—unable to decipher, incapable of conjuring context. Bradley's *I Learned About Race (#2)* (2017) lists judgment terms reminiscent of grade school alongside a black meticulous puddle of paint on the brink of obscuring an early portrait of the artist. The list itself becomes ambiguous in its entirety, perhaps related to the young boy's portrait, and yet as a whole—somehow entirely removed.

In photography and sculpture, Boru O'Brien O'Connell engages faltering histories as they fall into obscurity and opacity. *But I Must Explain...* (2017) at first glance appears to be a blank print, a visual void. Yet faint gradations suggest the vague presence of an image that is soon discernible as text. Photographed through a layer of fog, this passage is excerpted from Cicero's *On the Balance of Good and Evil*, a document from the original Lorem Ipsum, now better known as a typesetter text. Veiling the words in white, O'Brien O'Connell directly references the sabotage enacted on Lorem Ipsum, locating a parallel between visual imperceptibility and interpretive ambiguity. In a sculptural work, O'Brien O'Connell inscribes the internal surfaces of an archival box, recreating handwritten text from the diary of Vaslav Nijinsky — a Russian ballet dancer diagnosed with schizophrenia. This enigma of legibility manifests in the book object as an extension of Nijinsky, its inaccessibility ranging from the problem of deciphering handwritten forms, terms of use set by public institutions as a safeguard against digital free-for-all, to the dissociative effect time has on intimacy.

Jimena Sarno's *Elsewhere* (2012) plays on constant deferral, looking toward a place that refuses to arrive because it cannot, limited to existence in language and abstraction. Looping through term completions provided by the Google Search browser, Sarno gestures to a looking that never finds material form.

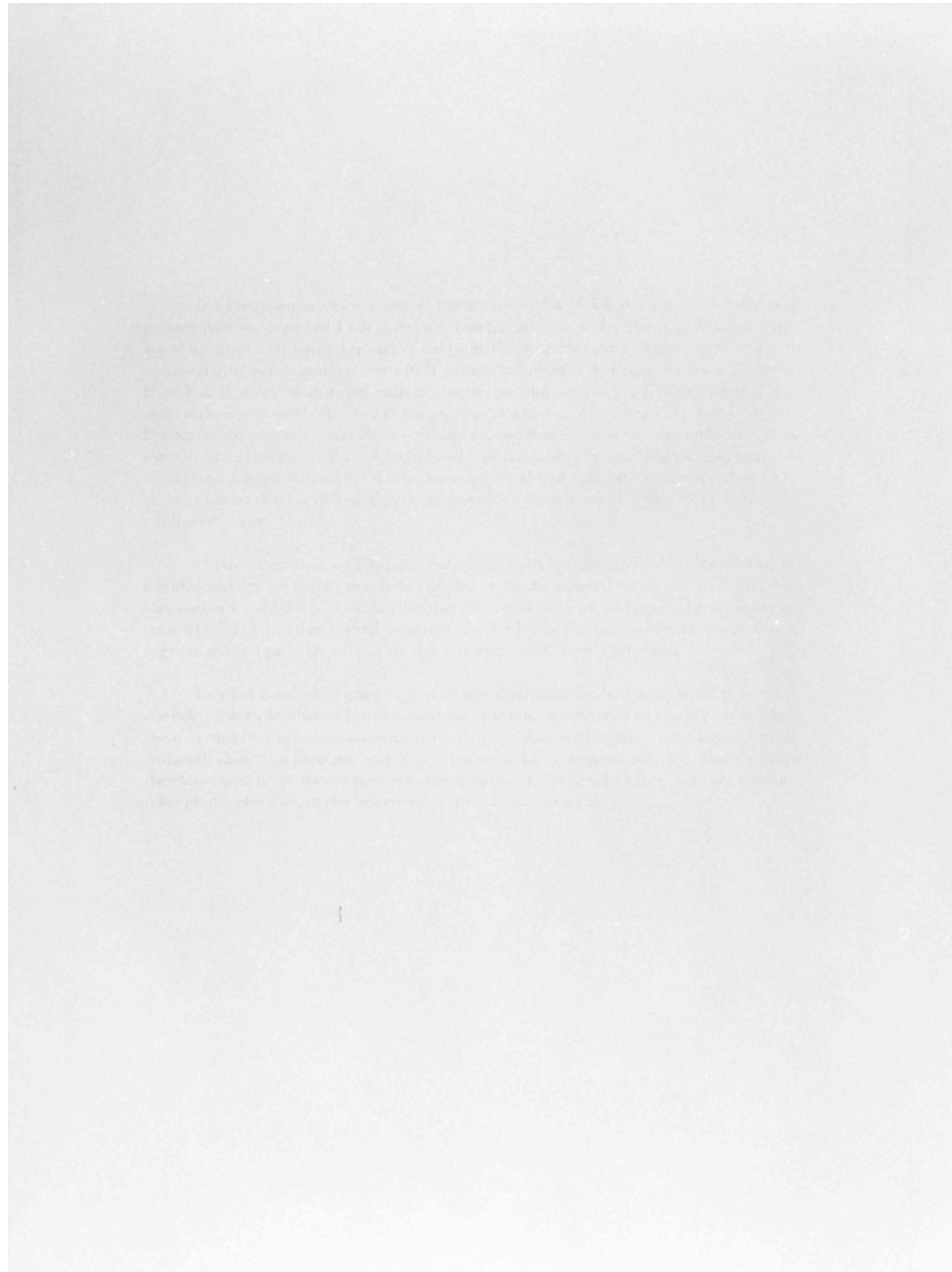
These delays and interruptions are indicative of an unknown space that exists within the artist themselves, as well between the artist, the work, and the viewer. Precarity and ambiguity are tangled in a hope of revelation that holds us afloat in seemingly infinite territory. May we hang on to the permanence of the unknown and the uncertain, remaining adrift in constant anticipation. Perhaps there is nothing to see, and perhaps there is.

Installation Images









Boru O'Brien O'Connell, *But I must explain to you how all this mistaken idea of denouncing of a pleasure and praising pain was born and I will give you a complete account of the system*, 2014. Silver gelatin print on fiber based paper. 18 x 24 in.

where the lines overlap

where the eyes look when lying

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Sparse correspondence makes for heavier archives boxes, weighed as they are by the material of the folders themselves. Collections of memos and forms, working materials and photographs, condense under the institutional weight of their processing, amassing unique sets of descriptive aids and letters to The Files. The word for archives that have not yet been vetted, catalogued, and systematized, is 'dark'. As though the structure itself makes light.¹

The Museum of Modern Art Archives holds forty-three letters sent by Ray Johnson to Robert Rauschenberg between the years of 1952 and 1965. Three remain unopened, sealed since dispatch. Perhaps they contain notes, pranks, the recursive "doublemint" that Johnson sent Rauschenberg eleven times over the course of their correspondence. Perhaps they carry something else entirely. Unopened, contained, these letters keep themselves, the silent asides to a conversation that has passed into public consciousness.

How do these papers exist before their illumination, when they are only imminent, enclosed? Cloud-like, they are indistinct and unformed, boxes without intention, unstructured by the histories that they will write. The anticipation of their contents is like a faith or a conviction, but one encapsulated in objects that are as signs, like spines of books in a personal library, the faces of old friends.² The material itself is a promise that there is something to wait for,³ revealing "itself here at the surface of the visible, by mystic documentary telepathy."⁴ Susan Howe tells us to treasure this enigma. "Quickly — precariously — coming as it does from an opposite direction. If you are lucky, you may experience a moment *before*."⁵ Enclosed in the dusk of acid-free armatures, the archives await their stories.

I

"No one knows the archival contents of a box from the outside. One's own form can hide a box's belongings. In this state, I sat in my classroom in elementary school, ready to have my contents neglected, to be crammed with knowledge vital to my education as a black boy. Myself a kind of box."⁶

The pale borders of a polaroid sheet fade into the glare of a white ground, broken only by the contrasting pitch of a film-

backing dusty with hairline scratches and daubed fingerprints.⁷ A photo of a photo printed to scale, Andre Bradley's *Fingerprints*, 2014, catches in documentary stillness the traces that accumulate on the surface of memory. A hazy sheen of prints paints the film, brushstrokes in minute motif. Counter to their use as forensic identification, these marks of handling become shadowy presences, signs of consistent, faithful use.

Beyond these direct intimations of attachment, the nature of this relationship between an unknown viewer and the photographic object is obscured by a literal turn away, a palpable precaution against stranger's eyes. Across the room, a pendant portrait, gleamingly overexposed, captures a man as he leans his head to the right, resting its weight on clasped hands in a pantomime of sleep. Silvery monochrome, trailing off into light, Bradley's *My Portrait As An Artist As A Young Man*, 2010, swoons with stillness and nostalgic reference. Bowed under the height of the frame, the artist dodges the camera's determining gaze in a photo unfocused and imbalanced by weary recline.

Navigating the terrain of his own past as would a researcher, Andre Bradley toys with the precarious hope contained, for example, within an undeveloped roll of film. In sequences of family photographs and self-portraiture, Bradley cultivates the analogy of his body as a 'Dark Archive', a collection of familial and cultural memories inscrutable in their private particularity.⁸ Through Bradley's words and photographic gestures, individuals become as images, shrouded in uncertainty; of an old photograph of his father Bradley writes, "The image reminds me of a memory of him leaving out the door. I wonder where he was going, looking fixed and famous."^{9, 10}

Abstracted to pure visual reminiscence, these events are excerpted or, perhaps, excused from narrative, as impenetrable as a photo flipped, as closed eyes.¹¹ Memory and photograph become interchangeable as fixed reference points, equally decontextualized documents of moments made mysterious even to those who lived them: "I wonder..." Must we write ourselves into history for fear of dissolving in it? Turning towards the individual, we clarify the boundary between history and memory, the shared record and the private. In the forbidding intimacy of his images, Bradley

Convenient
 Decent
 Desirable
 Fit
 Healthy
 Helpful
 Hygienic
 Needed
 Profitable
 Proper
 Satisfying
 Tolerable
 Toward
 Wholesome
 Dependable
 Eatable
 Flawless
 Fresh
 Intact
 Loyal
 Normal
 Perfect
 Safe
 Solid
 Sound
 Stable
 Trustworthy
 Unblemished

Uncontaminate(d)
 Undecayed
 Unhurt
 Vigorous
 Whole
 Worthwhile
 Asset
 Blessing
 Godsend
 Prize
 Service
 Treasure
 Use
 Welfare
 Wealth



COLOPHON

ENVELOPED

Enveloped is part of Small Editions' ^subscript series, a publication documenting the work of its Curators-in-Residence. Twice a year Small Editions selects an emerging curator to organize a thematic exhibition series to nurture a conversation at the intersection of contemporary art and artists books. Founded in 2012, Small Editions collaborates through studio visits and conversations with artists to publish Small Editions' bookworms and artist books. Seeking to support experimental artist publishing, Small Editions developed a business model that provides book production services to clients as a means to funding its publishing and exhibitions programs.

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^subscript