



Allison Wade: The Good Parts

July 25, 2021—February 6, 2022



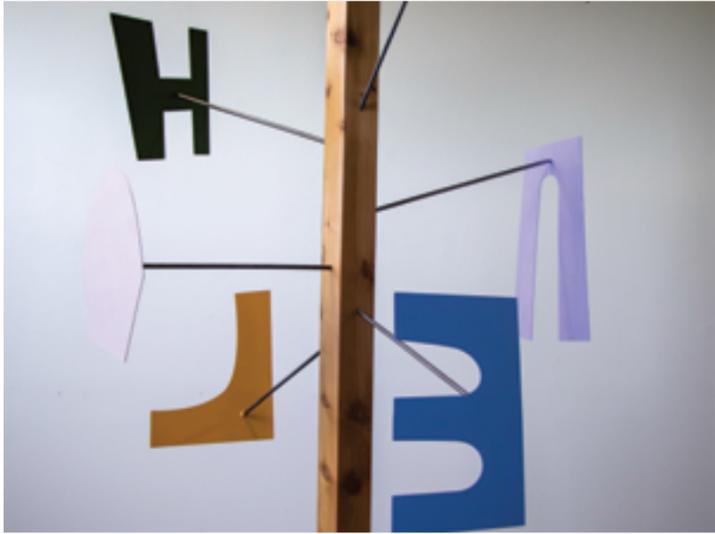
**John Michael
Kohler Arts Center**

Allison Wade: The Good Parts

A conversation between John Michael Kohler Arts Center Senior Curator Kaytie Johnson (KJ) and artist Allison Wade (AW)

KJ: Can we begin by talking about the title of your show? *The Good Parts* is a nod to Ree Morton's 1975 work, *Don't worry, I'll only read you the good parts*. But, I'm curious: what specifically about this artwork, and that particular phrase from its title, resonates with you and your practice?

AW: This piece and phrase resonate with me on so many levels—the materiality, the handwritten text, the play between flatness and dimensionality. The sculpture feels light and heavy at the same time—an assertion of care for another with an undertone of humor. But the potential meaning of “the good parts” and how that connects to my practice are why I suggested this title.



In the studio, I'm making judgment calls about what is “good” all the time, although I might not use that term. Is this the best material or color to use? Will that stand? How will the sculpture look from another angle? The great thing about being an artist is that I get to make up my own rules and logic about what ultimately works and what doesn't, about what is “good.”

KJ: How does this consideration of what is “good” apply to your material choices?

AW: Artists possess a keen ability to see potential in overlooked materials and situations. My previous studio mates would offer me their unwanted materials before tossing them in the dumpster, and vice versa. We all have parameters that are idiosyncratic, intuitive, and often inexplicable. “Good” is so uniquely subjective.

Earlier this year, we took a trip to my partner's parents' tree farm in Iowa. I picked out some wood to bring back for the work I made for the show—a number of end pieces and odd-shaped leftovers from the milling process. While they are useless in one sense—they won't be sold for material—they have value in my installation. As what they are, in relation to each other and to other objects.

2

I also like the idea of editing embedded in Morton's phrase. I struggle to think big picture. Instead, I build an inventory of parts from which I can pick and choose, arranging these into sculptures, relying on formal and structural characteristics as parameters for inclusion. In the past, I've likened this process to a syntax, with the goal of crafting a stylistically compelling turn of phrase. Recently, the shapes have become more distinctly alphabetical. The link to language is obvious, but the message is not verbal.

KJ: Let's talk a bit more about this shift to creating forms that are more alphabetical. It seems your approach to making shifted from grammatical to graphemic. Is it becoming more reductive, moving away from longer forms of written language to its very basic components? What led to this change?

AW: I'm not sure, but I wonder if it has to do with the last year and a half, how our lives got reduced to the essentials. Like many others, I realized I was spending a lot of time and money on things that didn't matter so much, so I made some changes. Perhaps that seeped into the studio, where I find myself focusing more and more on each element. Whether it's sanding and finishing a piece of walnut or grinding a metal shape until the surface is just right, the amount of effort extended on the details has increased exponentially.



4

This exhibition is supported by the **Kohler Trust for Arts and Education**, the **Frederic Cornell Kohler Charitable Trust**, **Kohler Foundation, Inc.**, and the **Wisconsin Arts Board** with funds from the **State of Wisconsin** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

The artist would like to thank the following people for helping realize the work for this exhibition: Matthew, Michael, Jim and Steve at Chicago Industrial Arts and Design Center; Olivia Juarez; Avenue Metal; Dove Drury Hornbuckle and the Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists Residency; and Cole Pierce.



3

KJ: Does this reductive turn also extend to the arrangement of the individual works in the gallery space, how they relate to and connect with each other?

AW: Absolutely. I consider negative space as a tangible element in my work, which is funny, because my initial inclination is to overfill. You can see a hint of horror vacui in my drawings, but it gets painstakingly pared down in the installations. Additionally, I will try out every possible combination of objects for an installation until I settle on an arrangement that feels right.

The size of the gallery at the Arts Center posed a unique challenge for me—finding a way to retain the intimate scale of my works and their relationships and still fill the space.

KJ: As the scale of your work increases, it feels like the play between two- and three-dimensional is more evident than in some of your smaller pieces. That liminal space where flatness and form intersect is really pronounced.

AW: Exactly. The ability to walk around the sculptures heightens the effect of this play. Some of the pieces almost disappear from certain angles. They become flattened to intersecting lines or drawings. I like the idea of occupying space in this way, requiring a shift in perspective to reveal the volume, or complete character, of a sculpture. This serves as a useful reminder for me both inside and outside of the studio: to withhold judgment until I've considered things from multiple viewpoints.

Cover: Allison Wade, *Hypotheticals*, 2021; walnut, steel, paint, ceramic, and fabric.

1 Allison Wade, *Anecdote (purple)*, 2021; steel, paint, oak, and hand-dyed fabric.

2 Allison Wade, *Figures of Speech (detail)*, 2021; steel, paint, and cedar

3 Allison Wade, *Ditto*, 2021; yarn.

4 Allison Wade, *Anecdote (purple) (detail)*, 2021; steel, paint, oak, and hand-dyed fabric.

All works courtesy of the artist.