



RAM HARNESS GAMES

FALL 2020

HANNAH WINKLER
RYAN DIAZ

RAM HARNESS GAMES



In **RAM HARNESS GAMES**, performers wear sculptures and compete in three different games, with the goal of using their sculptures to mark other performers with ink. The sculptures strap onto the performers' chests, buckling along the side body to form a kind of front-backpack or Baby Björn base form. A 6-foot, long, thin protrusion emerges from the center of the sculpture, jutting forward from the performer's chest. The tips and sometimes sides of the protrusions are covered in homemade ink pads, and will be "inked up" during the games with purple and red ink. The sculptures are all white and made of various lightweight materials including upholstery foam, pipe insulation, PVC pipe, pink foam, fabric, poly fill, spray foam, yarn, tarlatan, paint, crochet, and clothesline.

A ram harness is a large crayon that a farmer can strap to a ram's chest before they release him into a group of ewes. When the ram mates with an ewe, the crayon marks that ewe's rump, and in this way, farmers track who mates with who, and when the mating happens. I came across this device while researching sheep and was fascinated, immediately seeing it as a form of contact tracing. Taking the ram harness as a starting point, this project has evolved to investigate how we negotiate physical contact, social distancing, and intimacy in the age of COVID.

I'm working with a collaborator, Ryan Diaz, to develop movement elements for the piece. **RAM HARNESS GAMES** is designed to have a minimum of two participants, and can be expanded to include up to five participants per team and a crowd of spectators, depending on restrictions and safety concerns at the time of the performance. We have developed rules for three games, which we are calling **RODE(O)**, **JOUST**, and **THE QUIET GAME**. All will be played outside, mostly because it's the only safe option, but also because we feel like a sport inspired by rams is most respectfully played outside. Plus, it will smell and look better, and maybe the grass and mud will contribute marks.

For this iteration of the project, Ryan and I are looking at the world of male-male touch and how sports form a space for ritualized forms of male touch. Our ideal participant is a member of the Brown University Wrestling team, although I don't know if this is going to happen. Some of the wrestlers were interested, and emailed us back, but then fell off, and then Brown classes went remote because of a spike in COVID cases. So, we are not supposed to meet up. The drama of not being able to get "in touch" or "in contact" with the wrestlers feels like a joke about the concept of the piece.

Sometimes I fear that this piece will live only in the hypothetical, in the proposal. And sometimes I think that would be a full expression of this work, to be able to do what we can do now and perform it later when we can actually be in true glorious touch with each other, when a huge crowd of spectators can scream droplets over each other as they egg the players on.



When Hannah asked me to work with her on a project, we were on a walk around her neighborhood 6 feet apart from each other while discussing our mutual interest in staging, performance, and play. I had just returned from visiting Seattle for the summer, where I spent most of my time at home, in perpetual isolation as both my parents worked in hospitals. The Providence that I had returned to in the summer of 2020 was completely transformed. Empty streets, shuttered restaurants, closed studios—the pandemic ushered in a new way of being, full of rituals like my two weeks spent self-isolating after arriving in my new apartment, elbow greetings, and the naked feeling of walking outdoors without a face mask. Writing this in December, as Rhode Island tops the list of highest infection rates in the world, even with all those precautions it seemingly wasn't enough.

As Hannah explained her research into ram harnesses, and explained the sculptures she would create, I was intrigued by the modes of engagement they would suggest. The daub at the ends of these wearable sculptures both mark and replace contact between two people. In movement practice while wearing the harnesses, they served as new appendages for us to experiment with. They were like bumpers between one another, their distance the prescribed safety threshold so our play would remain responsible.

Hannah and I talked about how play in general creates safe conditions in which to experiment with risk. As the pandemic descended upon a world more-or-less unprepared to handle a full-blown public health crisis, history would repeat as the spectres of the black plague and the 1918 flu pandemic (also known as the Spanish Flu) haunted personal and federal responses to the virus. “Ring Around the Rosie,” is one such spectre. The factual relation between the game the black plague it supposedly depicts matters less to me than how easily something so harmless can bear the weight of death and decay in our imaginations. Children’s games are made up of equal parts danger and delight. Play, as in rehearsal or practice, is also a way of preparing ourselves for more serious, dire situations in life.

The game that I most easily map onto the COVID era is Red Rover: two teams of players link arms across from each other and take turns calling over an opposing member who runs and crashes into them, attempting to break the human chain. While seemingly lighthearted, Red Rover is incredibly dangerous, as broken bones would attest. While we are isolated from each other for our own good, we are also still human. New cases arise when people can’t help themselves, congregating despite the danger. We call each other over despite the harm we might cause to ourselves and others.

These games Hannah and I developed are simple metaphors. The rules are ways for us to have two players engage with each other as metaphor for the new conditions we brace against under a global pandemic. Closing one’s eyes and seeking the other while they try to get away; rushing towards each other in effort to make a mark; moving quietly and solemnly in collaboration with each other’s movements, these are only a few ways that express what intimacy looks like in 2020 and possibly beyond. The fact that it is literally impossible for us to convene to hold these games in person without violating state decree only reinforces how risk and play are inextricably linked.

What’s been revealed to me in this process is how disease and danger have always been simmering beneath every interaction, how the harm we might suffer is a negotiation we make with the rewards of intimacy, both physical and emotional. For now, of course, the need to suppress this virus is more important than any personal inconvenience. It’s equally important we not return to the ways we behaved before, the carelessness and lack of care that set off this incredible, preventable loss of human life. The rituals we perform as social beings will remain, but how we approach them will be different, if even in subtle ways. These games are just one way in which we are playing out contact and touch at the end of the world before COVID.



VISUAL RESEARCH

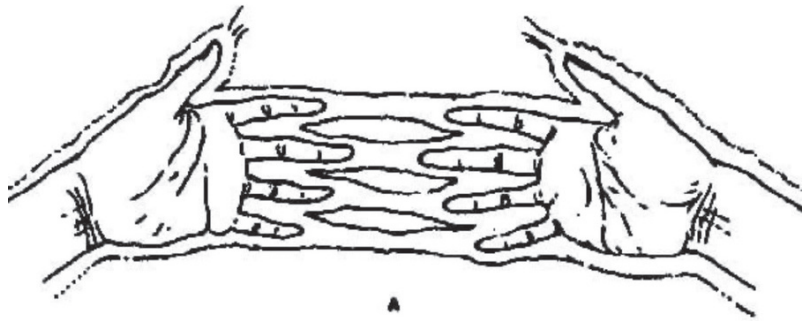


Visual research on ram harnesses

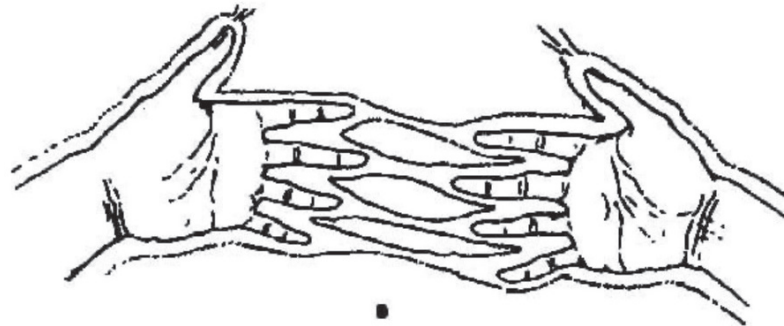


Visual research on ram harnesses, continued

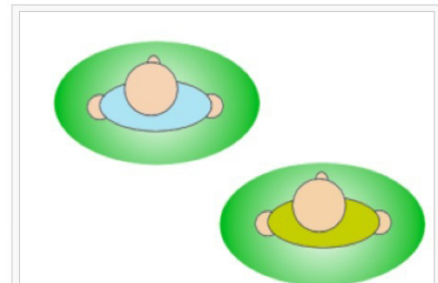
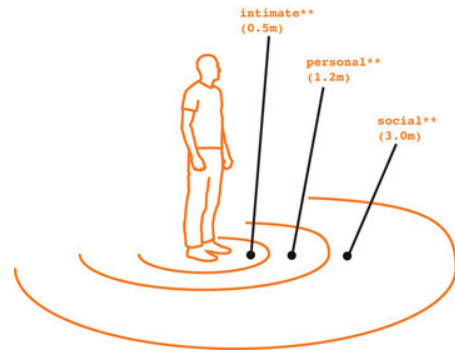




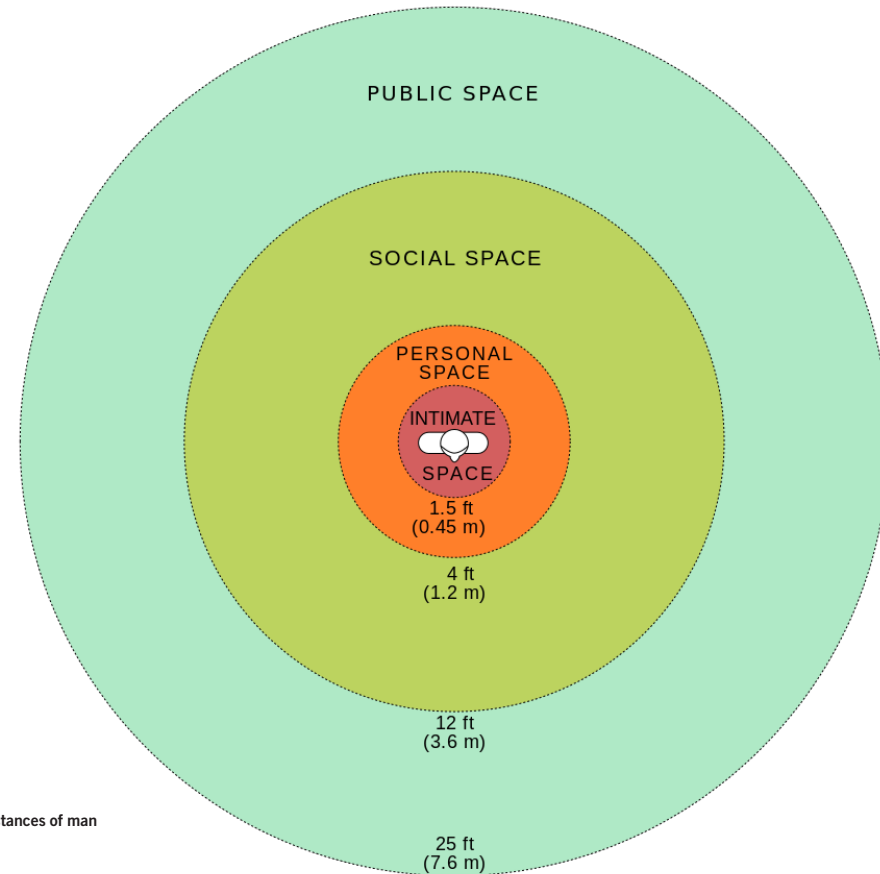
A

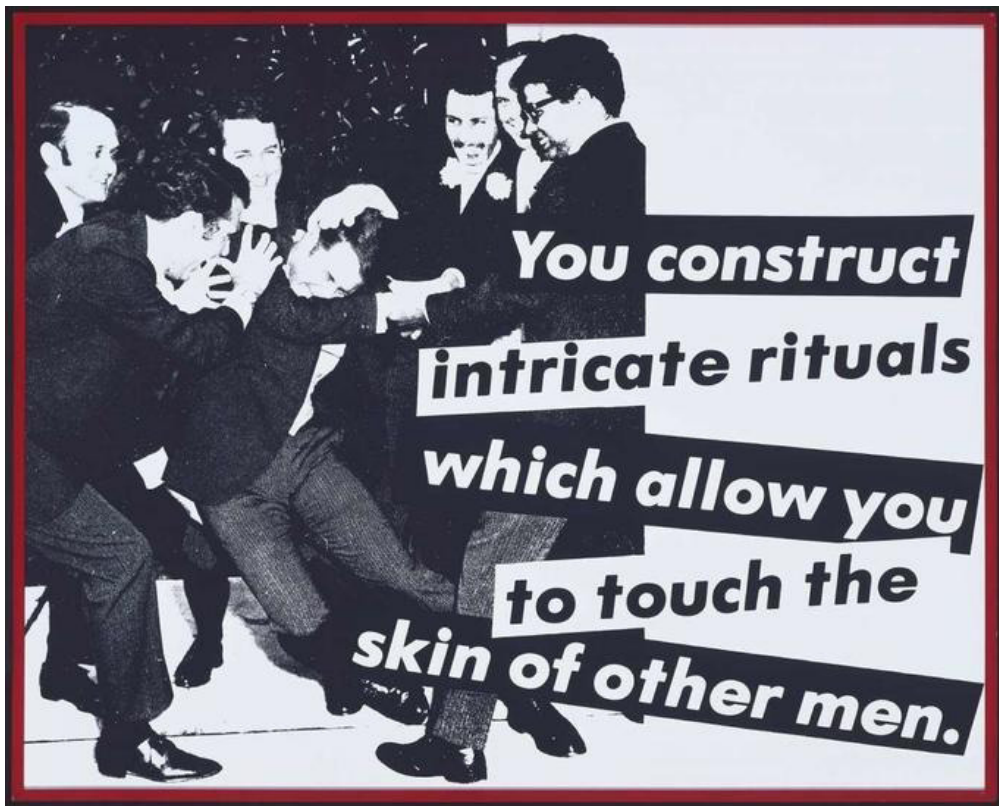


B



Two people not affecting each other's personal space





Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (You Construct Intricate Rituals)*. 1981.



Pina Bausch, *Café Müller*. 1985.



Jenkem Chic, "Spider-man Pinata" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0w24DLCIOg>

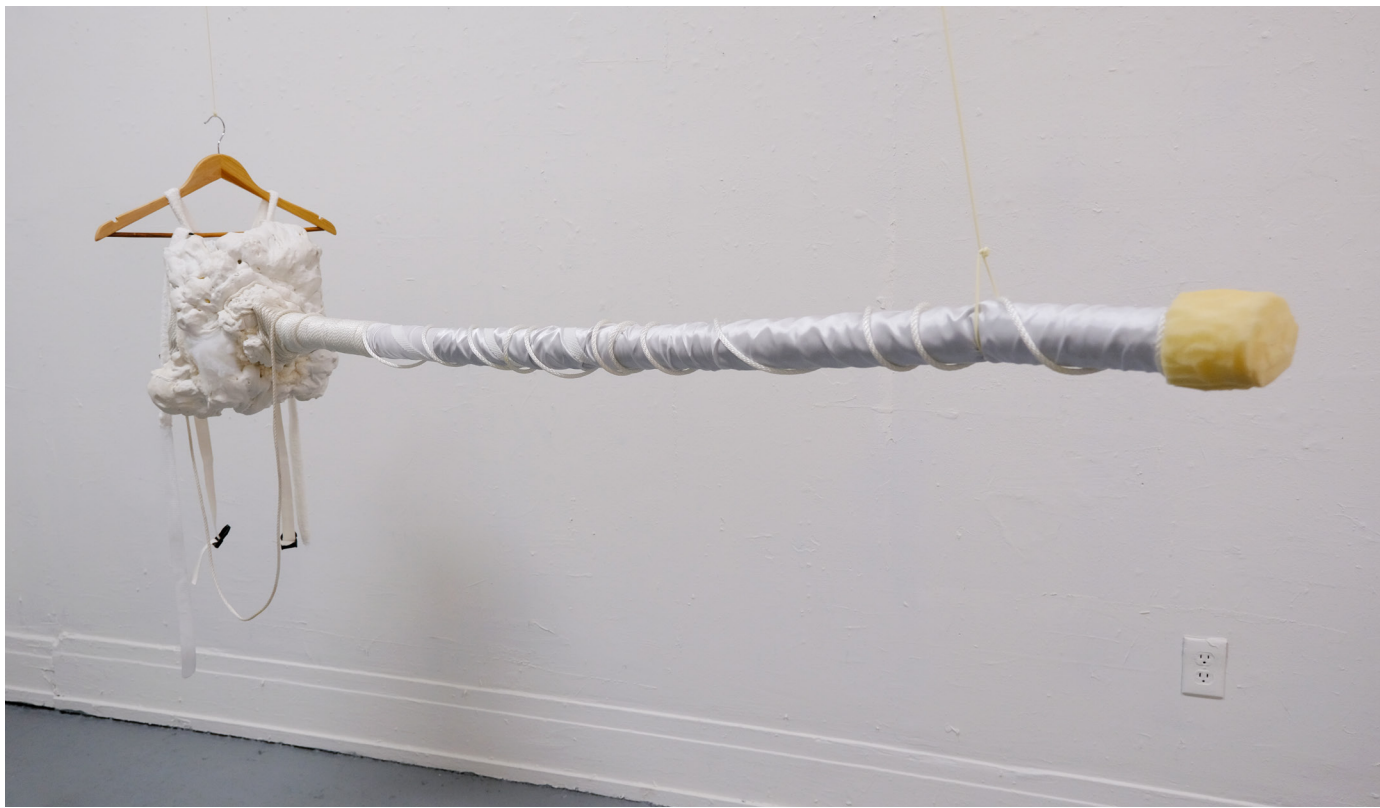


Kate Greenaway, illustration from *Mother Goose or the Old Nursery Rhymes*. 1881.

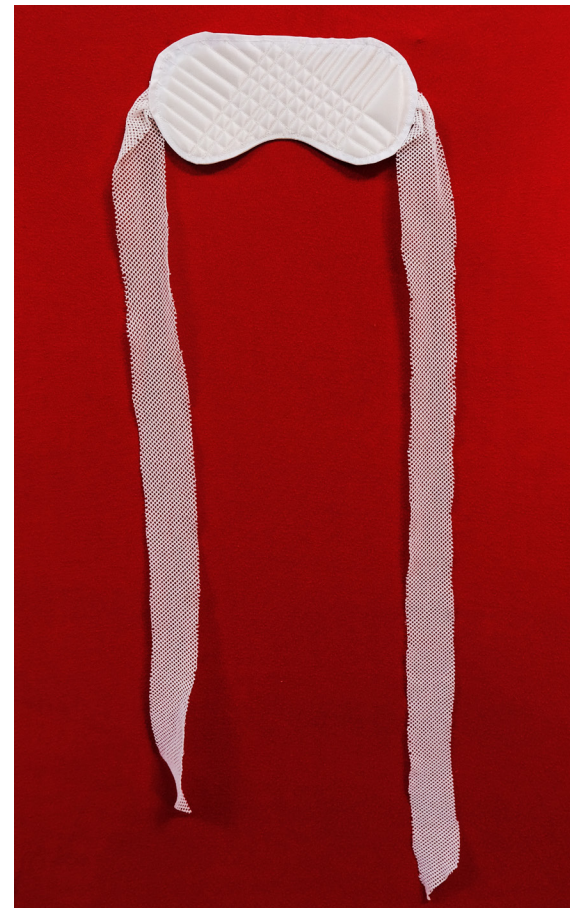


THE WEARABLES

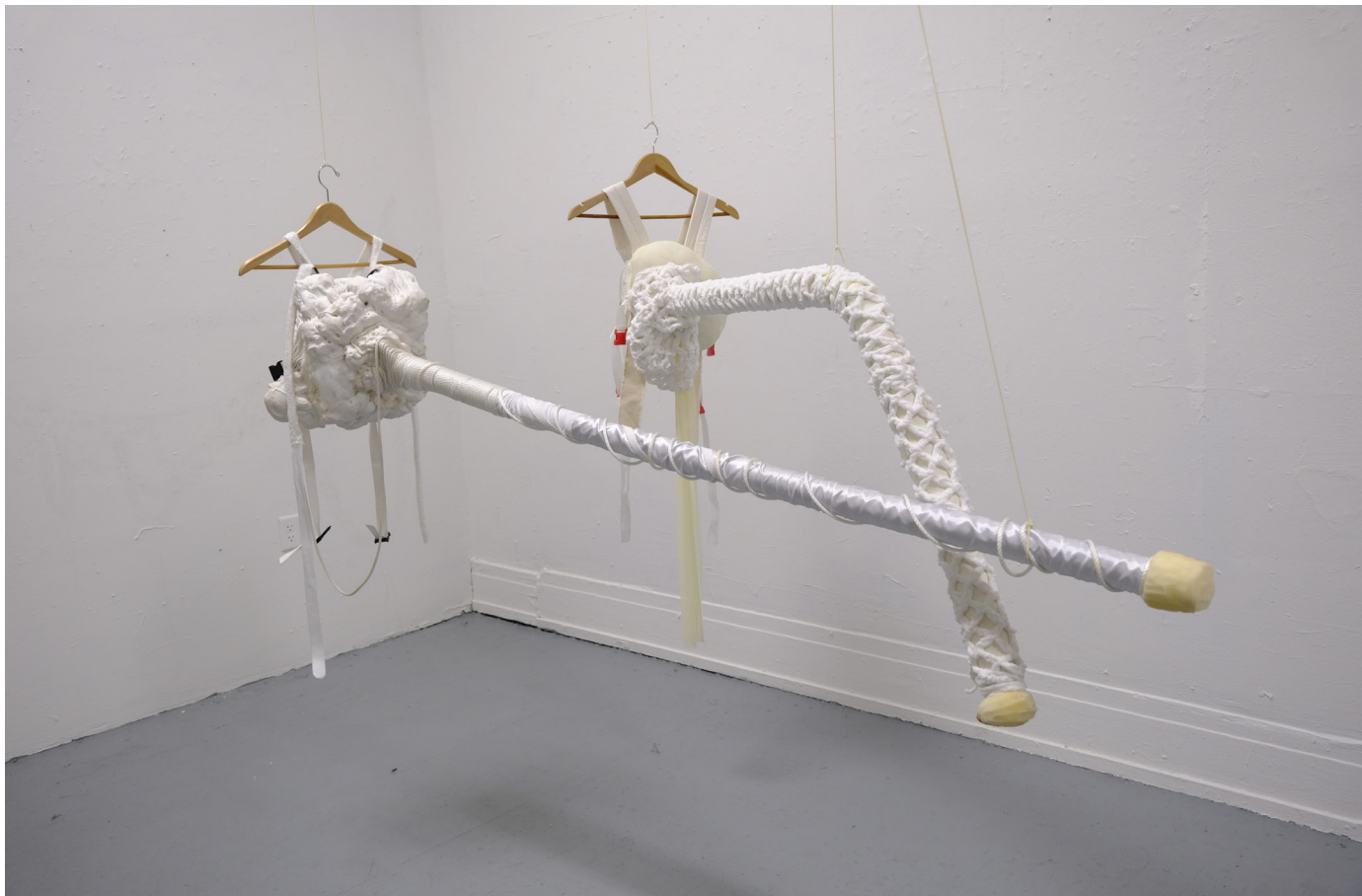






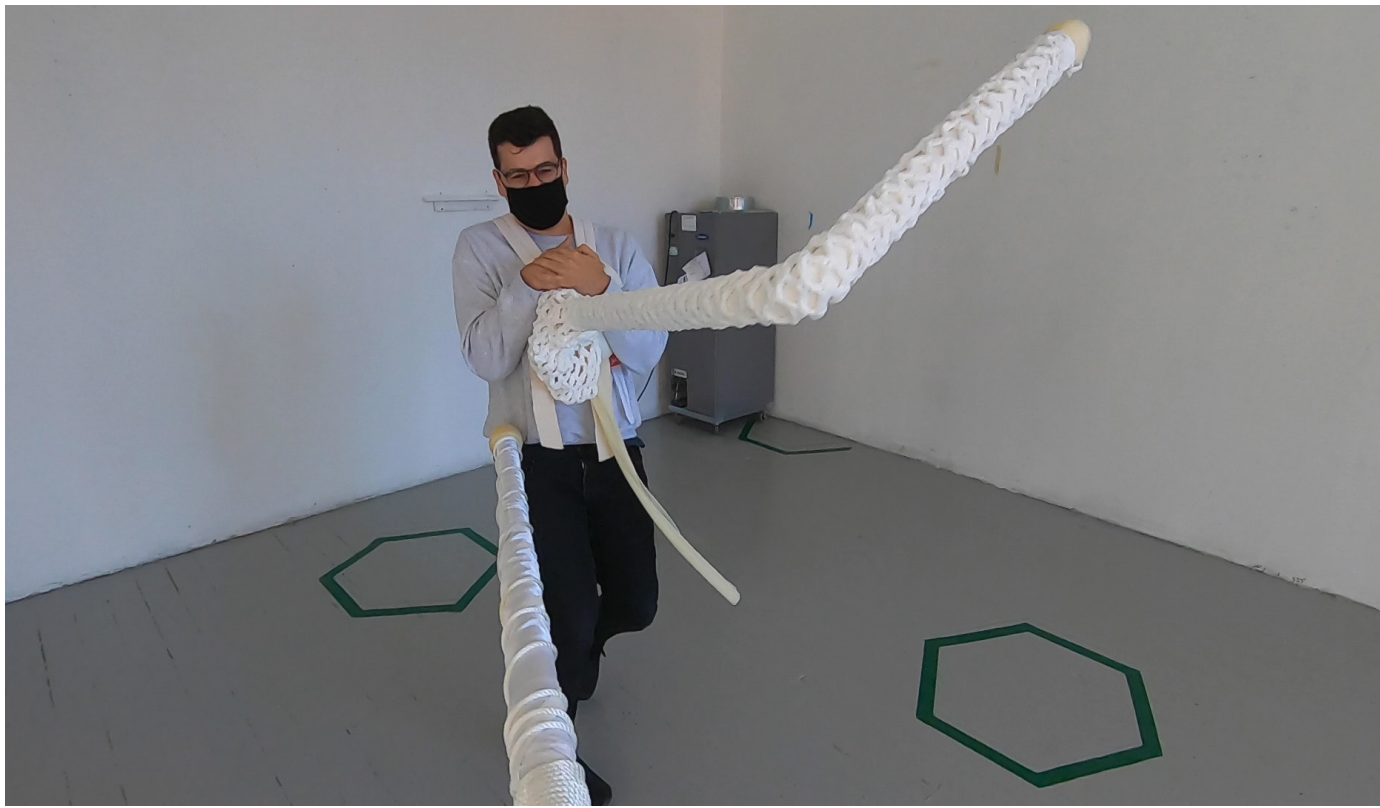


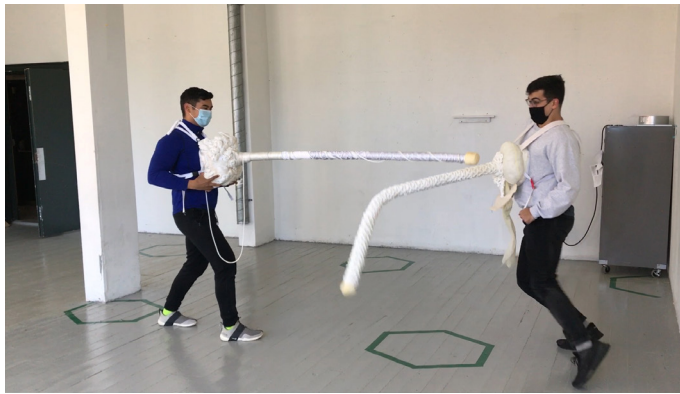
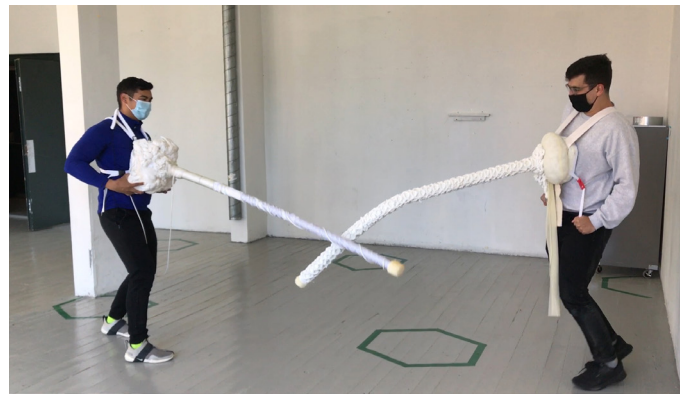






MOVEMENT PRACTICE



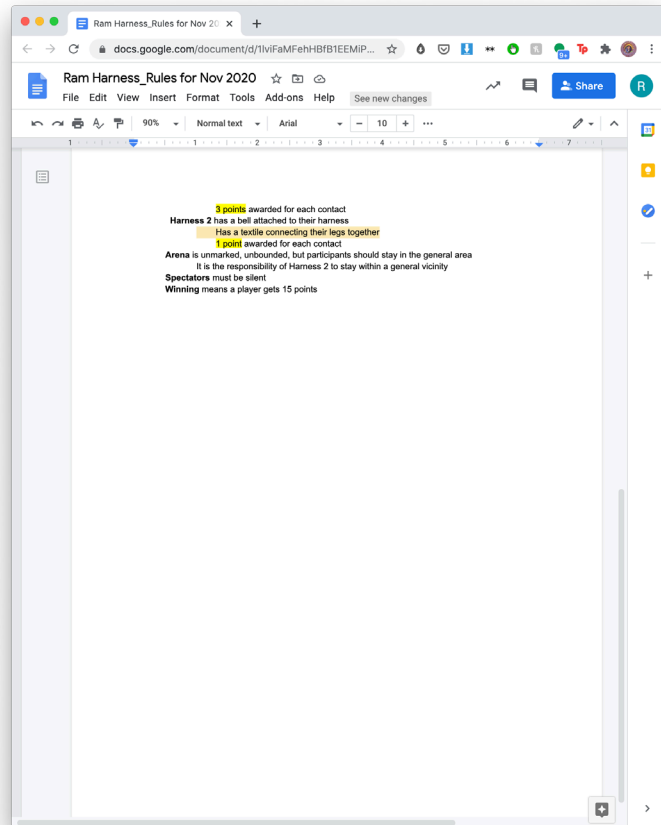
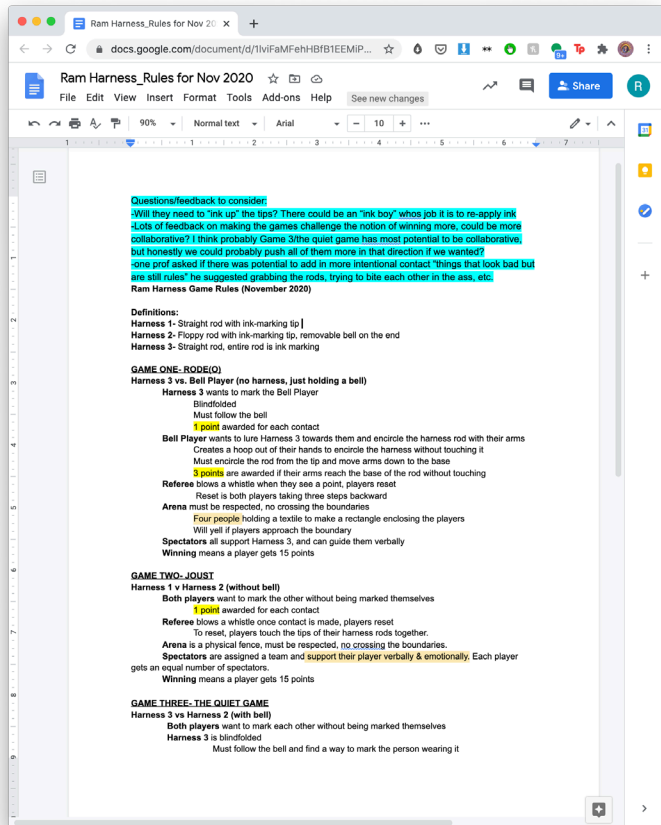












THE GAME RULES

GAME RULES FOR 11.20.20
DEFINITIONS

GAME RULES
RODE(O)

HARNESS 3 vs. BELL PLAYER
No harness, just holding a bell

- HARNESS 1** Straight rod with ink-marking tip
- HARNESS 2** Floppy rod with ink-marking tip, removable bell on the end
- HARNESS 3** Straight rod, entire rod is ink marking

- HARNESS 3**
 - Wants to mark the Bell Player.
 - Blindfolded.
 - Must follow the bell.
 - 1 point awarded for each contact.
- BELL PLAYER**
 - Wants to lure Harness 3 towards them and encircle the harness rod with their arms.
 - Creates a hoop out of their hands to encircle the harness without touching it.
 - Must encircle the rod from the tip and move arms down to the base.
 - 3 points are awarded if their arms reach the base of the rod without touching.
- REFEREE**
 - Blows a whistle when they see a point, players reset.
 - Reset is both players taking three steps backward.
- ARENA**
 - Must be respected, no crossing the boundaries.
 - Four people holding a textile to make a rectangle enclosing the players.
 - Will yell if players approach the boundary.
- SPECTATORS**
 - All support Harness 3, and can guide them verbally.
- WINNING**
 - Means a player gets 15 points.

GAME RULES**JOUST****HARNESS 1 vs. HARNESS 2**

Without bell

BOTH PLAYERS

Want to mark the other without being marked themselves.

1 point awarded for each contact.

REFEREE

Blows a whistle once contact is made, players reset.

To reset, players touch the tips of their harness rods together.

ARENA

Is a physical fence, must be respected, no crossing the boundaries.

SPECTATORS

Are assigned a team and support their player verbally & emotionally.

Each player gets an equal number of spectators.

WINNING

Means a player gets 15 points.

GAME RULES**RODE(O)****HARNESS 1 vs. HARNESS 2**

With bell

BOTH PLAYERS

Want to mark each other without being marked themselves.

1 point awarded for each contact.

HARNESS 3

Is blindfolded.

Must follow the bell and find a way to mark the person wearing it.

3 points awarded for each contact.

HARNESS 2

Has a bell attached to their harness.

Has a textile connecting their legs together,.

1 point awarded for each contact.

ARENA

Is unmarked, unbounded, but participants should stay in the general area.

It is the responsibility of HARNESS 2 to stay within a general vicinity.

SPECTATORS

Must stay silent.

WINNING

Means a player gets 15 points.



Don Whitman (Western Photography Guild)

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

HELLO [NAME],

We are two RISD graduate students, working on a video performance piece. We got your names from your neighbor Joelle Heller, who thought you might be interested in participating. The performance is set up as a series of three games, with two participants wearing sculptures that limit their movement as they try to win points against their opponent while obeying the rules of the game. Conceptually, we are interested in exploring contact and physical distance in the age of COVID.

We are hoping to hire two participants who have experience with other forms of sports or movement, and we think your knowledge and experience in wrestling would make you an ideal participant.

We need participants who are available for two hours on both the afternoon of Sunday 11/15 (for rehearsal) and the weekend of 11/21–22 (performance). The exact timing is flexible and can be made around the participants' schedules.

This is a paid gig, and you would be paid \$80 total for the four hours. All activities related to the project will be as COVID-safe as possible-- we will be outdoors, wearing masks, and maintaining social distance. If you're interested in participating or have questions about the project, please email us back and we can set up a short call.

Thank You,
Ryan and Hannah



THE ARENA



FALL 2020

HANNAH WINKLER
RYAN DIAZ

RAM HARNESS GAMES

