

Art Writing by Victoria MacBeath, on Marcia Huyer
Holding Space in Marcia Huyer's *Negotiating +/-*

From October 28th until Dec 10th, 2022, sculpture and installation-based artist Marcia Huyer's work *Negotiating +/-* will be on display at the Eastern Edge Artist Run Centre. This work is comprised of white plastic bags that inflate and deflate, inviting viewers to consider how they navigate public spaces, and what it means to extend care by leaving space.

Walking into the room, viewers are faced with 90 opaque plastic bags. These bags each inflate to a total size of 46 x 30 in and inflate and deflate at random. The bags are inflated by individual fans under each, which are controlled to turn on and off at random. This inflation and deflation creates a rippling effect and a robotic breathing rhythm. Connected to the title of the work, these bags alternate between taking up space and leaving space, negotiating with their own occupation of the room. Breathing and space are two ideas around which public dialogue has been heavily centered over the past few years, and Huyer's work engages in this conversation by altering the viewer's experience of a once-familiar space. Further, the opaque white of the bags conjures a clinical feeling. It alludes to the face masks, testing, and vaccinations that people have used as precautions when they enter public spaces and navigate their own bodies alongside others since 2020. Engaging in these precautions is an act of care for our communities and ourselves – and *Negotiating +/-* invites viewers to pause and consider the way that our experience of public space has changed over the past three years.

This work, particularly in a world ravaged by a recent pandemic, asks viewers what it means to hold space, to take up

space, and to leave space – as the plastic bags do at random. Viewers are given more and less space as the bags grow and shrink, which encourages us to consider our own use of the room. This installation demands a bodily encounter with the work and momentarily allows us to let something other than ourselves determine where we can occupy public space. In a post- (or approaching post) pandemic world, the grocery store, the bus, and local galleries remain physically the same, but our navigation of them has changed irreversibly.

This change, as Yuriko Saito writes in the introduction to their 2022 book *Aesthetics of Care*, has created an urgent influx of conversations around space and caring for the communities we inhabit (1). This installation provides us with a moment of pause and encourages viewers to consider how leaving space is an act of community care. By taking and giving space in the gallery, this work encourages bodily engagement with the artwork. Saito writes that “objects can serve as a vehicle for expressing care” (6). *Negotiating +/-* is filled with 90 pneumatic objects expressing care, as the bags encourage us to take a moment to practice self-care by pausing and reflecting on our experience of public space. These plastic bags, and their rhythmic ‘breathing’ expel care into the gallery space by their evocation of navigating access and space in a world where being close is, for some, a distant memory.

Being in Eastern Edge Gallery, alongside *Negotiating +/-* is an invitation to wonder how the spaces we occupy are negotiated. It asks us to consider in what ways this mediation is an act of care. It is also an invitation to pause, to reflect, and to consider the ever-shifting ideas around bodily engagement, closeness, and care in the communities we inhabit.