



AUGUST, 2021

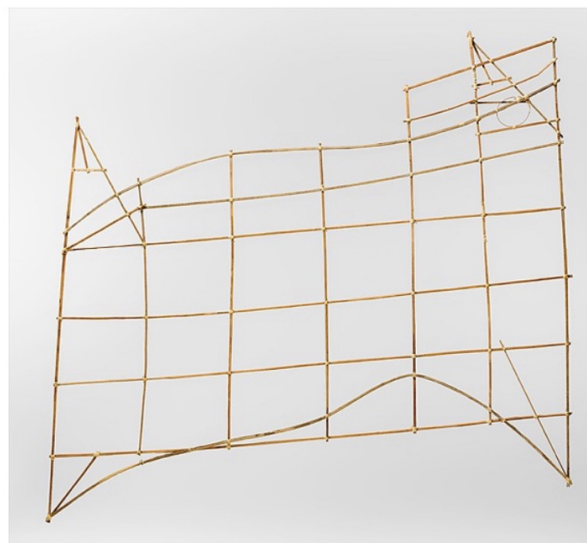
## No W here is Here: Alice Hope, Toni Ross, and Bastienne Schmidt at Ricco/Maresca



Toni Ross "Time and Again I" with her drawings at Ricco/Maresca

By JAMES SALOMON July, 2021

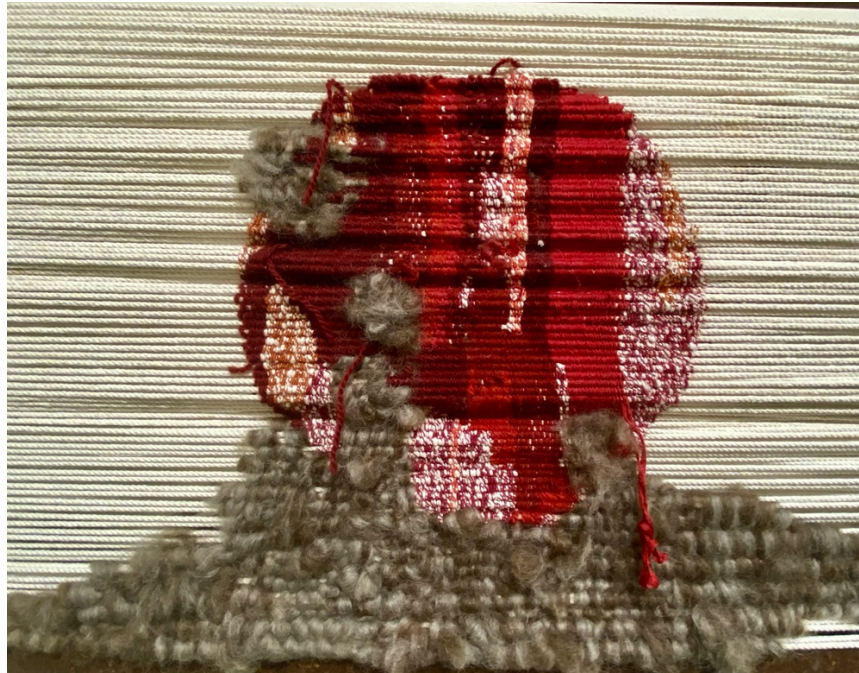
In late 2019, a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Alice Hope, Bastienne Schmidt, and Toni Ross met to discuss an exhibition concept that would highlight the influence of archeology in their individual practices. As a prompt, they agreed to each select an artifact from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's vast collection and respond to it. In a serendipitous event, and to their astonishment, each artist separately chose the *Navigational Chart (Rebbilib)* from the Marshall Islands.



Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Rebbilib at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Made from the stick-like midribs of coconut palm fronds and bound together with natural fiber strings to form a crisscrossed framework, navigational charts represent portions of the archipelago as they relate to different types of ocean currents and swell patterns. Before World War II and the advent of newer navigation technologies, Marshallese seamen utilized these maps as guides and mnemonic devices before crossing the Pacific Ocean in open canoes; each one was unique and fully decipherable only by its maker, serving also as a training aid to pass on navigation knowledge from one generation to the next.

The title *No Where* is a wordplay coined by Greg Dvorak in his book *Coral and Concrete* (2018). In this exhibition each artist responds independently to the aesthetic and cultural significance of the navigational chart, ruminating on how the simplicity of its formal properties belies its deep complexity of communication and wayfinding.



Toni Ross, "Marking Time" (Detail) at Ricco/Maresca

## Toni Ross

About 12 years ago Bastienne and I were having one of our museum/gallery days. I don't remember if we went to the Met to see a particular exhibition or just needed a Met fix. In any case, we first stopped into the Cycladic collection just to the left of the main entrance which is always a must for me. Continuing on straight down that corridor brings you through the African collection and into the Oceania wing. I think in past visits to the Oceania wing I had been so taken with the large carved canoes and wooden totems that I had entirely missed the more intimate installation of Micronesian objects. Bastienne brought me specifically to the glass case displaying a Marshall Islands navigational stick chart. I was completely stunned by it.

Its mystery, elegance, formalism and organic rhythm... I don't remember anything else from that day. Just the chart.

Knowing nothing about the stick chart I was struck by the searching quality of the lines, the wonky yet elegant grid, the imperfect imperfection that I so aspire to in my own work and that I admire. There is a searching quality to the stick charts that I experience in my own work. The works of mine that are included in *No Where* are not so much a response to the chart but rather examples of the inherent connections to it.

All these years later that one object remains at the forefront of my mind, a piece I could visit again and again and again (before or after the Cycladic masterpieces). Looking back on the day the three of us simultaneously selected the Rebbilib as our favorite object at the Met's vast collection, though ancient Cycladic figures have figured prominently in my mind and my work for decades, it was the chart that stood out. Perhaps it was its singularity. Or maybe it is an object that I have yet to figure out.



*Bastienne Schmidt with "Grid Breaking Open" at Ricco/Maresca*

## **Bastienne Schmidt**

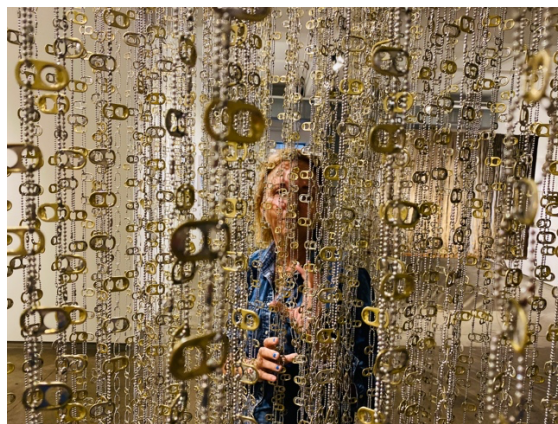
I am drawn to two sections in the Metropolitan Museum, one is the Greek section with small objects, upstairs in a side room tucked away from many visitors, where small fragments of terra cotta are stored in vitrines. My father was an archeologist, and the idea that little pieces of clay can survive intact or fractured for thousands of years is mind boggling to me.

The other room that continues to fascinate me is the incredible room of South Asian art. To the right side of it, there is a room installed with smaller objects, all of them made of natural fibers.

I remember the first time I encountered the navigational chart in the Metropolitan Museum vividly. It was in itself not a big object, but something drew me into its' orbit right away.

The use of humble materials, such as coconut ribs and threads and it's grid like structure, with on the top and the bottom wavy patterns that looked like the silhouette of a wave or even a sloping mountain, combined a fragility and resilience at the same time, that spoke to me deeply. It became a personal object to me that I had to visit each time I was visiting the museum. For me it constitutes a metaphor for life, to be able to move forward, you can be nimble and fragile, as long as you are resilient. It is the ultimate ode to humble objects, that contain an incredible life force, while being built of non-lasting materials.

It is movement, travel, joy, resilience, challenge and difference; a metaphor of yin and yang of life. It is an object that I want to come back to it again and again, to look for it, to feel its' essence.



*Alice Hope with "Proprioceptive I" installation at Ricco/Maresca*

## **Alice Hope**

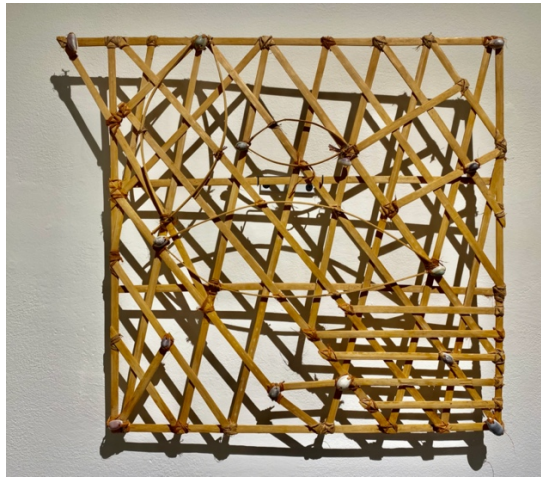
I was in the thick of learning about stick charts during the worst of COVID-19. Lockdown felt like a clipping of wings but coupled with navigation research Kodachromed my world. My perception woke up to phenomena previously unnoticed. Space around me came symphonically dynamic and alive, and my studio generously opened, albeit virtually,



to chart-centric conversations with anthropologists around the world. The navigation chart was my holy grail and my social network. It reminded me what I often forget: to be here.

In line with my economy of means with materials, the pandemic has taught me economy of means of place. My work for No W here creates place and marks location in this period of time that we're all living through together, while divided. K Corona and Proprioceptive 1 are single occupancy works. Our new choreographic rule, social distance, has necessitated a sharpened spatial awareness, a sixth sense I liken to Marshallese wave wayfinding.

The primary material for these installations is used Corona beer can tabs—the brand's name a poetic coincidence with the virus. Months before the pandemic, I chose the tabs for their dual tone (gold and silver) which evokes preciousness and reflects light. As with the navigation chart, I was drawn to the tabs' formalism, its economy of means and composition of positive and negative space, but the current cultural references magnify their relevance.



***If we lose our culture, we lose our memory** - Robert Wilson*  
*Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Rebbilib, courtesy the Watermill Center Collection*

On exhibit at Ricco/Maresca



*Alice Hope, Toni Ross, and Bastienne Schmidt, by James Salomon*

NO W HERE will be on exhibit through 11 September 2021.