



**TR Ericsson**  
*Industrial Poems - Poèmes Industriels*  
9.6 - 11.3.2018



# TR Ericsson

## *Industrial Poems - Poèmes Industriels*

September 6<sup>th</sup> - November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

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4089

“Can you hear her blacks crackle and drag? They’re zipping her up in a bag. The Cadillac’s coming to take her away, can you hear her blacks crackle and drag?”

Paul Westerberg





On August 14th, 2003 the northeastern and Midwestern United States and parts of Ontario, Canada went dark during the second most widespread blackout in history. Tom (TR) Ericsson was at a pool hall in Manhattan just south of Union Square on Fourth Avenue. It was the day before his 31<sup>st</sup> birthday and a little over two months after the death of his mother. The source of the electrical failure was traced back to a generating plant in Eastlake, Ohio a few short miles from where his mother, Susan, died by suicide at her home on Kirtland Road in Willoughby, Ohio.

While it was still light out, people were already starting to panic and leave. Tom went over to a table by the window and kept hitting balls, but the sun was going down and the pool hall soon closed. Trains weren't running, there were no buses, and you couldn't get a cab. He would have to walk over one of the bridges to get to his apartment. New York was still very much on edge after autumn 2001, the 9/11 attacks, Anthrax and flight 587. The thought of walking over the bridge stirred memories he had of standing in the window watching ash covered business people returning to their Brooklyn homes.

There had been other suicide attempts over the years. When he was only a boy, she'd tried in Tennessee. His father threw away the note she'd left; two pages devoted to her parents that ended with the line "Mike and Tom will be better off without me." This was the only mention of her son and husband. The doctors said she took enough pills to kill a horse. In June 2003, she tried again, and it was final, acute intoxication with amitriptyline, a tricyclic antidepressant she'd been taking for years. She had called her son earlier that day and left a message saying her husband (her third one), was threatening to put her in a home. This sort of turmoil was commonplace and had been as far back as the early 90's when Tom moved to the city to study art at The Art Student's League. In addition to the constant phone calls, she wrote her son over 400 letters between 1991 and the time of her death. These were by turns loving and humorous but always filled with desperate narratives surrounding issues with her parents, husband, his kids, money (the lack of it), all typed or handwritten on legal pads from the law offices where she worked.

*"She called all the time, I was on the phone with her all the time. She called in the middle of the night once to tell me about a meteor shower. I was pissed but I got up and went outside. I remember thinking if I see something right when I look up, then ok, and I did, a green streak dashed a short line in the sky and then I got my wife up and we got dressed and went to the park and saw a beautiful meteor shower early that morning. The park was littered with families on their blankets."*

Art, literature, philosophy, and poetry, were all things that Tom had used to wall himself off from his mother's despair. For years he'd been reading Soren Kierkegaard on the train, or when he was having trouble sleeping late into the



night and early morning. However, instead of facilitating an escape or diversion, Kierkegaard's labyrinth-like texts and complex riddled narratives are carefully crafted to jar a sleepy reader into an almost terrifying wakefulness. The influence of those texts was extreme and led to a kind of inner reckoning, like an arrow being pulled further and further back against the tension of the bow. In 2003 he was finishing Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments, a book that among many other things admonishes the reader to "not think" but to put the book away, and do, and be, and live. It was a strange and potent text to be reading given the circumstances, but in retrospect it was dew on the grass, a lingering last call to answer. With her death, all of that stored tension was unleashed, and he let everything else fall apart: his marriage, his career, everything. Slowly and painfully he began to try and piece things together, meeting with doctors, forensic pathologists, county coroners, trying to answer the void-like "why?" left after a suicide. What happened? What sent her careening over the edge like that? All that was left were the things she left behind: a house filled with nightmares and relics, a black plastic ashtray littered with half smoked filter-less butts, a dwindling checking account, a drunken husband, his drunken friends.

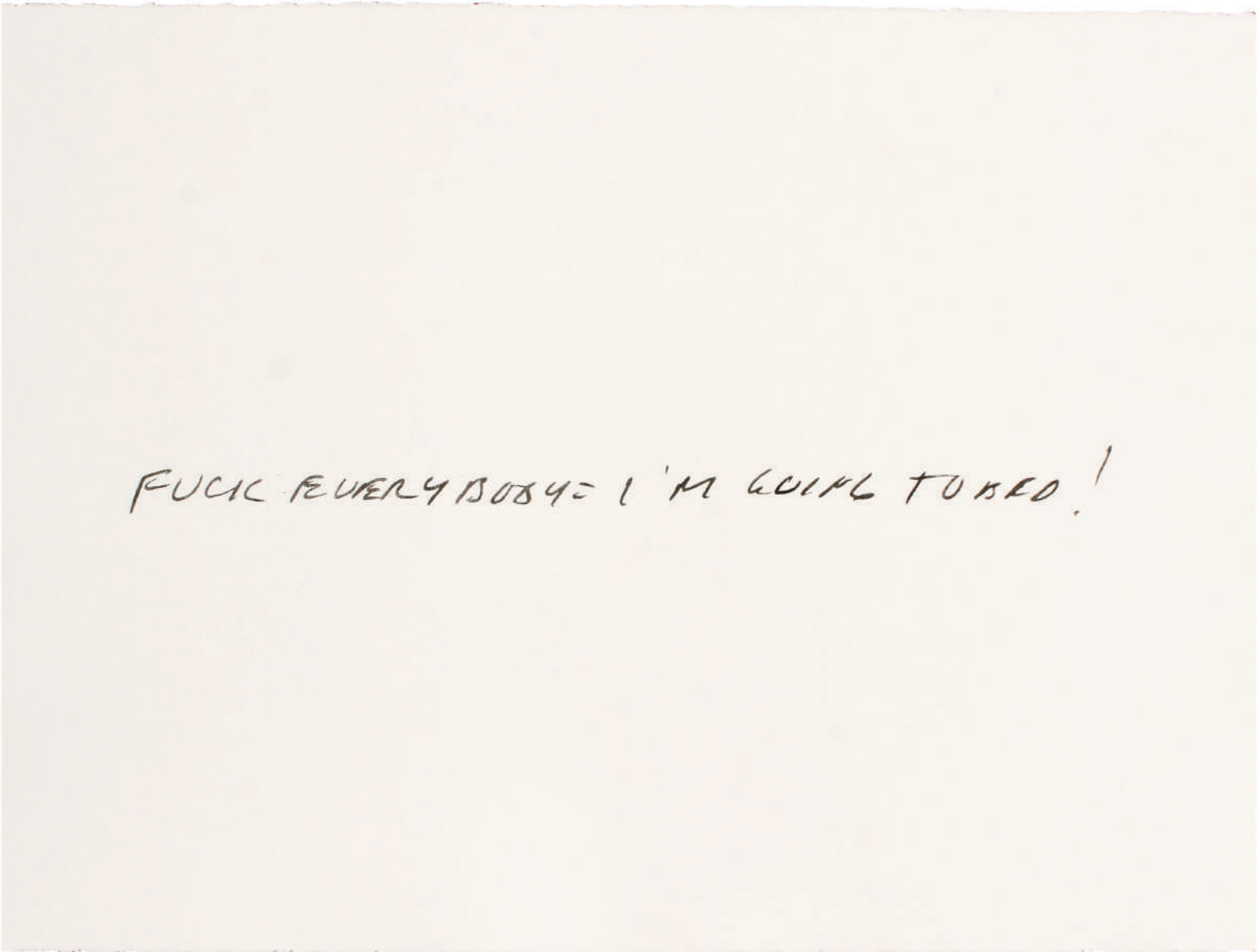
*"That awful night, driving from Brooklyn to a morgue in Ohio only to see her dead body, I stopped at a gas station along the turnpike in the middle of Pennsylvania, it was early in the morning, still dark. When I went inside to pay Angel of the Morning was playing. One of her favorite 45's, she'd listen to it again and again, especially after we left my dad. I remember her face, the way she looked when she listened to it and how real her pain felt to me."*

There was no one to call now. And she would never call again. "Fuck everybody..."

After he left the pool hall, instead of going home, Tom went over to a friend's place and ended his 30<sup>th</sup> year walking the darkened streets, seeing the inverted lights and darks of the now black buildings against the purplish sky, the tilted architecture thrown into a kind of surreal unreality. There was a drum circle playing in Tompkins Square Park, someone in the village had a gas powered generator and was selling hot dogs... people were lined up around the block.

*"It just doesn't end, as anyone knows who's gone through these things, you don't just get over it, and when you accept that, this thing ticking inside you, and the fact that it's not going anywhere, something else happens, it changes, you change, things around you change, her death, like her, was filled with life, I don't ask why anymore, I don't ask questions I can't answer, or think thoughts that can't be thought, I don't say what can't be said. But what can't be said must be shown."*





FUCK EVERYBODY = I'M GOING TO BED!

**FUCK EVERYBODY =  
I'M GOING TO BED!**

Handwriting may become obsolete, but in the rearview mirror will remain a way to involuntarily express unconscious emotions while articulating selected thoughts. It is as unique as a fingerprint revealing characteristics, personality, emotion and sentiment. The words recall a moment, but speak towards a lifetime. Might we learn more from the lines or the letters?

While the artwork was created in 2018, it is made from the ashes of the last cigarettes Susan Robinson smoked in 2003. The ashtray and cigarette butts remained in the artist's personal archive for a decade and a half prior to this exhibition. Many people live with the ashes of their loved ones. What might it mean to preserve and carry these remnants of a person's pleasure or pain? What happens to the material and their owner over time? 15 years is anything, but fleeting.

**Fuck Everybody = I'm Going to Bed! 2018**  
Ashes from her last cigarettes on paper  
22 x 30 inches -55.9 x 76.2 cm

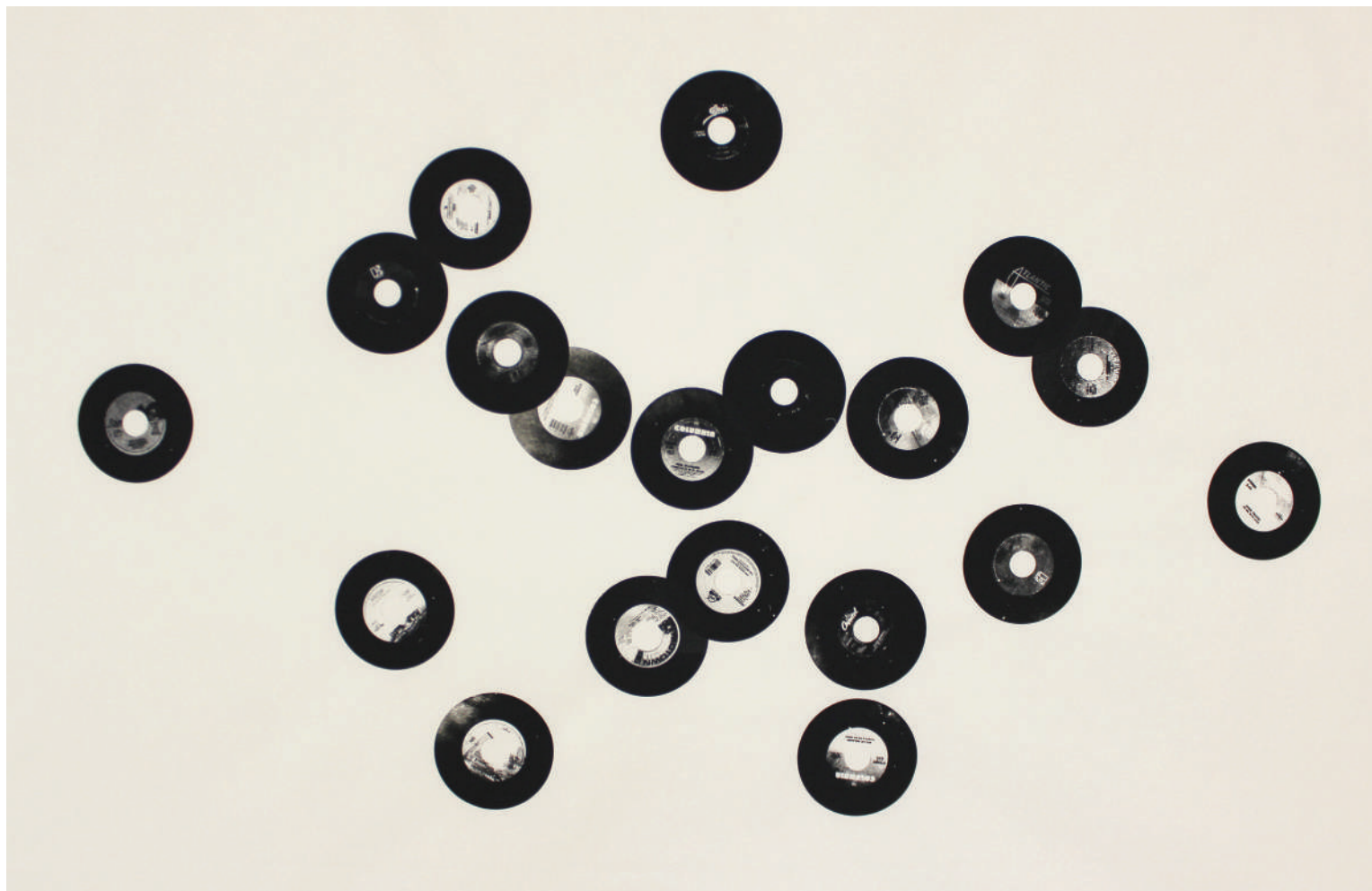




### **BROWNING, 1957**

Susan Sontag said “to photograph is to participate in another person’s mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.” What do our school portraits testify to when youth is behind us? What’s become of the kids in your class? How many didn’t outlive their parents? Each generation has to answer the same questions of the one before it, but under a new set of cultural rules and social realities. In this work, Ericsson has blown up his mother and her classmates covering the potential of baby boomers in one of their ashes. Everything ends in a photograph.

**Browning 1957, 2017**  
Graphite, resin and funerary ash on muslin  
66 x 96 inches - 167.6 x 243.8 cm



**45's, 2018**  
Graphite, resin and funerary ash on muslin  
59 1/10 x 82 7/10 inches -150 x 210 cm



### **45'S**

The music of a generation gets stored in the memory of the next. The lyrics and melodies all get imprinted, but the cultural context is detached, reduced to a home, a car, event or second hand story. They move a body across time without thought in the way that smell, touch and sound can.





***Can you hear her blacks crackle and drag?*, 2018**

Vacuum formed black polystyrene  
 29 panels each 12 x 12 inches - 30.5 x 30.5 cm  
 Installation dimensions variable  
 Edition of 7 + 1 AP

(L-R) Cigarette Butts, Lighter, Eyeglasses, Nightgown, Picture Frame, Shell, The Rose,  
 45, Credit Card, Cigarettes, Heart (necklace), Notebook, Perfume Bottle, Twenty Four Hours A Day, Phone  
 Amethyst (ring), Checkbook, Glove, Key, Message Tape, Purse, Shot Glass  
 Amethyst (necklace), Ashtray, Leather Boot, Long Island Iced Tea, Pill Bottle, Sachet, Wrist Watch

**CAN YOU HEAR HER BLACKS CRACKLE AND DRAG?**

With direct reference to Marcel Broodthaers, the exhibition includes 29 vacuum formed “signs”. These were the things of Susan Robinson. They were the things surrounding her when she died, the things she left behind. They represent her life in Ohio nearly 500 miles from her son, her stillness, mementos, addictions; alcohol, pills, cigarettes, a notebook, a key to the island she’d built for herself, the sea within and without, objects that build a home from within in the way Broodthaers wrote about mussels. You build a home that grows out of you, but always with a painful awareness of the world outside.

SUE  
So I'm gonna send you a letter tomorrow.

<beep>

Ericsson. It's Mike. Give me a call when you ah  
get back from your road trip.  
Ok. It's Monday around... I don't know what  
time it is.

<beep>

SUE  
Tommy you call me as soon as possible, um,  
something really strange has occurred with  
these lawyers and judges and everything and I  
don't want to be in the middle and I am and I  
don't like it. Call me. Bye.

<beep>

<dial tone>

Please hang up there appears to be receiver off  
the hook. Please check your main telephone  
and extension then try your call again. Thank  
you. This is a recording.

<beep>

SUE  
Tom. It's M. I'm in terrible pain. Please call me  
as soon as you get home, it's 10 o'clock, bye.

<beep>

Tom. It's M, it's 11 o'clock at...

<beep>

Tommy, it's 10:45 on Friday night call me as  
soon as you get home. Bye dear.

SUE  
Tommy, it's M again 11:20. I'll probably go to  
sleep in about a half an hour. But look honey  
you and Cassandra are gonna have to come  
home for Easter, I can't go three more months,  
I'm dyin' over here. Give me a call darnit.

<beep>

Tom. It's five till twelve, I'm still waiting for you  
to call me, something else has come up. I need  
your advice. I give up Tom, I guess you're never  
gonna call me. Bye.



*Can you hear her blacks crackle and drag?*, 2018  
Vacuum formed black polystyrene  
12 x 12 inches - 30.5 x 30.5 cm  
Edition of 7 + 1 AP

## **CAN YOU HEAR HER BLACKS CRACKLE AND DRAG?**

The telephone is of particular importance here. The phone became the main point of contact between mother and son. It marks the place of absence. It's cord wraps around discontinuity, alarm and silence, raising questions about location, transfer and the destination of words sent out into the air. Profoundly changing our concept of long-distance, it constantly transmits effects of real and evocative power. To the extent that it always relates us to the absent other, the telephone, and the massive switchboard attending it, plug into a hermeneutics of mourning.





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ACIS

*AWFUL  
INTERFERING "M"!*

No.	Date	Time	Place	Called	Number	Code	Min	Amount
1	2-08	340P	LEXINGTON	KY	606 245-1221	N	31=	3.10
2	2-09	708P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	4=	.40
3	2-10	937A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
4	2-10	535P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	3=	.30
5	2-10	645P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
6	2-10	708P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	4=	.40
7	2-11	1112A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
8	2-11	316P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
9	2-11	331P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
10	2-13	802A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
11	2-13	804A	DIR ASST	NY	212 555-1212	N	1=	.95
12	2-13	805A	NEW YORK	NY	212 535-7710	N	2=	.20
13	2-13	819A	DIR ASST	NY	212 555-1212	N	1=	.95
14	2-13	820A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 638-5000	N	2=	.20
15	2-13	834A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	2=	.20
16	2-13	416P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	11=	1.10
17	2-13	430P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
18	2-13	635P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
19	2-13	857P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	11=	1.10
20	2-13	932P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	5=	.50
21	2-13	1150P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	9=	.90
22	2-14	448P	VAN NUYS	CA	818 989-3785	N	22=	2.20
23	2-15	334A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	3=	.30
24	2-15	1118A	LEXINGTON	KY	606 245-1221	N	5=	.50
25	2-15	1006P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
26	2-16	1100A	COLUMBUS	OH	614 752-7800	N	1=	.10
27	2-17	1053A	COLUMBUS	OH	614 752-7800	N	5=	.50
28	2-17	1130A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
29	2-17	1140A	COLUMBUS	OH	614 752-7800	N	7=	.70
30	2-18	804A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	2=	.20
31	2-18	1055A	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	3=	.30
32	2-18	629P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	11=	1.10
33	2-19	115P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	3=	.30
34	2-19	502P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
35	2-19	823P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	3=	.30
36	2-20	833P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	3=	.30
37	2-21	319P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
38	2-21	357P	WILLOUGHBY	OH	440 942-5165	NB	46	17.70
			FROM	LEXINGTON	KY	606 245-1221		
39	2-22	1217P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	1=	.10
40	2-22	659P	LEXINGTON	KY	606 245-1221	N	51=	5.10
41	2-22	818P	VAN NUYS	CA	818 989-3785	N	30=	3.00
42	2-22	1000P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	15=	1.50
43	2-22	1029P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	6=	.60
44	2-22	1057P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	2=	.20
45	2-22	1155P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	2=	.20
46	2-23	308P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	4=	.40
47	2-23	927P	BROOKLYN	NY	718 768-4569	N	2=	.20
Total Itemized Calls .....								19.60
<b>Pay-Per-Call Services</b>								
48	2-14	302P	HEALTHINFO	900 680-4448	D	6		23.94
Total Pay-Per-Call Calls .....								23.94

FOR CALLING CODES PLEASE SEE THE BACK OF THE FIRST PAGE

**PHONE BILL**

In the most crazy, mechanical and bureaucratic way, this document relates to everything in the exhibition through repetition, compulsion, addictive personality, extreme intimacy, closeness, chaos and control, freedom and slavery, the solitary self reaching out to the world, to the other, as calls are answered or ignored and either way eventually sender and receiver disconnect over and over again.



*Amitriptyline, 2017*  
Plaster and amitriptyline  
Each 2 inches in diameter - 5.1 cm

## AMITRIPTYLINE

Ornaments of parents, grandparents, decorating plaster and chemicals to illustrate the ambiguity of responsibility for our own creations, for care, self-determination and filial influence. You don't pick your parents, you don't choose how they treat you, but you accept it as your own, it's your life go and live it. In this life, according to Camus "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide". The mirror mirrors all our desperations on this point, the magnified pills full of the chemical that killed Susan Robinson sing of melancholy and sorrow, but also freedom. For a mother this marked the end. For a son, it forced a new start.



*Punk, 2008 (detail)*  
Nicotine on paper  
20 x 16 inches - 50.8 x 40.6 cm

## PUNK

Nicotine is poison, but so is looking back. One of the first bodies of work TR Ericsson made after his mother passed was a series of images created with the brand of cigarettes she chain smoked towards the end of her life. The artist recalls wanting to make a portrait of his mother through the materials that were close to her. He began with cigarettes and photographs creating a haunting series on nostalgia, poison and mortality. The image included in this exhibition is from a photograph of a 16- year old Tom Ericsson taken at his mother's home.





## SUSAN ROBINSON

On the pool table, mother becomes location, setting, place that supports the game/life to be played and lived. It's the place of conflict and strategy, the place where things are determined, where the action starts and finishes, the victories, the losses, growing history of progress and failure and beauty and death. Only ashes and images and artifacts remain, the enigma of her, frozen in time for her son to dance/play/think/work around her stillness, her death and her memory as fact necessarily becomes fiction to endure an unknown future.



*Susan Robinson, 2018*  
Brunswick Table, Simonis cloth, graphite, resin and funerary ash  
97 9/16 x 53 9/16 inches - 247.8 x 136 cm



## FEAR & TREMBLING

Here the artist offers tools for the game in the form of Kierkegaard's fractured identities and approaches to existential problems. All the various positions, identities, approaches are mirrored in the game. It's played both with the mind and the body. You need to control both, but allow for flashes of intuition, and decisiveness beyond thought. The balls/game are in constant flux, multiplicity, countless possibilities, uncertainty, but with each shot a single decisive choice is required. Choose! This is central to Kierkegaard, either/or, the kingdom of heaven whereas both/and is the road to hell, you have to choose for a life lived for it's own pleasure, or towards an ethical end (duty/responsibility). Both are inadequate and fail to address the complexity of the individual. The third option is faith, and faith must be experienced not just intellectualized. That's perhaps Kierkegaard's whole point: play, live, risk something, do something, act in and on your life, realize it, see what happens when you do.

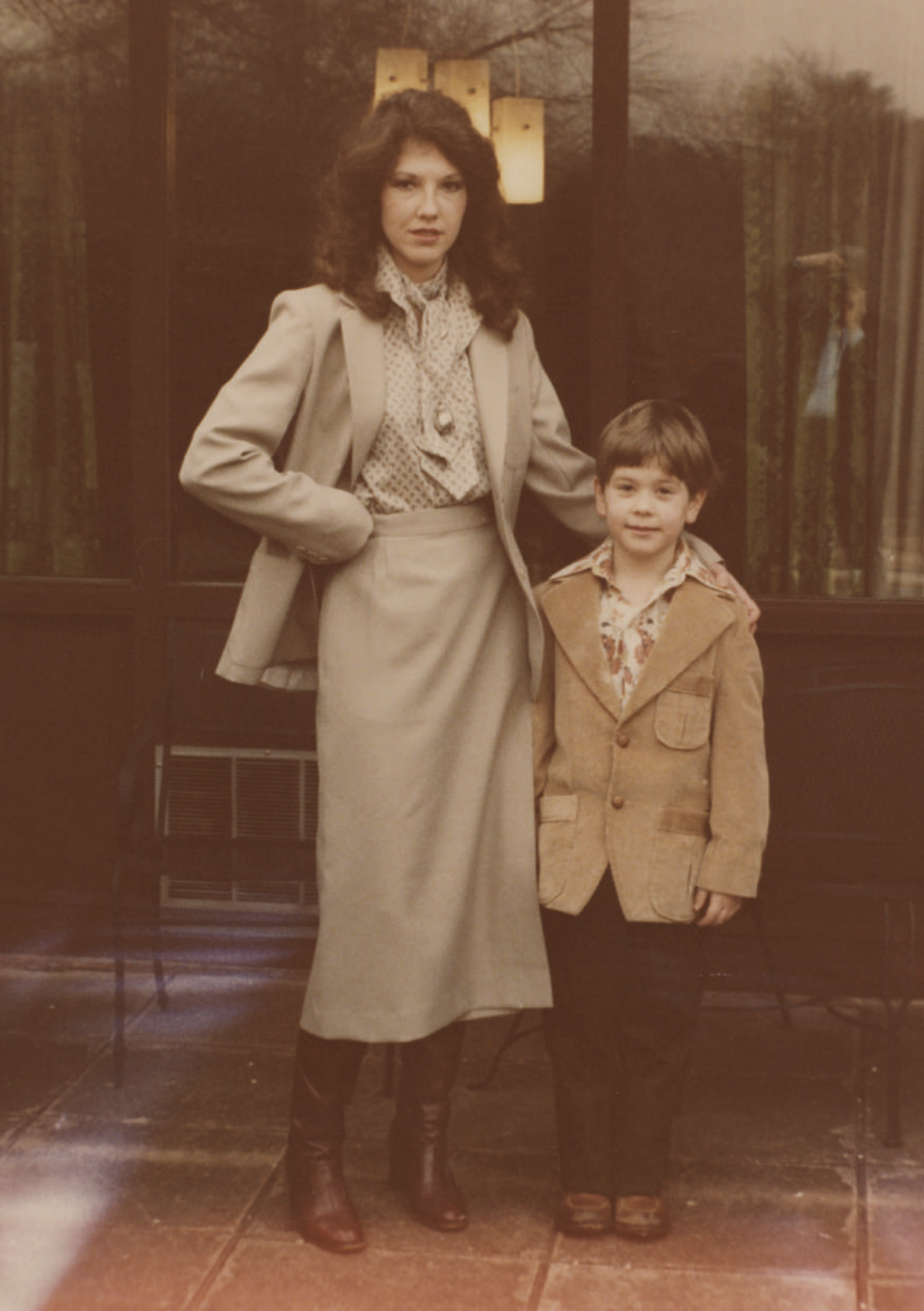


### *Fear and Trembling*, 2018

Wall rack with custom

Kierkegaard billiard balls, cue sticks and a copy of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*  
60 x 27 x 3 inches - 152.4 x 68.6 x 7.6 cm  
edition of 7





## ABOUT

The exhibition is part of “Crackle & Drag,” which is the umbrella title of TR Ericsson’s practice since 2003 and has developed into an inspired chronicle of a rustbelt family in post-industrial America. What begins as a soft, searing, and complex portrait of intimacy and Americana evokes universal themes of love, loss and ephemerality. With conceptual rigor and emotional directness, Ericsson uses a century’s worth of family archives to reconstruct the past, exploring the healing powers of commemoration and the pitfalls of memory. His work raises difficult subjects such as domestic violence, mental illness, suicide, love, loss and financial struggle, as it investigates triangular relationships between three generations through the objects that outlive them.

“Crackle and Drag” has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Everson Museum of Art during the last three years, also earning the century-old Print Center International Award. An eponymous monograph earned distinctions in the Aperture and Kraszna Krausz awards. Works from this body are in the collections of the Cleveland Museum of Art, The Dallas Museum of Art, The Indianapolis Museum of Art, Harvard Library, MoMa (New York), the Whitney Museum, Yale University Collection and numerous private collections including those of Marguerite Hoffman and Agnes Gund. The film “Crackle & Drag,” premiered in Belgium at Harlan Levey Projects in September 2015 before being presented in several festivals.

Throughout his career, Ericsson has also created works which bring artists who have influenced him into the narrative. Often it’s in these works that the artist/author offers up intimate expressions related to his personal outlook and biography. Duchamp’s *Étant donnés* was obliquely referenced in a series of powdered graphite works of Tom’s wife, Rose, where she became the *doppelgänger* of both a murdered girlfriend and his deceased mother. Bruce Connor’s Angels were inverted into erotic Lucifers in shadowy photographs of Rose, once more, but by far the most enduring and complex influence has been the work of Marcel Broodthaers.

Around the same time the artist began to manage the details surrounding his mother’s death, including the emptying of three homes (hers and both her parents’) into a storage locker in Ohio, he was, for the first time, learning of the work of Marcel Broodthaers. First, randomly, in a Pop art anthology, and later in an issue of *October Magazine*, picked up in a used bookshop, in which the entire issue was devoted to the artist. Eggs, mussels, frites, toys, shovels, wicker chairs, footstools, clothes, ladders, suitcases, shoes and bones, found objects in narrative clusters, staged performances, films and installations... these all contributed to a poet’s visual vocabulary

which is difficult to decipher and nearly impossible to penetrate for the casual viewer. Tom found Broodthaers more enchanting than frustrating, and intuited that somehow Broodthaers' curious signs and symbols, as well as his games with objects and language, could also be applied to the stored objects in the locker in Ohio. Of course, this influence was complex and never obvious. Our personal lives, like many of Broodthaers' works, resist easy interpretation. Our private lives and complex inner motivations are often mysterious. Any expression of those interior realities should be equally mysterious to others. Allowing for this and giving this the space and the patience it deserves is where real empathy begins. It does not start with knowing but with not knowing, and Ericsson asserts this unknowableness as being key to his entire enterprise.

Having grown up in his grandfather's bookstore, which specialized in poetry, Tom felt other affinities with the work of the Belgian artist. From early adolescence he'd been reading poetry and continues to do so today. His approach to art is one that sees fiction as that which "...enables us to grasp reality and at the same time that which is veiled by reality." Then there are the shared objects employed by both artists, the archiving, resurrection, rearranging and grappling with context and meaning, suspension of ideas, or, in Tom's case, an emotion within the object itself. In this case, instead of just seeing the banality of the thing, one feels the sponge-like way that it holds what was lost. By combining and re-contextualizing these objects, there is a shift in meaning, creating new possibilities, new stories and questions that drive the work forward in time.

This poetic approach implies some form of ambiguity; a resistance to being nailed down in a world that craves definition. As Ericsson points out, "Romanticism is rejected again and again - it's always cringe worthy and wrong. The industry loves its absence, because its presence makes everything more difficult, its anarchy, scholars love their accumulated propositions that they all begin to think of as facts though they're not, curators love to define art and it's meaning, but it's a lie. Broodthaers knew all this and even his heirs resist the easy definitions everyone wants, the work resists this, resists what is ultimately a kind of collective and institutional violence."

To escape this violence, Broodthaers and Ericsson both view the art institution as a tool or a vessel to lend new meaning and gravity to some sort of alternative history; a tool to create significance where there was formerly irrelevance. After all, art could also be defined as a useless object with no inherent value other than perhaps being beautiful, interesting or well crafted. It may hold an age or an idea, but how do you put a price on that? How do you sell a story or a family history, and why? Like the museum, it is a question of significance and monetary value, which then demand our attention, time and respect.





