

Redundancies

Beth Livensperger

Beth Livensperger

Redundancies

November 5, 2021 - March 4, 2022

Essay by John Yau

Flecker Gallery

Suffolk County Community College

Ammerman Campus, Selden, NY

## Director's Foreword:

Flecker Gallery is delighted to host this magnificent site specific large-scale drawing installation by Beth Livensperger. I am blown away by this exhibition. Little did I know when Beth emailed me to propose the exhibition that it would be so breathtaking and masterfully crafted for our space in concept, design, and execution - an absolute masterpiece. I am an ink on paper aficionado and so her history of works and the expansive nature of it was immediately engaging. We spoke and she came for a site visit. We talked about her work and the gallery and I made a point to show her how striking artworks reflect strongly in our speckled black granite floor. She left and began visualizing possibilities, building a narrative, and returned two months later with all of the components made, packed, and ready to install. As it was being unpacked I started to realize what a massive undertaking I was witnessing. An IMMENSE, multi part drawing that totally transforms our gallery into a liminal space of the mind where we occupy the fictional reality of a drawing, and where everything drawn is at human scale. I can't help but to think of the ground-breaking 1980's music video by Aha - "Take on Me" in which the characters move from our reality into a drawn universe. I really hope you get to see the show, and that the catalog somehow does justice to this amazing artwork.

I am equally thrilled to have engaged esteemed writer John Yau who has contributed a deeply thoughtful and insightful essay to these pages. I reached out to him and we began a conversation, shared Beth's website with him and he liked the work so we continued. He told me that we'd have to arrange for him to see the show in person if he was going to do this - he does not write about shows he does not see in person. There was only a two day window to make it happen as he was out of state and busy with other large projects. We made it happen. I met him at Flecker Gallery for a visit on the designated Sunday. We chatted about the show, the gallery, the college, and he spent a good thirty minutes in the gallery with a friend, examining the show and discussing it between themselves. A month later he sent me the essay on the following pages, connecting the exhibition to current students, alumni, administrators, and everyone in fact - we are all in this milieu together. He infers questions posed by the exhibition about class, race, gender, technology, capitalism, the pandemic; a wonderful and ideal complement to this breathtaking exhibition.

The two students involved in preparing the exhibition and keeping it open, Linda Southard and Bill Becker, are two of the finest Suffolk students I have had the pleasure of working with and their efforts in exhibition are deserving of note. The exhibition afforded the three of us many hours in the gallery through installation and the entire run of the exhibition, talking about the show, art, and life, and I will remember it always as a special time at SCCC and the Flecker Gallery. One final word of congratulations to Beth, between the show opening and catalog going to print, she was awarded a prestigious Pollock-Krasner Grant. We could not be more pleased. Enjoy the catalog and exhibition.

Matthew Neil Gehring  
Director

## In the Space Between Art and Life

By John Yau

There is something incisive and inviting about Beth Livensperger's *Redundancies*, an immersive installation of 3 wall-sized, ink-on paper collages that transform an open, three-sided space into the fictional corporate offices of Ideal System, Inc. Described in the press release as including "large-scale paper characters, elements, and architectural backdrops," Livensperger's fictional business consists of three distinct but adjacent areas, each defined by one of the wall-sized collages. Walking into the open space from the corridor, we literally and figuratively step into another world that is contiguous with the one we were in, but also separate.

On the right wall, viewers see a set of turnstiles marking the office entrance, with a young woman seated at the front desk, back to us, with the sign Ideal System, Inc on the granite wall to her right. On the wall directly ahead, we see a group of mostly male executives gathered around a desk, looking at the chart being projected onto the wall on the viewer's right, while holding identical memorandums.

Livensperger connects the projector to the projection by affixing an expanding triangle of tissue paper to the space between them. Here is where we see the artist's inventiveness with ordinary materials, as the folded tissue paper evokes projector's hazy cone of light in a darkened room. The physical beam is echoed by its reflection on the speckled, granite floor, which visually echoes the actual floor on which we are standing. It is in this and other connections that the meaning of *Redundancies* begins to emerge.

On the left wall, we see diagonal rows of women seated at identical desks, looking at their computers. Each one seems to inhabit an isolated island. One of the women and her desk is shown as a silhouette, indicating an empty space. The silhouette demarcates her absence, but also turns her into a blank space to be filled.

The connection between the women office workers (seen on one wall) and the executives (seen on another) is the closed conference room doors we see on the far left of the middle collage, behind the desk.

By using each of the three gallery walls as the basis of demarcating a distinct area within the familiar hier-



Beth Livensperger, "Redundancies", detail, ink on paper, full installation 8' x 60', 2021



Beth Livensperger, "Redundancies", detail, ink on paper, full installation 8' x 60', 2021

archy of a business, whose purpose remains unknown to us, Livensperger comments on a variety of social issues without becoming didactic. This is one of her greatest strengths. While the installation of *Redundancies* is in a building of college classrooms—which itself is a form of bland and even oppressive architecture—the artist never lectures. Instead, with remarkable deftness and an eye for detail, she connects the areas of her fictional office to their immediate surroundings, including the windows opposite the actual gallery. This formal playfulness invites viewers to consider the impetus animating Livensperger’s installation.

On one hand, there is the obvious point that the artist is getting at by titling the installation *Redundancies*, a term that can mean “dismissal from a job especially by layoff.” But is the viewer meant to simply stop there and see the installation as a comment on the corporate dehumanization of its workers? Or do the echoes between Livensperger’s images and their actual architectural counterparts suggest that there might be a deeper, more nuanced way to look at and reflect upon what the artist is up to?

In 1959, Robert Rauschenberg famously stated: “Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made (I try to act in

the gap between the two)”. Although Livensperger is pursuing a different direction in her art, it seems to me that she is also interested in the space that simultaneously joins and separates art and life. In her immersive installation, she focuses on the border between the space occupied by *Redundancies* and the actual physical circumstances in which work is placed, while also alluding to the changes in practices that corporations are taking in order to deal with “a new post-pandemic paradigm.” This paradigm shift has and will have a direct impact on the future, which has altered considerably since March 2020, when the spread of COVID-19 became a worldwide pandemic.

Livensperger makes the connection between her wall installation and the life going on in the same building by having the floor of where the executives are gathered echo the gallery’s floor. In this and other visual echoes, which refer to the building’s architecture, the artist suggests one possible future for the students wishing to enter the corporate world, which is that they might be deemed redundant. At the same time, while Livensperger could have presented this future in a pessimistic light, she chose not to.

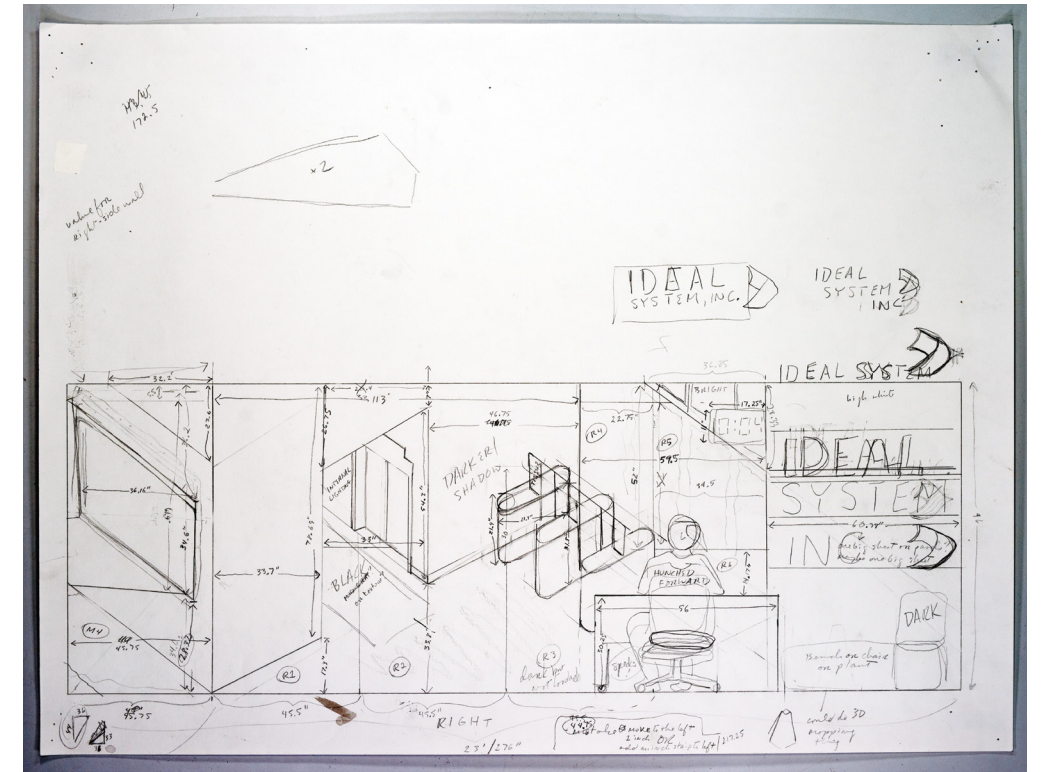
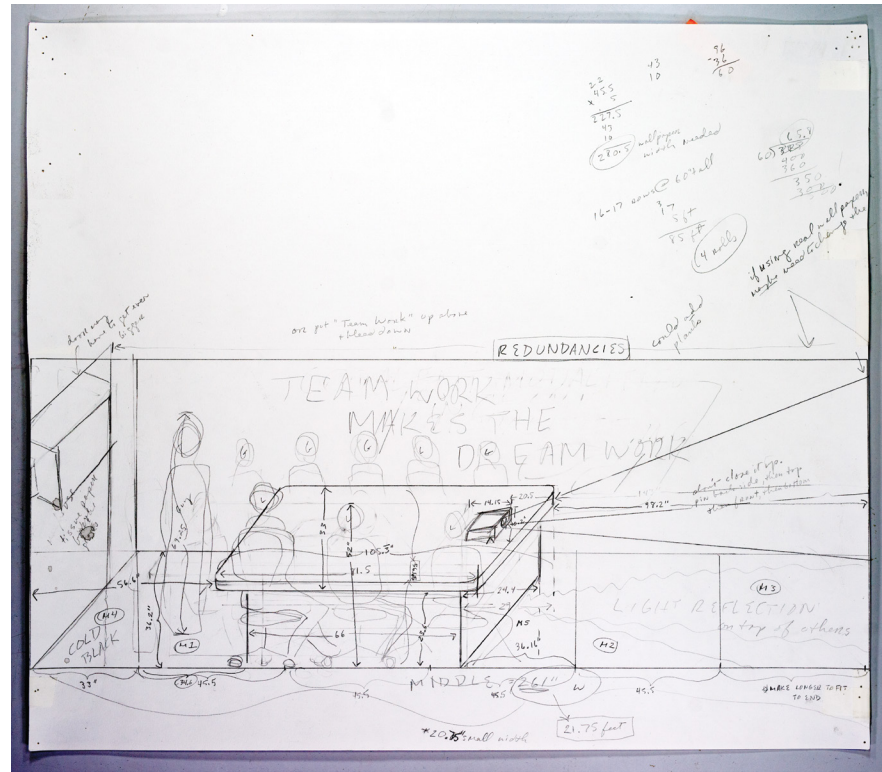
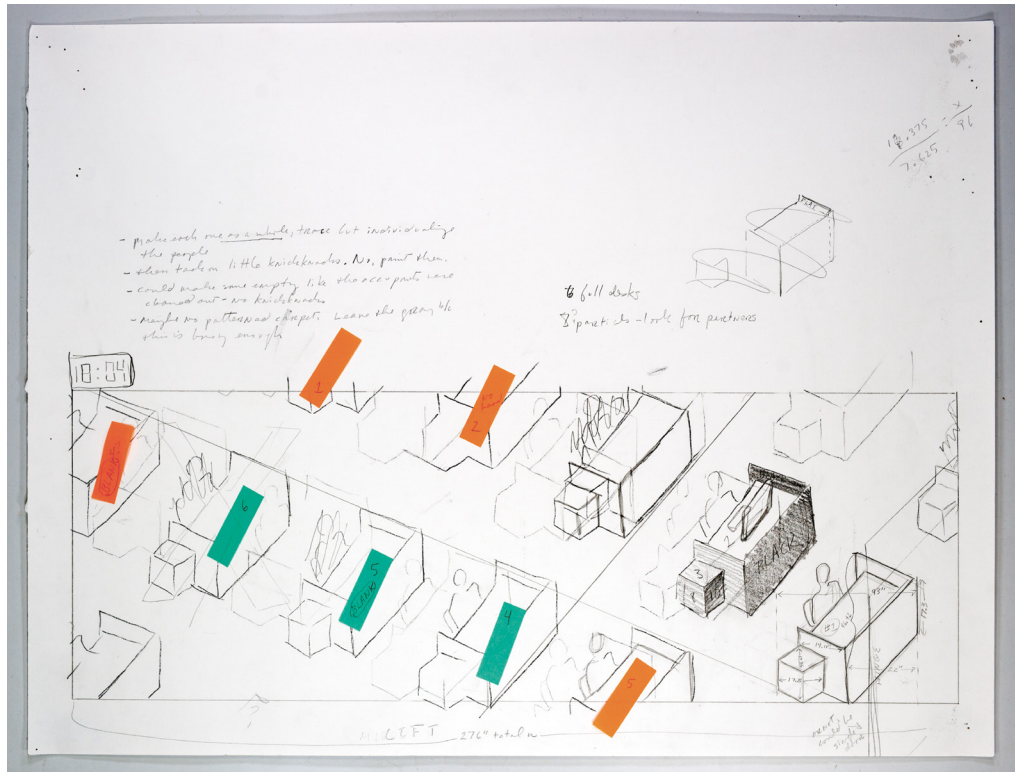
What all of this suggests is that the place where Livensperger was invited to install her large collages generated the outcome, and that she is highly attuned to the physical space where the Flecker Memorial Gallery is located, as well as its immediate surroundings. Once you notice the connections, *Redundancies* invites you to look more closely and see how the executives are separated from the workers, and that they are white and mostly men, while the workers are women and ethnically and racially diverse. Does the installation reflect the world it occupies? What is the make-up of the administration, faculty, and student body?

This is the real strength of Livensperger’s *Redundancies*. She invites the viewer, who is likely to be a part of the school (students, educators, members of the administration, and maintenance crew) to consider their place in the hierarchy. Should it remain as it is or should it change? What kind of structural changes does society and corporations need to make to create a more equitable situation for everyone? By inviting the people who are involved in education to consider one shape the future is taking, Livensperger is proposing that change is necessary and even unavoidable. It is the nature of that change that will determine to some degree the quality of our lives. The women working at their desks are at the mercy of those in power, while the men seem more interested in numbers and charts than in people's lives. The men are gathered together, consolidating their power, while the women are spread apart, weakening them. Is this the future that we want to enter and/or support? What can we do differently?

John Yau is a poet, fiction writer, art critic, and curator who has published over 50 books and received many honors and awards for his work including a New York Foundation for the Arts Award, the Jerome Shestack Award, and the Lavan Award from the Academy of American Poets. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ingram-Merrill Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation, and was named a Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters by France. He was the Arts Director of the Brooklyn Rail from 2007 to 2011 and he is currently a writer and editor for the online magazine, Hyperallergic Weekend, which he co-founded in 2012. He is a Professor of Critical Studies in the Visual Arts Department at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and resides in New York City.



Beth Livensperger, "Redundancies", detail, ink on paper, full installation 8' x 60', 2021

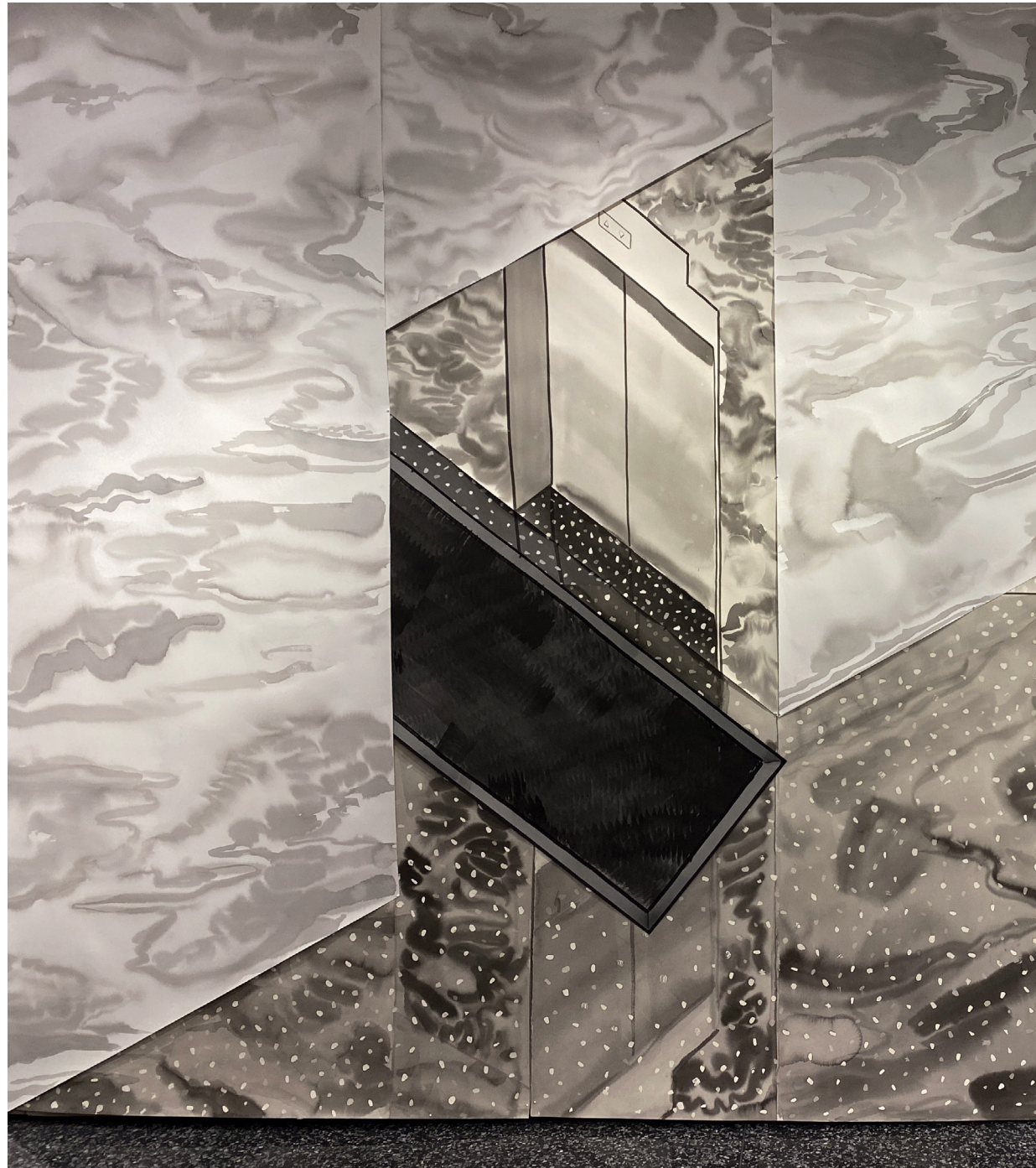


Planning drawings for "Redundancies", site-specific, collaged drawing installation, ink on paper, glassine, each wall panel is 8' x 20, November 5, 2021 - March 4, 2022, Flecker Gallery at SCCC.

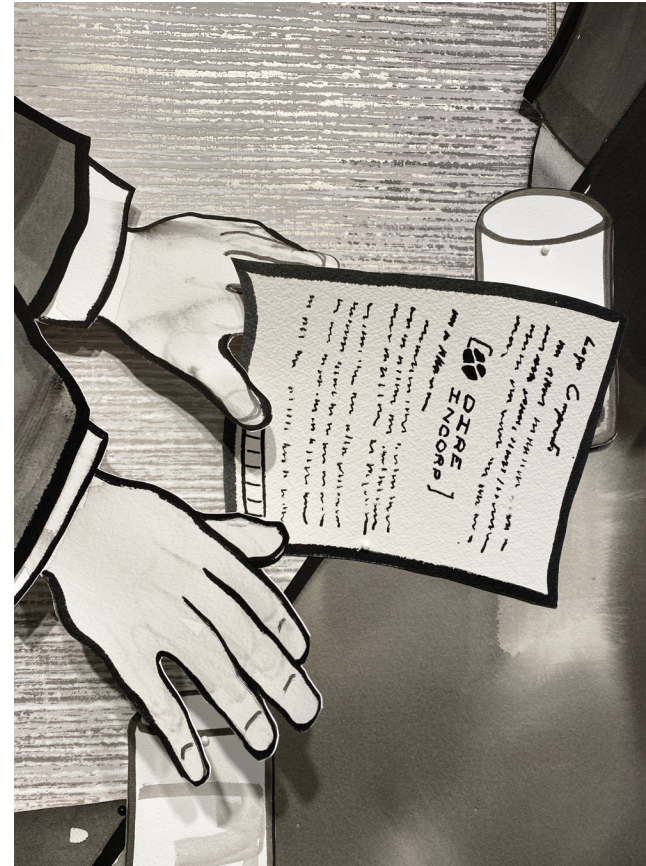


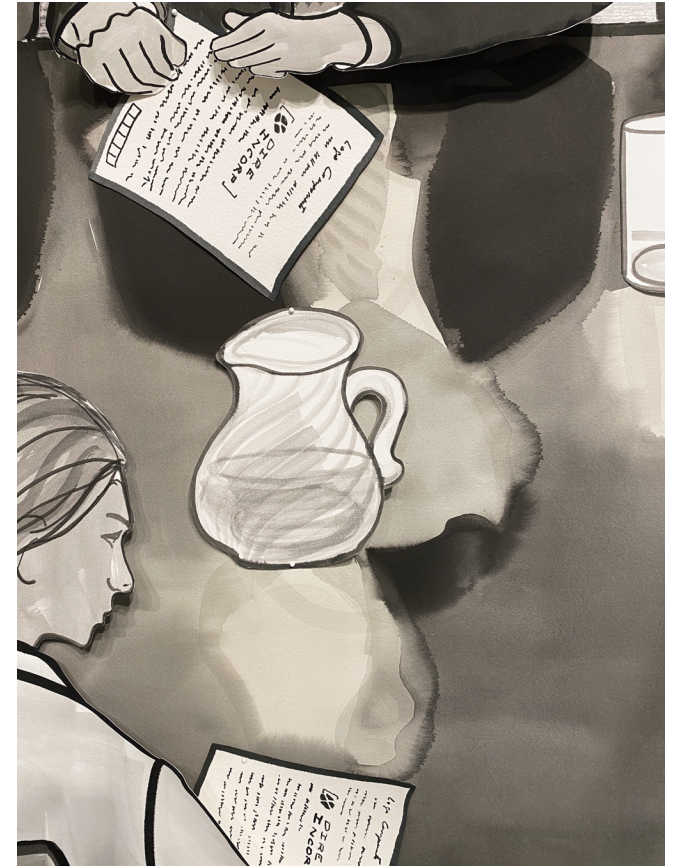
"Redundancies", site-specific, collaged drawing installation, ink on paper, glassine, each wall panel is 8' x 20', November 5, 2021 - March 4, 2022, Flecker Gallery at SCCC.

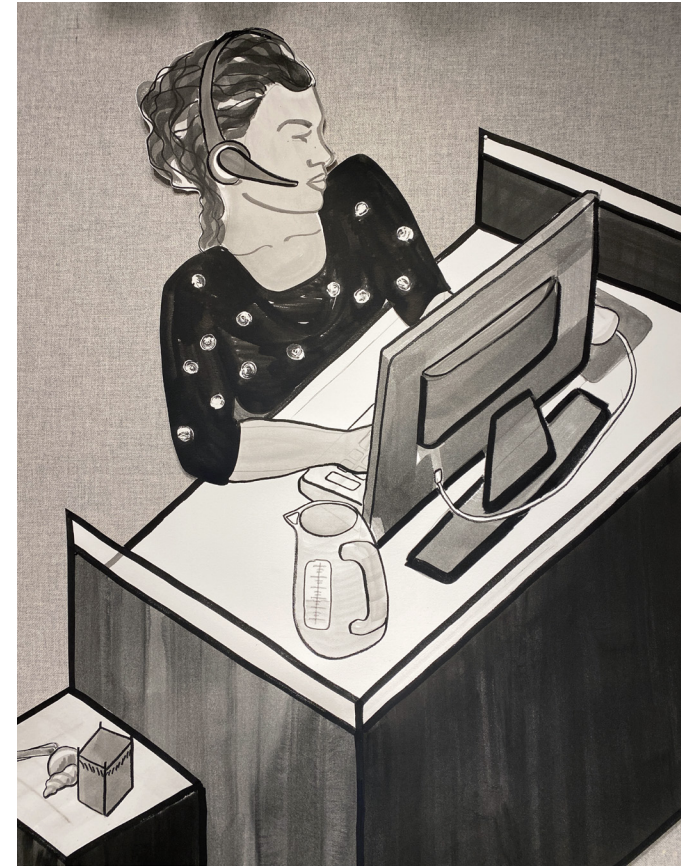














Beth Livensperger and Mark Harris, Vice President of Financial Affairs for SCCC discussing the exhibition.  
Beth delivering her gallery talk during the opening reception (opposite).



#### Exhibition Statement:

I make large-scale, ink-on-paper collages which depict women navigating the banal, yet psychologically charged, space of office interiors. In my installation for the Flecker, I wanted to create an illusionistic extension of the gallery space which would transform it into a fictional corporate suite. To this end, I recreated the gallery's distinctive speckled flooring, and incorporated small additional details that mimic the surrounding space. The right wall of the gallery is the marble-clad corporate lobby, complete with bored security guard. The center wall depicts an executive budget-cutting session in progress. Hard choices will have to be made, and if the budget is to be balanced and profitability restored, certain redundancies must be eliminated. These "redundancies" are indicated on the left wall, where (perhaps in the next room, perhaps in another state or country) a fleet of headset-wearing customer service, sales, or tech support associates grind out their day. Several of them are blank silhouettes: victims of the layoffs to come.

Office culture is undergoing a transformational moment: our country seems to be emerging from the pandemic, some jobs remain remote, and worker mobility and wages may be increasing. However, the impact of these upheavals is not yet settled. While the advent of remote work accelerated technological innovations and erased commutes for many, it also underscored stubborn societal inequities. During the pandemic, women working from home shouldered disproportionate burdens of childcare and household management (as it ever was), while several million left the workplace altogether. Clearly, female success in the workplace is fragile, and our assigned roles are deeply ingrained. My work reflects women's fraught relationship to structures of power, acknowledging an ongoing struggle while celebrating perseverance, ingenuity, and ambition.

#### Bio:

Originally from the Midwest, Beth Livensperger holds a B.F.A. from The Cooper Union, and an M.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from Yale University. She has exhibited at venues in NYC, widely throughout the U.S., and in Seoul, Korea. Her solo projects have been hosted by The Abrons Arts Center and Chashama, and she has participated in group exhibitions at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, RISD Memorial Hall Gallery, The Painting Center, and Essex Flowers, among many others. Her work has been reviewed in Politico, Two Coats of Paint blog, and WNYC's Culture Datebook. Residency and grant support has been received by the Lower East Side Printshop, Sam and Adele Golden Foundation, Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Vermont Studio Center, Chashama, The Abrons Arts Center, the Saltonstall Foundation, and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation among others.

# Beth Livensperger

## Redundancies

November 5, 2021 - March 4, 2022

Flecker Gallery

Suffolk County Community College, Ammerman Campus

533 College Road, Selden, NY 11784

<https://sunysuffolk.edu>

<https://www.sunysuffolk.edu/experience-student-life/arts/art-galleries/flecker-gallery.jsp>

Please visit and follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

Gallery Director and Curator: Matthew Neil Gehring

Essay by John Yau

Flecker Gallery would like to offer special thanks to Dr. Ed Bonahue, Dr. Lauren Tacke Cushing, Dr. Mark Harris, Dr. Irene Rios, Dr. Sandra Sprows, Dr. Edward Martinez, Charles Wittreich, Barbara Hurst, Maria Cherubino, Linda Southard, Bill Becker, and the SCC Association.

Catalog © 2022 Flecker Gallery at Suffolk County Community College

Works of art by Beth Livensperger © 2021 Beth Livensperger.



Flecker Gallery