



*New and Recent  
Photographs*  
ERIN O'KEEFE

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WITH AN ESSAY BY

*Kate Tarker*

STAGE DIRECTIONS FOR  
APPROACHING AN O'KEEFE

There was a triangle in her face. An elbow. A triangle, emerging from a morass of black puffy coats. So many people jammed together, pretending they were alone in space. She tried to press her head backward to escape, but an orange parallelogram pressed her forward into the elbow, which by way of some shuffling was now a purse. She looked up at the eyes looking down on her and held her breath. She glanced around, then slid out a white rectangle and looked again at the time printed on it. She was golden. It was all going to be worth it once she got to the show.

She was on the wrong train. She was on the right train going in the wrong direction.

She stepped out, into the shadows. She felt stupid and cold. How could she have possibly thought she had enough time? Her biggest fear was that she was in the right life going in the wrong direction. That she was the right word, perhaps, but the wrong answer to the crossword puzzle. A bright shop window told the demented lie that spring was coming, if only she'd layer in teal and grass green. A passing cab switched off its glowing light. On her screen, she plugged in her walking route and did some calculations. She was never going to get there on time.

By gathering speed, she regained confidence. It was snowing lightly, and sure, there were sludge lakes, but she could maneuver the crowds, stuck as they were in well-trodden pathways. There are plenty of ways to lie to yourself, she thought. You can lie by omission, or you can lie by multiplicity. You can trust in too much possibility or not enough. She wanted to risk more, to believe in more. But she also sensed, increasingly, that disappointment and possibility abutted each other on a razor's gleaming edge, seamlessly competing for her attention.

This whole city was fantasy after fantasy, piled on in crisp layers, one hope on top of the other, jostling for prominence. The paint wasn't thick enough; other people's dreams could push through yours. Or was that, too, prime illusion? Reality had a mysterious structure here. Surrounded by vibrancy on all sides, it was at times easy to compete and shine. But it was easy, too, to believe you were living amply in three dimensions, when really you were as flat as a photograph.

As she trudged on, she let go—discarding heavy memories, erasing details, pressing her past days into curves and angles, rolling her loudest emotions into their broadest outlines and then leveling them all into smooth, even planes. Navigable.

She hurried through a particleboard tunnel, where hunter-green paint lapped up slapdash against hard, straight edges and an ocher ground. Thick sludge dripped down from the scaffolding. Thin mucus dripped out of her nose. She wiped it off. "This will be a great city," her dad liked to say, "when they finish it." She could handle remembering that much about him.

Last winter, she walked deep inside a sidewalk shed like this one, only to find it had no exit. She banged on the offending wall. It was an unsolvable





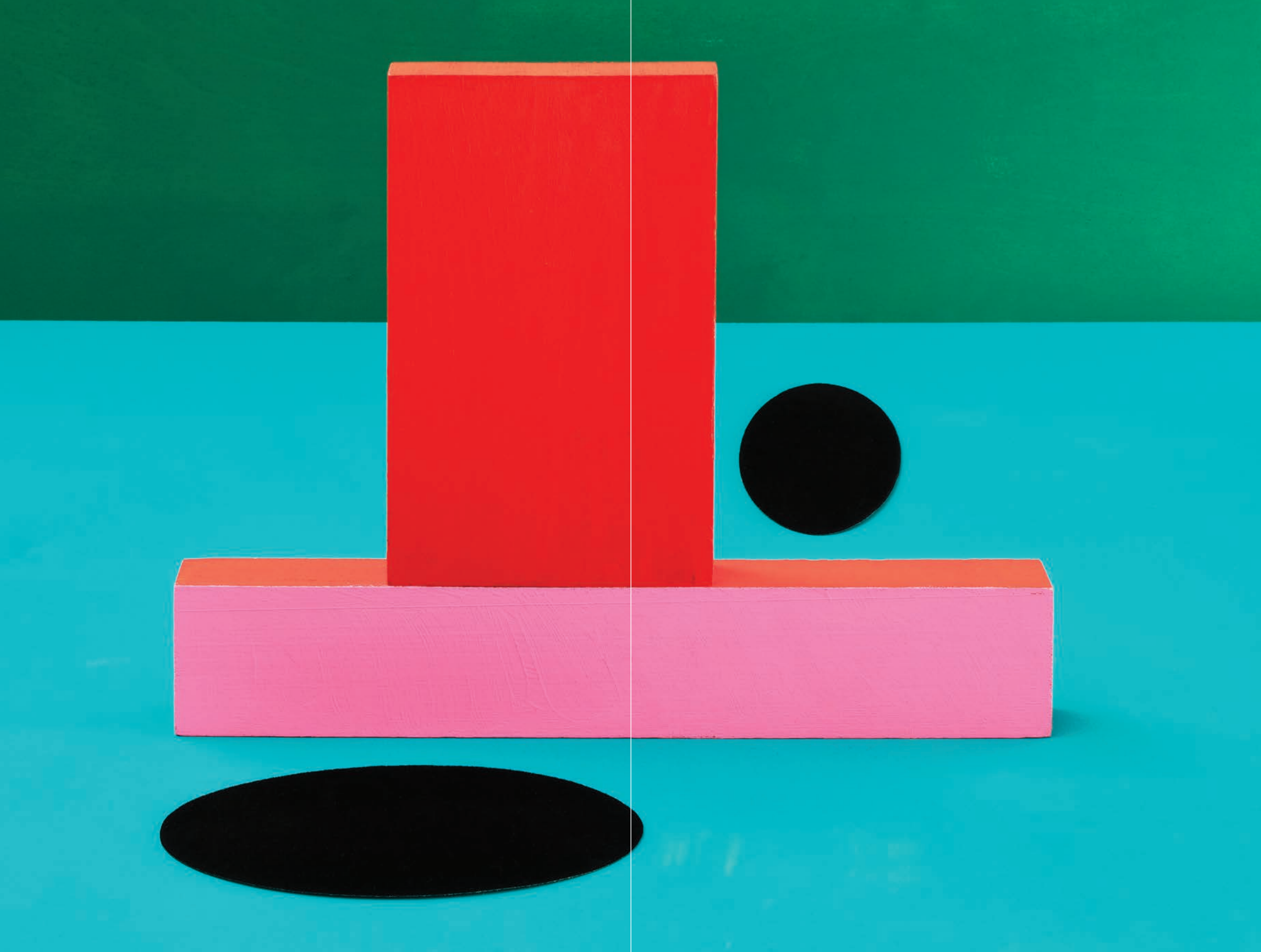
problem. Beckoning you in just to spit you back out: her life was full of doorways like that. It was best if you could give in to the pleasures of rerouting, but she wanted so badly to be a straight line. Tonight, she was a motherfucking train, she was an urban gazelle, she was going to make it. She was the prima ballerina flying over Slush Lake.

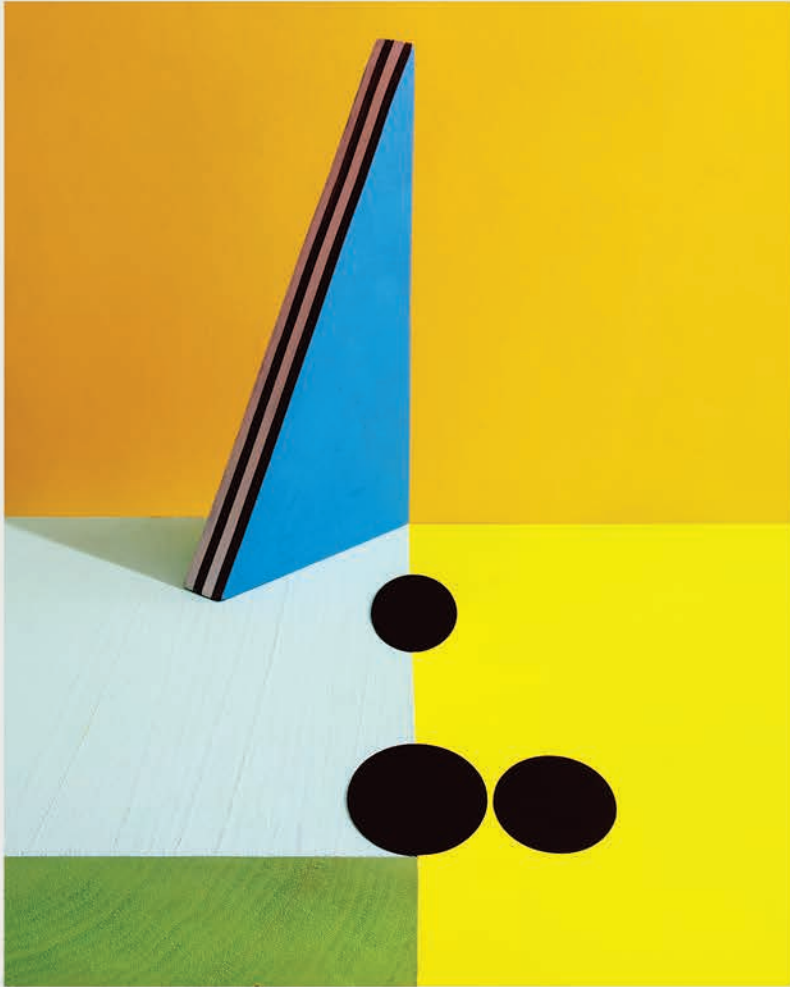
She missed her aim by an almost trivial margin and stepped forcefully into a void. Her foot rolled and folded. Down she went. Huh, she thought. Huh. She noticed she was throbbing, pulsing, vibrating. Regardless, she got up again and ran for ten more breaths. She was not going to miss this show.

In the exam room, the doctor showed her the X-ray: a clean but relentless break, diagonally bisecting the entire length of her fifth metatarsal. The bone halves were perfectly misaligned. She would need a sharp incision from a knife, plus a roofie from a surgeon, plus a ground-floor home addition, a metal plate and a clamp, to return to being something structurally sound. Did she have health insurance?

“Do you hear me?” he asked.

She didn’t say anything, she was in shock. Though in her memory, this was when she turned so blue and so square, when she full-throttle screamed bright pink.





Previous spread: *Circle Circle* 2020, archival pigment print 32 x 40".  
This page: *Floating Ellipse*, 2020, archival pigment print, 25 x 19".



This page: *Inside Voice*, 2020, archival pigment print, 25 x 20".  
Following spread: *Still Life*, 2020, archival pigment print, 32 x 40".





*Doorway*, 2020, archival pigment print, 25 x 20".



*Built Work #18*, 2018, archival pigment print, 40 x 32".

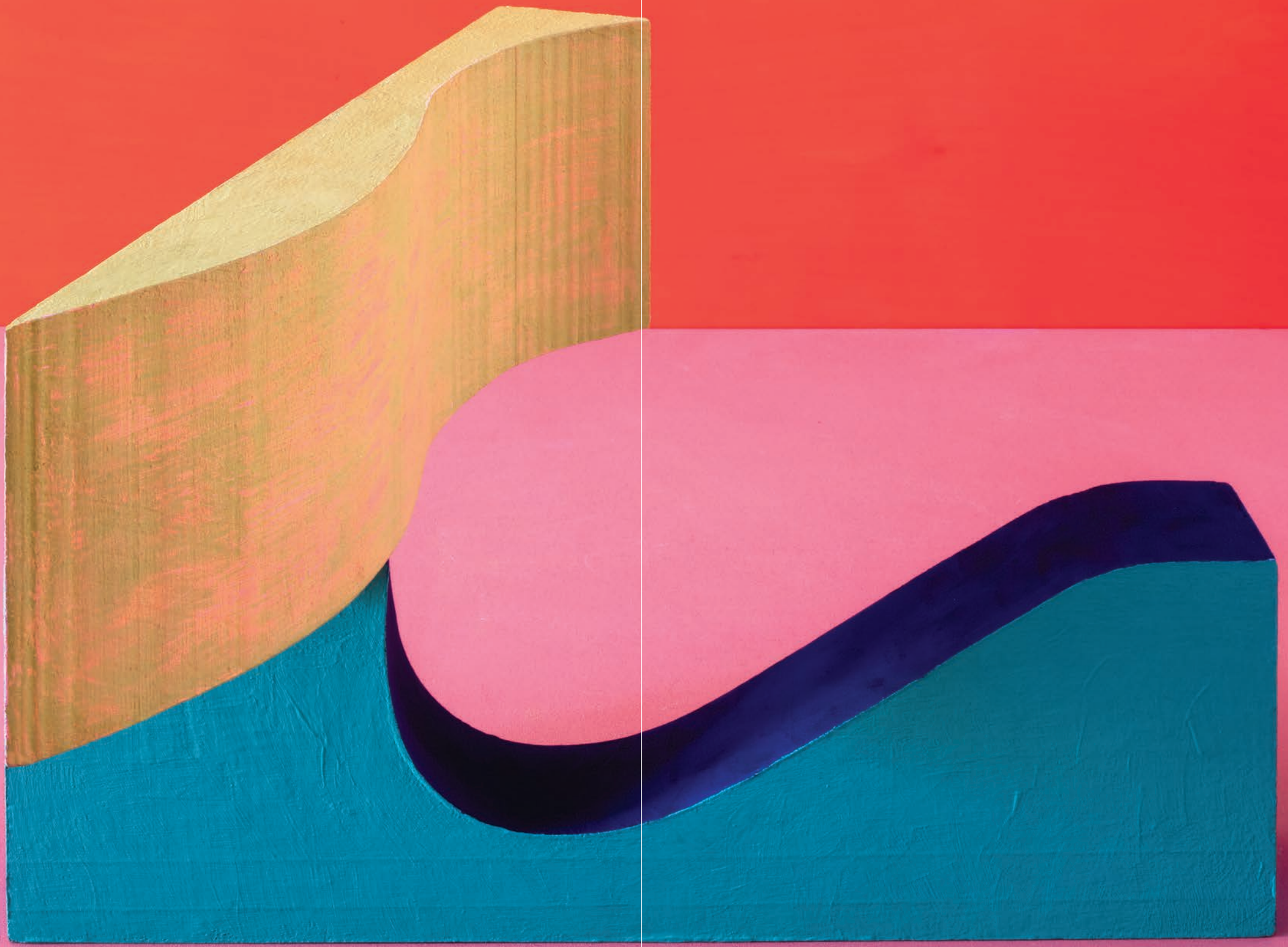


*Built Work #40*, 2018, archival pigment print, 25 x 20".



This page: *Green Stripe*, 2019, archival pigment print, 25 x 20".  
Following spread: *Red Reach*, 2020, archival pigment print, 20 x 25".







*Side Up*, 2020, archival pigment print, 25 x 20".



This page: *Flat Green*, 2020, archival pigment print, 40 x 32".  
Following spread: *Gathering*, 2020, archival pigment print, 20 x 25".

