

# ARTFORUM

Artforum International  
David Gilbert, *Coming of Age*  
By Emily Hall  
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David Gilbert is inspired by Brancusi, an artist who saw his studio as a dynamic place—a place with "nothing fixed, nothing rigid"—and who often photographed his sculptures there. Gilbert's studio is also a vital site, but the studio is all there is. Gilbert takes the things that litter it and arranges them into tableaux that exist only and for his photographs. Aside from the paintings and drawings that variously appear in these images, the materials that populate Gilbert's photos are generally domestic: a lot of yarn and string, rolls of tape, screws, hooks, a bucket, and fabric. In *Yarnia*, (all works 2013), a tangled heap of colored yarn sits on its haunches at the end of a leash-like swath of ripped fabric and more yarn, which descends from the top of the image. In *Girlfriend!*, a wooden slat leans against a torn sheet of fabric; the board is festooned with ripped pink material, green yarn, and a toothbrush.

The formality with which these objects are presented, the fine sense of composition and color, offsets the humble provenance of the materials. *Yarnia* is awash in morning light and cool hues: the gray concrete of the floor, the lilac of a sheet of paper, and the blue, yellow, and pale-green of the yarn. *Dawn* has a cheeky Vermeer quality—there is draped fabric, and a window to the side weakly illuminates the scene—and the objects that populate it recall Surrealism: A phallic stela stands beneath a ballet slipper in a jury-rigged wire cage. In *Web Site*, a suspended web of yarn and torn and knotted fabric casts long shadows.

Discerning where Gilbert's deliberately arranged assemblages end and their environs begin can be difficult—indeed, the boundary between the two is so fluid that the act of distinguishing becomes nearly pointless. But the photographs derive much of their energy from this ambiguity. *Yarnia's* affable tangle of yarn is centered in the image as if for a monumental portrait. Yet an electrical cord with a blunt, alarming plug

undercuts this formality, snaking in from the bottom with the air of a microphone dropping into the frame of a film. Together, the images record a chain of improvisations, accidents, and deliberate intention, a web of forms and ideas. The common element is the studio, which unties the images and at times seems to generate the work. It is not surprising when some of the main characters appear in other photographs in supporting roles. The festooned slat from *Girlfriend!* can be seen at the very edge of *Web Site*, and the pile of yarn from *Yarnia*, or one very much like it, hides under a table in *Dawn*.

Many of the photos are printed at a large size, investing every detail, every piece of yarn or screw, with a degree of stature. They almost seem alive. In contrast, a group of smaller photographs feel somewhat dull, like snapshots of a chaotic room. In this show, at least, the artist's studio (and the creative process it represents) is more compelling when we can clearly see it moving parts.