

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the Graduate Project Exhibition or Film Project prepared

By: Danica Olders

Entitled: Court

Held at: MFA GALLERY - CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
1395 BLVD. RENÉ-LÉVESQUE O

And submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts (Studio Arts - Sculpture & Ceramics)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Names of the final examining committee:

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Date and Year: January 27, 2026

COURT

DANICA A OLDERS

NOTICE OF REVIEW

DEPARTMENT OF STUDIO ARTS
SCULPTURE & CERAMICS
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

CASE NO. : 2026-THESIS-DAO
SUBJECT: COURT OF EVALUATION
STATUS: FINAL REVIEW

THIS DOCUMENT ACCOMPANIES A BODY OF WORK SUBMITTED FOR REVIEW, EVALUATION, AND JUDGEMENT IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

DATE: JANUARY 27, 2026
TIME: 14:00 HOURS
LOCATION: MFA GALLERY - CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
1395 BLVD. RENÉ-LÉVESQUE O
DEFENDANT: DANICA OLDERS

PREFACE.

The following pages detail a project that emerges from a long-standing preoccupation with space, and more specifically with how people behave in it. My sustained focus comes from a deeper uncertainty about how people live together, find purpose and orientation within a world that is difficult to comprehend. My practice engages questions of spatial organization, consumption, and retention (in all its storing, saving and holding), approaching space as something shaped through the ongoing negotiation of needs, and desires.

Critics such as Jeremy Gilbert question whether it is possible to meaningfully change a person's perceptual relation to the world through relational or conceptual art. He argues that these practices "preach to the converted" and lack the capacity to generate long-term cultural change.¹ While I share some of this skepticism, I see this less as a failure of art so much as a misalignment of expectations.

I do not believe it is the responsibility of artists to offer solutions, nor do I expect artworks to resolve the conditions they expose. What interests me is the possibility that art *can* register issues and leave an impression: a clue, sensation or moment of recognition that slightly reorients the viewer. Any change that follows should not need to be immediate or measurable, but accumulative, imprecise and unfolding through memory over time. When I look at art, I'm drawn to senses of connection or wonder: this feeling that someone is showing me something I didn't think of before or something that I can relate to.

Installation is a way to attempt this, as it works across multiple methodologies at once. Sculptural concerns of mass, balance and space intersect with painting strategies of composition and lighting as well as theatrical approaches to scenography and narrative sequencing. These disciplines together form environments that are not meant to be consumed at a glance but navigated through movement and time with more than one point of entry visually and spatially.

Underlying this approach is an ongoing interest in routines and their capacity to stabilize, numb or disorient. Drawing from phenomenological and geographical theories of embodied habit, I understand everyday movement as a choreography that both supports and constrains perceptions and intentions. Routines hold us together, but they can also render structures invisible, allowing systems of control to feel distant and difficult to question. If routines are difficult to alter or relinquish on an individual level, it suggests how resistant collective routines may be to change, even when that change could offer greater comfort or stability to others.

COURT is situated within this broad spatial inquiry. Rather than functioning as a relational encounter or a didactic statement, it operates as a situation in which ideas of co-dependency, balancing and holding are materially tested. The installation does not ask the viewer to participate in a scripted way, nor does it propose an alternative system to inhabit. It stages a thought process to walk through, as an invitation to experience the space and see what happens.

¹ Gilbert, Jeremy. *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism*. Pluto Press, 2014. Pg. 191.

My inquiry moves into a focused examination, addressing how material choices and spatial logic articulate its concerns. What is at stake is not the production of consensus or resolution, but the possibility that awareness itself might open space for consideration and maybe joy.

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CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

This work begins from a question of holding.

How is space held, how are bodies held within it and what happens when that holding is tested?

Space is understood here as a lived and psychological condition shaped by bodies, objects and systems of relation. Stacking, storing, measuring, transporting, defending and even resting are operations that compose everyday routines. These practices accumulate into infrastructures or *time-space routines*² that guide people into patterns that dictate what can be maintained and what cannot. *COURT* explores the fragility of infrastructures and the tension between individual needs and collective needs. Through an arrangement of ceramic spheres, the work looks at how meaning accumulates when a single form is obsessively repeated and assembled into a larger co-dependent network. The space is composed to appear stable, yet remains at risk of collapse, revealing the ambivalence embedded in how space is shared.

² David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

COURT is a staging of containers in balance and under tension. It challenges accessibility by closing what is open and directing visitors more psychologically than physically. Familiarity in form, material and function is used as a point of entry, a way to disarm, entertain and involve people.

Fragile and labour-heavy, the spheres hold real risk of breaking, yet are piled in a way that suggests casual play. They tease at participation only to revoke it through the inherent condition established by conceptual art, the medium and the rules of the gallery.

In all varieties of courts, both spatial and social expectations are at play. The court embodies a state of balance and negotiation: whether it is a court of law, sport or courtship, there are prescribed rules of conduct. It stages a judgement of whether a person or people are within the bounds of engagement.

IN SESSION

SECTION 1. *Schematics*

COURT is an installation composed of two parts. The first is described below, the second is in SECTION 2.

1.1. *Pile*

On one side of the gallery is a mass of 35 ceramic spherical forms piled into a 3-sided pyramid. The spheres are cast from the same 12" consumer globe, retaining textural traces of its elevation, longitude and latitude lines. Though they come from the same source, the casts are treated individually, using different claybodies and surface treatments, they are transformed into sports balls, planetary orbs and pictorial scenes, all with varying degrees of deflation. The installation stands approximately four feet tall each ball resting on the three others below. The pile is held together by gravity and rests on a footprint of playground sand.

These piles can be either 4-sided or 3-sided, in this case, the tetrahedron was chosen for its formal irregularity and a preference for odd numbered groupings. While 4-sided pyramids are more familiar, the 3-sided version, equally as practical, carries a slightly off-kilter spatial energy that better suits this investigation. Historically, the pyramid system of stacking was a solution for earlier industrial and colonial endeavors. The storing of cannonballs posed a logistical problem¹ on both land and sea. While a practical solution, this organization acted as a display of power that is still found at old strongholds, cemented in place like fossils in rocks and climbed on by children.

This display format communicates abundance through visual order: everything appears accounted for, the country provides, the consumer reassured, global consumption aestheticized. It is also seen in supermarkets where fruit is seductively stacked. Apparently a person can pick 10% of fruit from a display before it falls apart. Which hypothetically could create an avalanche if "[s]ay 29 shoppers grabbed an apple from a stack of 300."² This balancing system echoes infrastructures: how communities, families and individuals depend on interconnection and mutual support to remain intact. Like the apples, my pyramid is also a fragile equilibrium at risk of collapse.

1.2. *Expectations*

If the structure were to collapse, before being judged and juried, then the conversation would shift to the contradiction of potential and doubt. The broken spheres would tell the story of imperfection, struggle, things falling apart despite our best efforts. It would also talk about the potential for greatness, and the

¹ The Cannonball Problem is also a popular math equation.

² Darren Incorvaia, *How Much Fruit Can You Pull from a Display before It Topples?* Accessed August 24, 2025. <https://www.snexplores.org/article/physics-stack-fruit-display-collapse>).

potential of rebuilding. Risk is embedded in the work by the act of stacking ceramics, already fragile objects, whose stability can't be guaranteed. Reaching the point of stacking is itself contingent on a process marked by multiple moments of potential failure – to be discussed in section 3.2. The pile is sitting on a bed of playground sand, which should absorb some of the compression force and offer cushioning if this incident occurs. Small tacks of gum and wax at connection points add a bit of resistance to slippage but are mostly in place to protect the fragile glazed surfaces.

1.3. *Impulse Control*

Alongside the primary sculptural components of *COURT* are a series of ceramics made to fit in the palm of your hand. They mimic hand-sized sporting balls, replacing traditional logos with painted action words like “toss” and “pitch”. Their presence is intended to activate an inner cocktail of impulse, desire and restraint given that their material reality and institutional setting enact predetermined rules of engagement.

SECTION 2. *Tetherball*

The second side of *COURT* offsets the weight of the pile by defying gravity. A solitary sphere hangs 5' above the ground with a single length of climbing rope, knotted at top and bottom. On this side of *COURT*, tension is actually in force rather than just implied. The tethered ball is hanging above a large blue puddle (about 3'x3').

SECTION 3. *Matters*

3.1. *Globes*

Globes offered one of the earliest ways to grasp the planet as a single, knowable object; making an overwhelming vastness into something that could be held and touched. Globes solidified an understanding of a shared planetary existence while simultaneously implying the possibility of other worlds beyond earth. They are also an ever changing object, as geo-political situations unfold over time. A globe can be a time-capsule for behavioural geography but it is also a consumer object. They are produced in a graphically pleasing way with carefully chosen colours, teetering on the edge of being a *duck* or “self-promoting graphic.” A label Edward Tufte and other graphic specialists use when design outweighs information. A globe doesn't just show the world, it packages it.

Being able to grasp and see the world from a safe perspective, leads to thoughts about homes, habitats and containers. The globe functions as a dollhouse version of the thing that everybody lives on, yet nobody can agree on how to live there. David Seamon, introduces time-space routines as building blocks of behavioural geography—the study of relationships between human behaviour and environments. Time-space routines

are recurring choreographies enacted on a regular basis. Through repetition, the body remembers sequences of movement, allowing actions to unfold with minimal conscious effort. Like the allure of a self-driving car, this ease or autopilot, frees the mind for other forms of attention: daydreaming, event planning, grocery lists..etc. The familiarity and comfort these provide make them a stabilizing force that can stand in the way of long-term change. Thinking about the earth as a container opens up philosophical questions of how being-in-the-world is a unifying, unchangeable condition. Be it small as an apartment, expansive as the ocean, as commonplace as a neighbourhood or as unfamiliar as a distant country, people are placed in a geographical world where specifics can be changed but the overall surroundings cannot.³

3.2. Ceramic

Ceramics are used as the backbone material in *COURT* not only as a symbolic container, but a material that holds meaning, purpose and place for humans. Working with clay is a practice of care. It can't be rushed, forced or fully controlled⁴. It is a material that undergoes irreversible transformations and in its final fired form (ceramic), it retains a brittle nature. Through intention and time, clay is processed from a natural deposit into a fossilized object⁵. And what I mean by fossilized is that once fired, ceramics can break or become weathered, but do not easily return to the earth they came from. Ceramics have a geological time that outlasts the human maker. Just as a globe acts as a time capsule of the geographical situations at its making, a ceramic object can also carry meaning forward, leaving a story or clues as to who made it and why.

Until a work has been fired it is liable to crumble or return to its clay form if met with water. Working with clay in this initial phase takes patience and care. It's a constant negotiation with time and humidity as it needs not to dry too fast but also not too slow. That said, it also allows a do-over, if unsatisfied, one need only throw it in water to make it malleable again. The firing involves trust or slackening expectations. It is a necessary part of the process where reversal is no longer possible and the work may come out unrecognizable from what was intended.

Beyond its permanence, fragility and methodology of care, ceramics are materially familiar to almost everyone on the planet as they are used in infrastructure and everyday practices (mugs, toilets, bricks). It is one of the only media that can be functional, decorative and conceptual at the same time. Ceramics' most historically consistent role has been that of a vessel (vase, urn, bowl) a form designed to hold and carry. When I think about space, I think about how it *holds* and what it holds. Space is a container for life unfolding, just as the earth is a container for all that resides within it. This container comes in different sizes and as there are various

³ The quote is adapted for inclusion and brevity. For the original, see David Seamon, "Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets," *The Human Experience of Space and Places* (St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 148.

⁴ Through extensive testing, molds and repetitive processes results can be more or less perfected and controlled.

⁵ Katrine Køster Holst, "The Kiln." *The Clay and Other Essays*, translated by Christine O'Hagan (Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2020), pp 5-6.

spaces within the limits of this planet, there are many containers within containers. So if space is a container, then for my intents and purposes, clay is the material I choose to represent these many containers being contained. "If it is a human thing to do to put something you want..into a bag, or a basket..and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you share it or store it..and then the next day you probably do much the same again-if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all."⁶ To Ursula K. Leguin, the stories that are loudest and seem more important are the ones that involve bashing, beating and killing. These stories are more exciting than containers that bring things home and carry life around. She talks about Elizabeth Fisher's Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution - that probably the first invention was a kind of holder.⁷ But what if the container narrative can be louder than the other stories? What if the container that holds the other containers is the one that is most known and relevant? Or is its commonality among us what keeps this story tempered? Is the container too enmeshed in day-to-day routine to be significant?

After being something that is materially familiar and ubiquitous, ceramic and clay are also symbolically associated with origin stories. Nestled in the introduction of the first book in his sphereology series, Peter Sloterdijk mentions the biblical figure of Adam being made from clay. Starting from a hollow clay vessel he then is filled with breath and life-"[m]etaphysics begins as metaceramics".⁸

3.3. Air

Peter Sloterdijk's works look at spheres from micro to macro, using metaphors like bubbles and foams to examine personal, public and global spheres of being and relating. He describes air as a shared environment largely taken for granted until it was explicitly disrupted during the first uses of chemical warfare. What had been an "assumption of breathability..privilege of naïveté"⁹ suddenly seemed unstable and something that could be threatened.

Air exists in the spaces between everything and everyone. Unlike space, air cannot be private as it is inherently shared. Breathing is a collective act. Besides bodies with lungs, air permeates and transforms everything it touches and is also transformed in return. Juliana Spahr captures this shared condition in her book of poems, *this connection of everyone with lungs* with haunting clarity: "How lovely and how doomed this connection of everyone with lungs."¹⁰

⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989).

⁷ Elizabeth Fisher, *Women's Creation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), quoted in Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989).

⁸ Sloterdijk, Peter. *Bubbles: Microsphereology*. Semiotext(e), 2011, p. 33.

⁹ Sloterdijk, Peter. *Foams: Plural Sphereology. Spheres, Volume 3*. Translated by Wieland Hoban. Semiotext(e), 2016, p. 122.

¹⁰ Spahr, Juliana. *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs: Poems*. New California Poetry. University of California Press, 2005, p. 10.

3.4. Sports!

The sport ball is a widely understood object. It invokes play, devotion and teamwork, while simultaneously carrying competition, greed and challenge. Sports are theatre at a colossal scale, playing out social tensions, rivalries and collective identity. Even the terminology of sport - field, score, match, victory and loss - echoes vocabulary of conflict. I can't count how many times I've heard sports commentators or news castors talk about teams "battling it out." For this reason, sports have often felt to me like a form of tamed warfare: competition ritualized and nationalized then redirected into entertainment rather than force. Like in battle, there are strategies to take the other opponent "down", weaknesses are studied and strengths played to.

Sports provide a sanctioned space for intensity and allegiance in a world where many conditions (political, environmental, economic) are somewhat beyond individual control. In politics, meaningful participation is limited to a few, whereas sports spectatorship offers a sense of involvement without direct consequences. At a more zoomed in level, people are often raised with sport. It is integrated in education systems through mandatory phys-ed and co-curriculars; even if it doesn't play a major role in one's life, few have had no connection to sport at all.

Routines and calendars are constructed around seasons of sport, and regular practice is required in order to participate as a player. Sport therefore structures time as much as it occupies space, embedding itself into daily, weekly and seasonal rhythms. This organization of attention also extends beyond participation into spectatorship, where schedules are adjusted around viewing matches, broadcasts and keeping tabs on outcomes.

This brings me to a connection between sport and weather, and again to Sloterdijk. As airspace becomes politicized through modern warfare as stated in 3.3, attention increasingly shifts towards the weather. Sloterdijk describes this orientation as a "performance given by nature for society," transforming individuals into climate critics who constantly observe, discuss, and respond to conditions and events beyond their control.¹¹ Noam Chomsky similarly frames spectator sports as a collective outlet that offers involvement, opinion and connection in place of direct participation. In *Understanding Power*, he describes sport as a redirect from political engagement. Much like discussions of the weather, sports spectatorship produces a population fluent in commentary and expertise, despite having little influence over outcomes. Unless one is a player or coach, these positions remain those of spectators. Both sports and weather function as situations where routines and daily flow are shaped. They create shared spaces in which people can feel involved with aspects of life that remain uncontrollable.

Unlike the weather, which is implicitly lived in and unavoidable, sports introduce the possibility of deliberate and generally safe engagement. People gather to watch

¹¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Foams: Plural Spherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Semiotext(e), 2014), p 160.

matches, they don't generally gather to watch the rain.¹² Sports operate through set rules of engagement, and are scheduled at specific times and places. They offer a structured way to encounter risk and competition from a position of play.

3.5. Deflation

Deflation is meant as a response. The response is to the overlooking of containers that I see, and the embodied feeling of bigger systems being difficult and distant and out of my control. A deflated ball is one that was either used too hard and has burst, or one that just needs a bit of attention and care.

In middle school I tripped over the semi-deflated ball on my turn to bat (kickball), flipping onto the ground causing e-v-e-r-y-o-n-e to laugh. I was super embarrassed but when I looked back at the depressed ball, my foot indented in it, I also had to laugh. The deflated ball presents an unfavourable situation, but in most cases reparable. The balls of *COURT* are immortalized in their state of mortification and fatigue.

SECTION 4. A note on *ambivalence*

This work is a monument of/to ambivalence, with tension and play performing essential parts of the work's logic. Lauren Berlant treats ambivalence not as indecision or apathy, but as a fundamental condition of being.¹³ Ambivalence is the capacity to hold attachment and irritation, care and refusal at the same time. It presents an orientation towards the world that does not resolve with balance or clarity but hangs in contradiction.

Ambivalence suggests that more than one thing can be true: I can need routine to feel stability and comfort, while it is also a device that keeps me stuck in greater patterns that may not be helping me change or grow. I can miss something and be upset with it at the same time. A work can be extremely precious but also non essential.

This way of being – of not choosing, of being multiple things, mirrors my own approach to life and to this work. *COURT* holds contradictions, without giving resolutions. By holding contradictions, art is a safe space to question and express varieties of human nature and existence without needing to have answers and solutions. It opens different perspectives to be held for a moment and shared and then packed away and shared another day.

¹² My advisor reminded me that people do also chase tornados. Which brings to mind *Twister* (1996) and *Twisters* (2024) and many other films like *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004) turning weather into frightening and exciting entertainment.

¹³ Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (Writing Matters! Duke University Press, 2022), pp 161, 170.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

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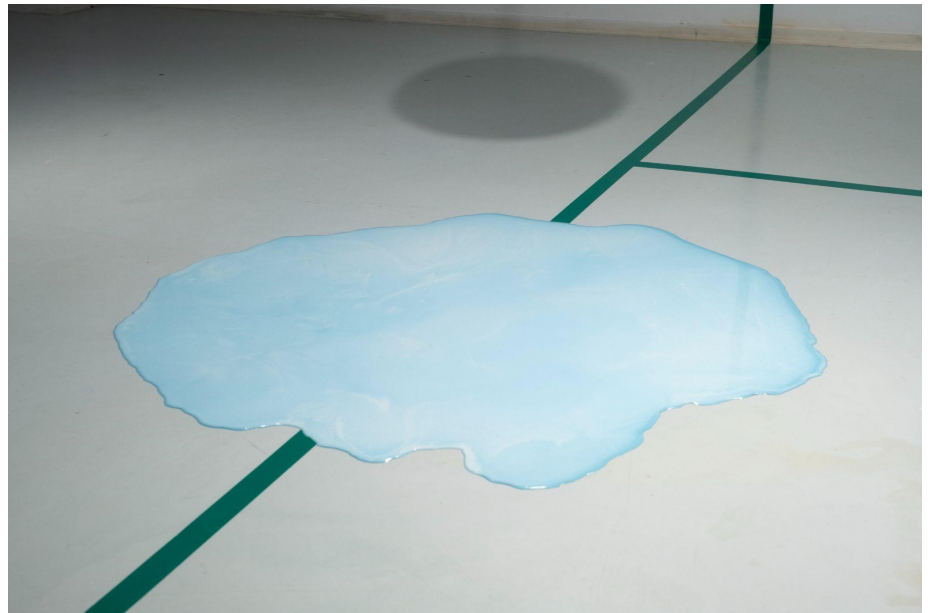
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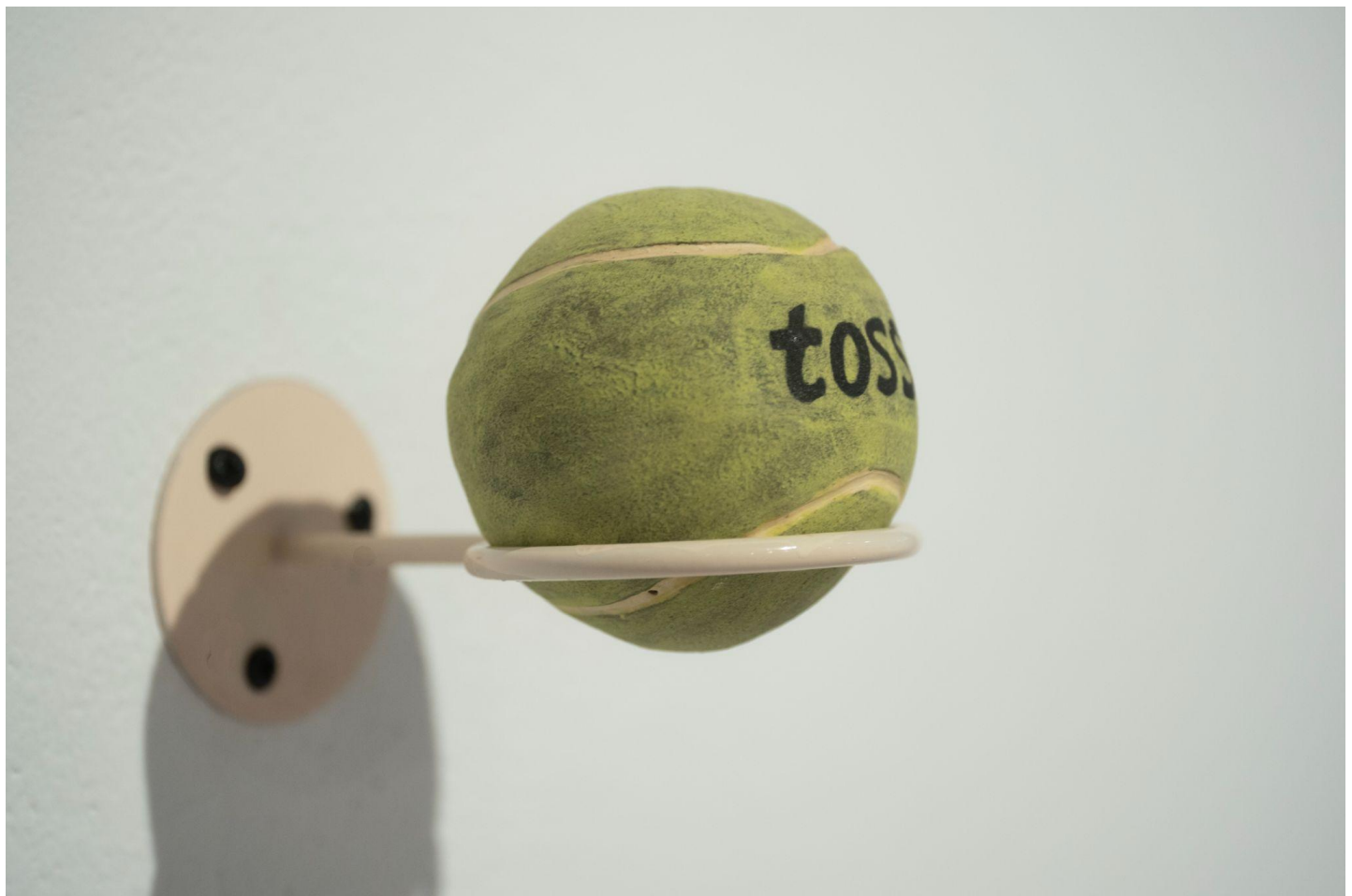
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exhibition by danica olders

COURT



vernissage

JANVIER	28.....	17H ~ 20H
JANUARY	29.....	13H ~ 18H
JANUARY	30.....	13H ~ 18H
JANUARY	31.....	11H ~ 16H

January 28 ~ 31 . 2026

MFA Gallery . Concordia University . 1395 boul. René-Lévesque Ouest