

# sculpture

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*Untitled*, 2016. Artist-built wooden structure and black marker, 5-hour performance at Beijing Live, Beijing, China. Photo: Joakim Stampe

## I Am the Sculpture: A Conversation with John Court

June 21, 2022 by [John Gayer](#)

John Court has a unique relationship to written language. While talking to art psychotherapist Steve Pratt about his work, Court, who is dyslexic, explained: “I can visualize concepts as they are presented in speech, but I cannot trust text because it leaves me feeling confused, resulting in a fear of writing something incorrectly because I have no way of knowing what is, or is not, correct.” Despite, or perhaps because of, this reality, Court’s experience lies at the heart of his practice. Drawing on deep-seated feelings and memories, his works are often realized through intensely laborious methods that seem to echo his ordeal. Thus, he investigates and interprets aspects of reading and writing through drawing, sculpture, and durational performance—visually dynamic works that disclose textual features in diverse ways. Court is so deeply connected to the processes of making art that he not only regards them as performative, but also sees himself as the work.

Born in Bromley in southeastern Greater London, Court worked as a general laborer for several years before receiving a foundation diploma in art from London’s Camberwell School of Art and a BFA in sculpture from the Norwich School of Art and Design. In 1997, he moved to Lapland, Finland’s northernmost province, where he continues to live and work. In recent years, he has turned to mapping his art activities through book projects. For *an idea of performance a idea of art* (2017), an expansive collection of notes and



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sketches, he invited 11 artists and curators to contribute texts. Then, for *A Body of Acton Performance Work 1996–2018* (2020), Court wrote his own text. Striving to overcome obstacles appears to be a great part of his raison d'être.

**John Gayer: What drove you to become an artist, and why is your performance work so sculptural?**

**John Court:** I don't know how or why, but when I was around 23, I decided I was going to do a foundation course. I left school at 16 without knowing how to read or write, and I worked first in a plastics factory and then on building sites. At 19, I started drawing things that were coming from my imagination . . .

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