



Underdonk

power structure

Power Stricture

Kate Holcomb Hale and Gabrielle Shelton

Curated by Natale Adgnot

February 6 – March 1, 2026

Opening reception: Friday Feb 6, 6-8pm

Underdonk, 297 Grand Street, 3rd Floor, New York NY

Open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays 1-6 PM



Left: Gabrielle Shelton *If You Want Me to Stay*, 2024. Steel. 8' x 20" x 5'. Right: Kate Holcomb Hale *Never trust that that's gonna hold you up*, 2024. Cotton, acrylic paint, watercolor sticks, polyester fill, foam, lavender vinyl, wood, stones from Nova Scotia. 5" x 120" x 11"

Underdonk is pleased to present *Power Stricture*, an exhibition of sculptures by Kate Holcomb Hale and Gabrielle Shelton. Whether wrought from bronze and steel or sewn from handpainted cotton, both women create objects that confront structural impediments to female ascent,

making literal the mechanisms that maintain existing hierarchies. The overtones oscillate between humor and exasperation, grief and defiance.

With decades of experience as a female metalworker, Gabrielle Shelton defies expectations while simultaneously performing the traditional roles of wife and mother. Her refusal to be confined to more “feminine” work is no longer shocking in 2026. Instead, the ubiquity of women bearing unequal caregiving labor while pursuing careers has become banal. Meanwhile, once-implicit constraints on women’s career prospects – enforced by the fact of this inequitable domestic burden – are made explicit in the tradwife movement.

Shelton’s brutalist forms mirror the invisible power structures that underpin a society that tolerates and capitalizes on inadequate support systems. Her inverted, stacked steel sculptures recall the Escherian Penrose stair that leads nowhere. Other staircase-like artworks lie on their sides forming barriers instead of steps. A ladder ducks and undulates, leading back down to where it began before turning upwards again. Masterfully crafted to the technical standards of luxury metalwork, these sturdy objects are rendered useless as their heft becomes a liability.

Kate Holcomb Hale’s works convey soft power. She began making her sewn sculptures after a period of intense caregiving and loss. Instead of reflecting the unyielding power often associated with masculinity, her limp ladders and flaccid railings poke fun at the vulnerability and ultimate futility of caregiving while celebrating the strength that lies in agility. Caregiving relies on improvisation, responsiveness and flexibility; skills that are cast as weaknesses in the hard-line mindset of hard power.

Hale takes inspiration from architectural elements that perform care for our bodies by providing access, support, or protection. Like her sewn sculptures, her wall pieces derive from the built environment. Ghostlike vestiges of her home are preserved as imprints in paper clay lifted from the front door, a radiator cover, a light switch.

Evoking the stick-and-move tactics of a boxer, Hale’s pliable sewn works bend and twist instead of breaking. Drooping ladder rungs and ineffectual speed bumps are covered in bruise-like marks but show no signs of disintegration. Like human bodies, they bend so they won’t break. There is power in responsiveness.

Kate Holcomb Hale (b. Buffalo, NY) is an interdisciplinary artist who lives and works in greater Boston, MA. Kate’s practice uses sculpture, painting, video and craft to call attention to architecture and objects that perform care. Collapsing kitchen tables, knotted handrails and resting columns act as vehicles to consider vulnerability, futility and the invisible labor of caregiving that occurs in domestic and public spheres. This body of work was conceived after a period of intense caregiving in which she lost her mother, father and brother in quick succession. The experiences required Kate to confront systems of care and question who carries the weight when support systems fall short or are nonexistent. Through the act of sewing her work brings flexibility to the rigid, built environments we inhabit. Grief is embedded in each bruise-like mark and gesture she paints onto cotton, which she later sews into pliable sculptures. Her installations combine playful colors, softness, familiar forms and humor to create receptive spaces for empathy and healing. While Kate’s work is often personal, it reimagines

how we can soften and modify our built world to accommodate our most vulnerable members of society and ease the load of care work. [@kateholcombhale](https://twitter.com/kateholcombhale) / kateholcombhale.com

Gabrielle Shelton is a Los Angeles–born, Brooklyn-based sculptor working primarily in steel, bronze, and aluminum. A graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she creates works that range from monumental outdoor structures to intimate, handheld forms. Her current focus lies in stair-inspired sculptures and dystopian metal landscapes, shaped by over 25 years in New York City’s construction industry. Shelton has exhibited with Candice Madey Gallery, Guild Hall, R & Company, SPRING/BREAK Art Show (LA & NY), Socrates Sculpture Park, the Museum of the City of New York, and others. In addition to her art practice, she runs Shelton Studios Inc., her architectural welding and machine shop in Greenpoint, dedicated to the craft of functional and decorative metalwork. [@gabriellesheltonsculpture](https://twitter.com/gabriellesheltonsculpture) / sheltonstudiosinc.com



Gabrielle Shelton *Stacked Stair*, 2025. Steel. 18" x 18" x 24"



Kate Holcomb Hale *protect (radiator cover)*, 2022. Paper clay, pastel. 11" x 10.5" x 1"

Underdonk is an artist-run exhibition space located in the Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan. Founded in 2013, Underdonk is committed to showcasing emerging and underrepresented artists in all disciplines, and regularly hosts readings, performances, and

guest curators. It has presented over 100 exhibitions over the past 12 years. The shows have been reviewed in The New Yorker, Hyperallergic, Art Spiel, Brooklyn Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, Art F City, Artsy, The New York Observer, Two Coats of Paint, and Artnet. [@underdonk](#) / [underdonk.com](#)

For more information, contact Natale Adgnot (curator/member of Underdonk) info@nataleadgnot.com.

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