

# Fan Mail: Nicola Dale, A. Will Brown

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Webster's definition of ideology is: "A system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy." Artist Nicola Dale's sculptures, performances, and installations are interpretations of this definition of ideology—one of many subjects that Dale explores in her work.

Dale often works on one subject or idea for an extended period, in distinctive bodies that incorporate various forms and approaches. Her ongoing series *Models for Ideology* is one such examination. *Model for Ideology VI* (2015) was a durational performance in which the artist—clad in black pants, shirt, and ballet socks—stood for an extended period with long, thin wooden dowels stuck under her foot, chin, arms, and hips, simultaneously forcing her into and supporting her in a contrapposto stance. The *Models for Ideology* create a series of support systems that constrain movement and make it precarious; ideologies work in the same way by creating a set of principles and expectations in which to operate but also struggle to extend beyond, systems which are durable and somehow always in flux.

Dale's sculptures, such as *Model for Ideology I* (2014), embody this play between sturdiness and instability. Made of wood, foam board, and paper, *Model for Ideology I* also presents like a contemporary architectural model for a steel and glass tower of Babel, the ultimate conflation of ideologies expressed in a profusion of languages, which, when brought to bear upon one another all at once, creates utter meaninglessness.

Dale describes *Model for Ideology I* and *Model for Ideology III* as addressing "the ebb and flow of ideologies as they encircle and overlap us. *Models I–III* take the traditional sizes of books as their starting point and explore the slow demise of a certain kind of knowledge." From one book-shaped red rectangle to the next, like dominoes of increasing scale, *Model for Ideology III* is a series of dowels that seem to push apart and connect to each other at various angles that imply the transfer of ideas or codes—signs from one generation to the next; there are subtle variations as it shifts and changes over time.

Dale's series *Not So Firm As Faded Ink* (2014) addresses similar ideas of language and the transmission of information. After two residencies—in Shanghai, China, and Yorkshire, England—Dale started to explore the Chinese proverb, "The best memory is not so firm as faded ink." In her sculpture *Record Part II* (2014), Dale constructed thirteen tree-like miniature totems from shaved pencils, recombining the ends and the shavings into delicately organic forms that reach upward. The vertical shapes are assembled in a ring as if to suggest a meeting place or a transfer of ideas. At play also is the nature of the material, which acts as a symbol for language and the transfer of ideas and knowledge over time.

*Kexy* (2014) takes the form of a wooden lectern—the platform at which lectures are transmitted or given—and turns it into an abstract and fertile ground for the growth of ideas. This work commits to the transference of ideas as a permanent and permeable condition in which time is frozen and interrogated, both opened and closed by the act of speaking or writing.

Whether through installation, sculpture, or performance, Nicola Dale entreats her viewer to think more deeply about the nature and construction of language, ideas, history, and the forms these tropes might take. Her practice is consistent and focused, yet mindfully elliptical.