Flint Jamison’s art tells us that we’re in a foreign place and, as always, alone. He reminds us that we do have our wits, our senses, our fight-or-flight response; our feelers are definitely *up* in the presence of his work. His abstractions reveal the narrow divide between outside and inside, the porous boundary between ourselves and everything that’s not. Other bodies, the environment, corporate, governmental, and institutional operations, the ongoing etiquette of maneuvering through the erotic, cultural, and social codes—Flint impresses that our survival hinges on understanding cues. There’s often a point of rupture, a point of contact extended in his work that functions as a mouth to enter it. There’s a keyboard to tap, a screen that speaks through illuminated text, a consciousness conveyed by the work’s electronic activation. Its soft, whirring readiness to be felt appears more as an absence, a dark place to search for a more familiar warmth. I’ve been in its stealth, mechanized presence a handful of times, and felt reduced to a lover attempting to read the remote affect of a disinterested paramour. There’s the sense that when you’re with it, you’re all flesh and need—looking for a way “to connect.” It tells us what art does to us.

Jamison’s work enacts the dynamic of absolute power and of power in relationship. It reconceptualizes the symbolic into a body, a series of systems, and soon opens onto the uncategorizable. Housed in a room, it expands and diminishes us; it escapes us through its refusal of legibility. His shadowy, armored casings produce a surreal parallel plane for one impaired visitor to pilot. The hand manuals provided in the form of his somatic books are only an illusion of a text, the pretense of a key. In no time, the content unravels to become tangents of words that resist coherent meaning. Fingering the pages seeking lucidity (in vain): eventually, inadvertently conjured up the discomfiting mental image of a panicked 737 MAX cockpit shortly before an explosive end. Futility and frustration are the real subjects to square here. Like Flint’s other works, the books take the measure of the reader’s patience and turn one sensate simultaneously. Particular words rise to the surface: model, membrane, heat pump, trigger, vocal folds, box, security—a cultish faithfulness is required to unlock the shuffled text. One supposes that with the exact degree of attention paid to it, ample time clocked and unknowable debt satisfied: there’s a way to outlast the abjection of the thing--this body--that breaks down. If one fails or flails beautifully, fitfully, Jamison suggests a release into the pure neutrality of a form finally free of content, of context is possible. While entrée into the void is the ultimate prize, the oceanic sublime is matched by a fear of losing the self in Flint’s art.

Months in isolation in Los Angeles, the global pandemic seems an appropriate backdrop to approach a dialogue on Flint Jamison’s shrouded practice. In place of a direct Q &A on a matter of facts and descriptions: instead, I’m the beneficiary of Flint’s gift-giving, receiving assorted sensual and cryptic editioned books steadily in the mail. One at a time, over two weeks, the immaculate parcels appeared. Our email exchanges lead to more kind opacity on his part. Still, a feeling of growing kinship quickly develops between us. He agrees with my description of his work as a form of SM; more pictures arrive in my box to illustrate his version of fetish. A little bit creepier than usual, I think, due to the model, not the gear. Testing our intimacy, I compare my first response to <<2X Scrypt Huffer>> at Air de Paris in 2015 to an encounter I had at a dungeon in San Francisco fifteen years before. There, I witnessed a woman wholly encased in leather with a small breathing hole in her skin-tight hood, sitting on an uncomfortable chair that you might find at a convention center. Next to her was her lover/mother-figure/guide: a prim, matronly transwoman. The quiet couple was there to be seen. Her hand rested gently on the mute, mummified woman’s thigh, as we made small talk—tethering her to a place, rendering null the emptiness through applied pressure, conveying a presence, love. I became haunted by this scene of tenderness and deep-seated need—the need to be witnessed publicly as disappeared, self-annihilating, gone. Flint agreed with my comparison to his work and offered that he was at that same party.

Monica Majoli, August 2020.