

A Dancing Mind
Ashton Cooper

To understand Ada Friedman's work is to disregard one's tacit understanding of a painting's form, to let the artist take you into her own highly particular system for generating painting, drawing, and performance—or, more to the point, artworks that are emphatically all of the above. Friedman's unique system of categorization is as constitutive of her pieces as paper, acrylic, or charcoal. She conceptualizes the work in two types: First, "Everyday Drawings," which, true to their name, are works on paper, and, second, "Performance Proposals," which are loosely tied to painting, though they rarely sit comfortably within the standard confines of that category. The "Performance Proposals" are further divided into distinct bodies of work that Friedman refers to as "plays." This classification system lives in the works' titles. For example, in the ongoing work *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Floor 4*, Friedman first names the work as a "Performance Proposal," then indicates its "play" or series title as "Pathwork," and finally its individual title as "Floor 4."

In supplanting the typical art parlance of "series" with the word "play," Friedman purposefully invokes the body in time and space. She insists on the acts of painting and drawing as performative processes that unfold over time and on artworks as receptacles and records of movement and action. Play also calls to mind an ethos of lightness, fun. For Friedman, the complex scaffolding of the work's making is not restrictive, but a structure in which to mess around, improvise, and tinker.

This process is evident in two works that Friedman started making this year, and are ongoing: the aforementioned *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Floor 4* and its studio companion *Performance Proposal, Pathwork: Counting Days 3*. *Floor 4* is a long, narrow strip of linen made with foil, paper, ribbon, acrylic medium, and electrical tape. It rests on the floor and is marked with graphite and charcoal rubbings taken from a heating vent in Friedman's Grant Wood Art Colony apartment (a gesture that grounds the work in its physical site of origin). As part of the process of making *Floor 4*, the artist walks, in sock-clad feet, along its 10-foot-long "path." One end of the work abuts a wall on which hangs *Counting Days 3*, a small construction on found wood. When Friedman reaches *Counting Days 3* she adds a hatch mark to its surface. She also might wipe excess paint from this action onto the piece under her feet. Friedman's pacing performance will continue to take place over time as she constructs both pieces during their time on view at the University of Iowa and also when they return to her studio. The multi-hued, time-keeping tick marks in *Counting Days 3* will accumulate atop and around one another.

Friedman's surfaces tend to be covered in scribbling and jotting—notes taken during, before, and in some cases after the action of making, exhibition, or performance. Much of this content is really only wholly intelligible to the artist. "I see my paintings as holders of my dancing mind and the vitality of my studio," Friedman explained in a 2024 interview. In diligently tracking and displaying the methods of her work's construction, Friedman generously invites the viewer to join the dance.