



Displacement Study, 2000
pencil on paper, cutout, bullet hole, GSR
15 ½ x 45 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Hills Snyder collects data for the sake of Dada. Take *Displacement Study* (2000), a tidy trilogy of stencil drawings, each depicting a pail identical in shape and size: the first, containing a crown outlined in faint dashes, the second, brimming with blue, the third boasting of a bullet hole girded with gunpowder. The series is a lesson in both physics and poetics, what the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes asserted as a body at rest in fluid, displacing the volume of that fluid equal to the volume of said body. Archimedes' principle came about when King Hiero II of Syracuse asked the mathematician to authenticate a gold crown, which the king suspected had been mixed with silver. Gold, being the denser metal, would displace less volume when submerged, revealing, in theory, the dishonest metalsmith to be even denser. The second drawing appears to hint at the crown maker's fate, with a bucket of water about to overflow, but it's the mortal wound in the third drawing—aptly titled *Half Empty, Half Full*—that gets the final say.

Snyder invites interpretation. His work tends to build over time into bodies of work—contiguous installments that loosely, waggishly connect one to the next in ways that seem arbitrary if not spot-on. *Displacement Study* is no different: an accompanying log titled "My History as an Art Shooter" references two earlier unrelated projects of a similar nature. *Untitled, Unarmed* (1970), occurred in an empty Lubbock farmhouse, when Snyder unceremoniously shot twenty pony serigraphs with a .22, one at a time, aiming for the same spot. *Ballad of The Dog Creek Mare* (1987), a site-specific installation shot with a .30-30 Winchester, paid homage to a wild mare from 1930s Wyoming shot dead by a jilted cowboy, a sort of hysterical fiction imbued with historical fact and mythical meaning.

An ardent observer of the absurdity within reality, Snyder pokes fun at such trigger-pulling penchants with an element of chance as much as clear intent. Coincidentally, all three projects were spaced roughly 15 years apart, with "Art Shooter" simply logging: "2015: saw what was coming and just pointed my finger in the air as a gesture of despair announcing resistance and hope." Not long after, Snyder moved from a lifetime in Texas to the tiny town of Magdalena, New Mexico—a displacement study in its own right, out there in the high desert. Half empty, half full of resistance and hope.

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