



Austin Thomas *Pocket Utopia: Open Book*

April 3 – May 10, 2025

Morgan Lehman Gallery is pleased to present *Pocket Utopia: Open Book*, an exhibition showcasing over a decade of notebook drawings by Austin Thomas. More than personal sketches, these pages function as both talismans against daily responsibilities and portable studio spaces—expanding the traditional boundaries of drawing. Created in transit, in conversation, and within the public sphere, Thomas’s notebooks transform drawing into a social act—inviting engagement and interaction.

At the heart of the exhibition is a drawing desk originally created by Thomas for The Drawing Center’s *Playpen* exhibition in 2004. Now on loan from artist Danielle Dimston, the desk bears the marks and patina of twenty years of artmaking. More than a piece of furniture, it serves as both a conceptual and physical anchor—a creative catalyst and a space for exchange. It embodies the communal spirit of *Pocket Utopia*, a long-running project that has functioned as Thomas’s curatorial practice, salon space, and meeting ground for exhibitions, programs, and discussions. Over time, *Pocket Utopia* has evolved into an umbrella term for Thomas’s larger artistic practice, encompassing both her work and her engagement with creative communities.

Throughout her notebooks, recurring themes emerge—gestural mark-making, dates, notes on place and vibe, and traces of sound and movement. These are not static objects but evolving records of time and process. Select volumes will be available for visitors to explore, reinforcing the exhibition’s interactive and conversational nature. Drawings trace states of reverie, and these intimate pages possess a poetic sensibility—many are composed of both words and images, marking the passage of time. Some incorporate photography and cast-off elements from Thomas’s printmaking process; others are painted directly with fingers or with pigment squeezed straight from the tube. Created on the subway, in the backseat of a car, or on the run, these works capture the immediacy of thought and action.

For Thomas, the notebook is both a private and relational space—a mobile studio where ideas unfold in real time, often in the company of others. *Pocket Utopia: Open Book* brings together notebooks dating from 2007 to the present, including volumes recently completed for this exhibition. These works embody the imagination, synthesizing fragments of daily life into patterns, concepts, and poetic visual rhythms.

On Saturday, May 3, 2025, visitors are invited to a communal drawing session all day, during gallery hours, with special guest **Alyssa Fanning** from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. Refreshments will be served.

Austin Thomas is an artist, educator, and curator whose multidisciplinary practice blends drawing, printmaking, and community engagement. She holds a BFA in Psychology and Women's Studies and an MA in Studio Arts from NYU. For over two decades, she has shaped the New York art scene through nonprofit spaces, galleries, and museums. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and has been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *Hyperallergic*. It is included in collections such as Grinnell College, The Corcoran Legacy Collection, the Hoggard Wagner Collection, the JoAnn Gonzalez Hickey Collection, and New York Presbyterian Hospital.

In 2016, she completed a permanent public sculpture in Brooklyn through NYC's Percent for Art Program. She has also completed commissions for the Public Art Fund and Grinnell College. Thomas has had solo exhibitions at Morgan Lehman Gallery, Municipal Bonds, and LAB Space and has been an artist-in-residence at Wave Hill, Guttenberg Arts, Smack Mellon, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and Bascom Lodge at Mount Greylock. In 2024, she reopened Pocket Utopia, her artist-run curatorial project dedicated to mentorship and community-building.

Thomas lives and works in New York City. This marks her third solo exhibition with Morgan Lehman Gallery.