

Two Coats of Paint

August 2, 2015

Revitalization by contamination: OBJECT'hood at Lesley Heller

Contributed by Jonathan Stevenson &
Sharon Butler



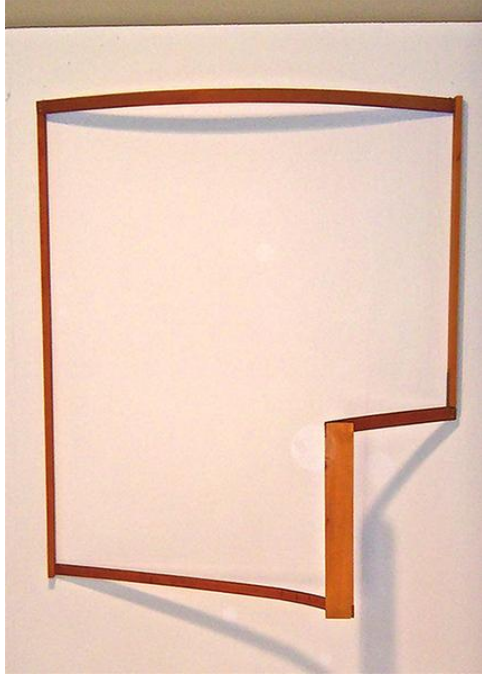
Contributed by Jonathan Stevenson / The premise of “OBJECT'hood,” a group exhibition at Lesley Heller Workspace curated by Inna Babaeva and Gelah Penn, is that sculpture, though less celebrated than painting, is enjoying a stealthy resurgence. Fueling what they impishly call this “revitalization by contamination” is the willingness of its practitioners to draw on a wide range of other artistic disciplines to generate art in three dimensions.

[Image at top: Nicole Cherubini, *The Great Disruption*, 2014, pine , earthenware, paint, glaze, 28 x 24 x 4.5 inches. Image courtesy of artist and Tracy Williams Ltd.]



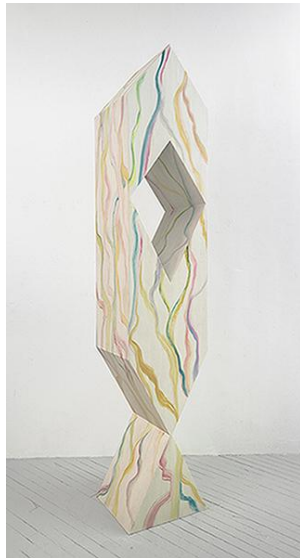
Chris Joy, Untitled, 2013, oil on canvas, 13 x 24 inches.

The curators duly recognize the organic connection between painting and sculpture, and between sculpture and installation. Christopher Joy's untitled little abstract piece acts as a clever meta-check on the exhibition's expansive theme, featuring chunky support and a graphic 3-D style suggestive of sculpture while clearly remaining a painting. In turn, Harry E. Leigh's spare wood geometric frame, gently warped, moves into the realm of sculpture – but only by a delicate Sandbackian increment.



Harry E. Leigh, *Untitled*, 2007-14, wood, 64 x 54 7/8 x 17 3/4 inches.

From that foundation, the show's breadth and depth make the curators' case for sculpture's eclectic versatility, while supplying high-voltage jolts of savvy socio-political comment. "OBJECT'hood" leads seductively with Rachel Beach's *Leda*, a deceptively simple plywood geometric structure painted with branch-like strands of bright color. The title references Zeus's lover and the mother of Helen of Troy, Clytemnestra, and Castor & Pollux in Greek myth. By comprehensively exploiting space – it draws attention equally to its surface, its interior, and something unknown beyond its diamond-shaped opening – this sublime piece evokes Leda's beauty and fecundity but also the risks of presuming to cavort with the gods.

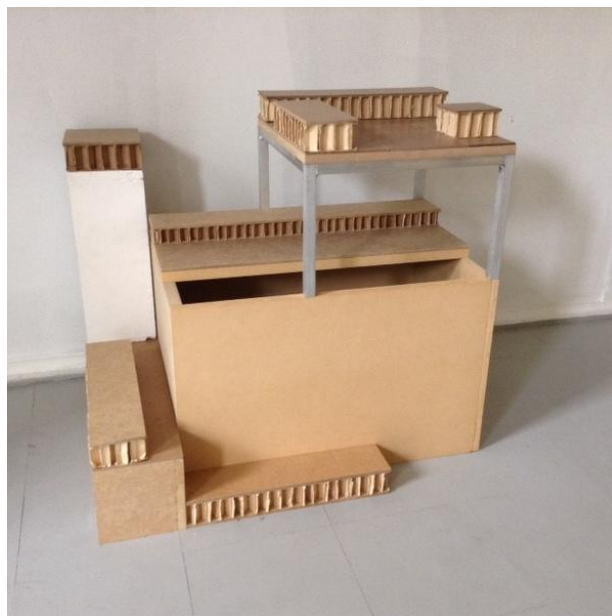


Rachel Beach, *Leda*, 2014, oil on plywood, 91 x 18 x 15 inches. Image courtesy of artist and Blackston Gallery



Don Porcaro, *Sentinel #9*, 2011, concrete, stone, metal, paint, 44 x 14 x 12 inches.

Don Porcaro's *Sentinel #9*, comprising four intelligently conceived and exquisitely crafted components made from several materials, is more resolutely ominous. The base is a bell-like structure on insectile legs, supporting a concrete fuselage from which a multi-colored gooseneck extends to a red sphere with three protrusions that either point to the sky (like missiles) or extend back to the bell (like ringing handles). For all its complexity and calculated ambiguity, the piece stands as a clear and compelling post-Cold War memorandum re: threat and warning. Peter Dudek's foreboding mock-brutalist cardboard sculpture of a prison-like structure – titled *Who Goes There* – and Matthew Deleget's hauntingly reductive black plastic installation *Failed State* are fitting segues to an evolved obsession with security.



Peter Dudek, *Who Goes There*, 2014-2015, MDF, aluminum, cardboard, Masonite, plaster, 25 x 26 x 21 inches.

Arguably that preoccupation has marginalized the challenge of environmental and urban decay. See, for example, Judy Pfaff's acidly sardonic *Sing Like the Birds Sing* (featuring horrifically melted plastic), Joy Curtis's austere distressed *Solaris Relic*, the casual violence of Kate Gilmore's installation *Come Around* and Letha Wilson's *Rock Hole Punch (Kona Lava)*, and Nicole Cherubini's obtusely presented *The Great Disruption*. And decay is partly a function of human obliviousness or culpability. Witness Isidro Blasco's archly shambolic *Shanghai Planet* and Don Gummer's blithely hopeless *Darwin's Map #4*.



Sheila Pepe, *Shoelace Drawing*, 2015, sewn shoelaces with fabric lining, 21 x 8 inches.

Martha Clippinger's wood-and-acrylic *Antsy*, Doreen McCarthy's inflated vinyl *Squirm*, Katie Bell's mordant wall sculpture *Lone*, and Daniel Wiener's snidely creepy *Submerged in a Polished Sideboard* seem glum intimations that any awareness of these problems is rudimentary and unserious. Elise Siegel's bereft ceramic portrait bust, Sheila Pepe's *Shoelace Drawing* personifying inert genitalia with a Munch-esque scream, Elisa Lendvay's coldly empty *Days End*, and Kirk Stoller's *Untitled (squiggle)* hinting at a straight razor suggest domesticated resignation.



Lisa Hoke, *Improbable Nostalgia*, 2005, paper cups and plastic ties, 36 x 36 x 24 inches. Image courtesy of artist and Pavel Zoubok.

More playfully, though perhaps with tacit ruefulness, Lisa Hoke's circular wall sculpture *Improbable Nostalgia*, composed of concentrically arrayed interlocking Disneyland paper cups and plastic ties, suggests a spectrum of influences from Warhol to El Anatsui. The piece elegantly registers the paradoxically permanent infiltration of commercial or utilitarian ephemera into culture (as did, more elaborately, Hoke's bravura recent solo show at Pavel Zoubok Gallery). In a conceptually related vein are Mike Hein's Plexiglas-encased piece of found foam and Elana Herzog's staple-mounted textile remnants and metal scraps.

With unusual substantive oomph in several directions, OBJECT'hood confirms sculpture's extraordinary formal adaptability.

"OBJECT'hood," curated by Inna Babaeva and Gelah Penn, Lesley Heller Workspace, LES, New York, NY. Through August 21, 2015.