EAF 08

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
2008 EMERGING ARTIST FELLOWSHIP EXHIBITION
SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 - MARCH 1, 2009

MARTIN BASHER
CHELSEA BECK
KIM BECK & OSMAN KHAN
MICHAEL BERENS
SARI CAREL
ADRIANA FARMIGA
KIMBERLEY HART

RAJKAMAL KAHLON
JASON BAILER LOSH
MATTHEW LUSK
JONG IL MA
TED MCCANN
JUNIPER PERLIS
HARRIET SALMON
CONTENTS

3. ESSAY by Martha Schwendener

8. MARTIN BASHER
10. CHELSEA BECK
12. KIM BECK & OSMAN KHAN
14. MICHAEL BERENS
16. SARI CAREL
18. ADRIANA FARMIGA
20. KIMBERLEY HART
22. RAJKAMAL KAHLON
24. JASON BAILER LOSH
26. MATTHEW LUSK
28. JONG IL MA
30. TED McCANN
32. JUNIPER PERLIS
34. HARRIET SALMON

37. EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

38. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

40. NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS CREDITS

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THE LIVES OF OBJECTS

by Martha Schwendener

In recent years, in certain quarters, talk has turned to an end of art objects. It's not a new idea. In the late 1950s and 1960s, with the advent of Happenings and the rise of art hybrids involving performance, film, video, music, and dance, the idea of making objects seemed hopelessly traditional and academic. Moreover, during that period, objects could be seen as emblems of a culture hopelessly corrupted by materialism and consumerism.

Conceptual art drove the point to its final destination. Douglas Huebler's famous statement in a 1969 catalog essay for a show at the Seth Siegelaub Gallery summed up the endgame attitude toward object making: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or space."³

The turn into the 21st century produced another generation of object-weary artists. It was a period marked by a booming art market, a golden age of collecting, building contemporary art museums, biennials, triennials, and art fairs – and artists often responding with revulsion to the treatment of art as a speculative investment. What was called "social sculpture" in the 60s by Joseph Beuys returned in different form, with new names.

In the mid-90s, French curator Nicolas Bourriaud posited Relational Aesthetics as art practice based on encounters and social exchange, with the exhibition space as a "laboratory."³ Claire Bishop tweaked his definition to cite artwork that was "open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure," often appearing as "work-in-progress" rather than a completed object."³ Now artists set up their own art schools, abortion clinics, and agricultural collectives. A local museum was emptied of objects, becoming a site for visitors to interact with trained "interpreters" of a work, and an announcement was circulated on the Internet advertising a "drug detox residency" for artists, curators, and critics in Germany.⁴

Art has become a place to experience community or receive social services, all of which dovetails with a larger movement toward what theorists have described as the Experience Economy, in which encounters or personal "transformation" are consumed, rather than hard goods.⁵

But there are other factors separating artists today from their peers in the 60s. One of the most significant is "green" thinking, environmental considerations, or what has been boiled down recently into the term "sustainability." The bottom-line for artists today is not merely the politics of materialism and consumerism, but something more elemental. In this age of recycled paper, biodegradable snack bags, and bamboo products – following, of course, on the heels of the Great Bottled Water Boom – is it responsible to put more objects into the world?

This is where public sculpture – and Socrates Sculpture Park – becomes an interesting test case, where the anti-object argument breaks down. After all, urban space is populated by buildings and people. But must all of our urban space be used for housing, commerce, and transportation? (One wonders, when flying over the city, or driving on an elevated expressway, how long it will be before the cemeteries, which have been relegated to the outer boroughs of the city, become rezoned.)

Do we really want to get rid of objects that make you reflect on your relationship with the urban setting; that turn urban space into a site of imagination, possibility, even wonder; that, when a work is really successful, make concrete, urban space into a fantastic, almost other-worldly space?
The politics of public art in New York are well rehearsed. The most famous cases usually involve highly visible or contested sites: Richard Serra’s “Tilted Arc” was destroyed and removed from Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan in 1989; Andy Warhol’s mural, “Thirteen Most Wanted Men,” created for the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World’s Fair, was painted over to avoid offense. Other public works have caused no concern at all, mostly because they occupied land that no one cared about: Agnes Denes planted and harvested two acres of wheat in the summer of 1982, when Battery Park was nothing more than an overlooked landfill.

Socrates, for many years, registered as a kind of liminal space, somewhere between public and private, ignored and rediscovered, useless and valuable. Founded, as many alternative art spaces in New York were, on a bit of post-industrial wasteland - formerly a garbage dump, a repository for unwanted objects - it was forced to become a public park or be swallowed by development during the real estate boom.

Socrates has shown plenty of objects, but it's also served - per Bourriaud - as a laboratory. People can see sculpture built. But artists have also pushed the limit of objects to include sculpture that doubles as functional seating, a Christmas tree farm, or various, temporary performance stages. Socrates also serves as a laboratory for thinking about materials and how they weather or interact with the environment. In that sense, it might become valuable in the future for testing the boundaries between urban sculpture park and land for agriculture, housing, or some other purpose.

The Emerging Artists of 2008 addressed many of these concerns, thinking about how architecture and sculpture might merge; how viewers might be coaxed to interact differently with their environment; and the ways in which advertising and signage might, in a different context, register as different sorts of signifiers.

Their efforts, however, came down primarily on the side of objects. For objects might be eradicated from museums and galleries, where space is bounded and interaction, “encounters,” and communication with other people can be easily placed in the foreground of our experience. But what do you do when you’re dealing with grass and dirt and sky; an urban space – or a park that functions both as a place within the city and a space set apart, just a little bit, from the flow of urban life?

It might be easier to cite W.J.T. Mitchell, who turns the question back on objects themselves. In his essay “What Sculpture Wants,” he suggests, “sculpture wants a place to be and to be a place.”6 This expands our definitions past the statues of famous men along Literary Walk in Central Park – and, perhaps, even past the postmodern ideas of sculpture in an “expanded field” offered by Rosalind Krauss, in which sculpture is no longer the modernist, “privileged middle term between two things that it isn’t” (namely, architecture and landscape), but something that has gained “permission” to think in other forms.7

For Krauss, these forms didn’t extend to no form at all: that is, to non-objects. At Socrates, we see sculpture that more often uses the permissions granted by artists from the 60s and 70s, which Krauss cites, than those who’ve eschewed objects entirely. But the special conditions of the site, and the fact that all around them objects are being called into question puts a special pressure and emphasis on these sculptures, and the way that we view them.
Referencing minimalist form and modern architecture, this installation touches upon a darker, more complex side to domesticity and the suburban dream. A large rectangular lightbox is left blank. A modernist structure is filled with building debris, decaying plants, and an unwrapped painting. A model of a suburban ranch home stands abandoned in a vitrine. Here, the dream home is left unfinished, empty and deserted.

Martin Basher received a 2008 New York Community Trust Emerging Artist Fellowship
Three abstract signs are situated on a knoll adjacent to the East River and the Manhattan skyline. The signs, differently shaped panels cut out of MDF and covered in patterned wallpaper, are placed at strategic points. The shapes are intended to block, obscure, flatten or frame certain aspects of the landscape behind the installation. Each post is accompanied by a key, encouraging visual interplay between the piece and the skyline behind it.
A free-standing sliding door, similar to those typically found at supermarket entrances, is installed in the center of the Park. The doors function automatically, opening as visitors approach and closing after them. By framing the landscape beyond, the doors serve as a commentary on commercialism and the erection of barriers and fences.
Using his embossed drawings as inspiration, Berens sought to recreate his imagery in three dimensions. Volunteers were asked to sit in a spandex hammock while molds of their figures were formed using polyester felt. The forms were then heated with a steamer and covered with epoxy resin. The resulting concave shapes were attached together and installed in the foliage, five hammocks deep at the highest point, evoking the image of a parachute resting in the trees.
A combination of sound and sculpture, Carel has constructed minimalist forms out of wood, some of which are bound by rectangular gravel beds, evoking a Japanese garden setting fused with modernist logic and design. The accompanying sound is a layered collage built around the Australian Magpie, a bird whose song is complex and rife with variation. The sound is intimately connected with the other elements to create its own aural ecology.

Sari Carel received a 2008 Dedalus Foundation Emerging Artist Fellowship
Mimicking the stone pedestals and bronze figures found in city parks and plazas, this sculpture appears to follow a classical canon. The figure, however, is made of fabric coated with Paverpol and placed on a wooden pedestal. Regardless of the vantage point, it displays only a continuous rear view. This humorous play in construction is intended to address sentiments that are attached to traditional monuments and statues—heroism, nationalism and also historical revision.

Adriana Farmiga received a 2008 Dedalus Foundation Emerging Artist Fellowship
A unicorn hunting blind, complete with a decoy, is nestled among the foliage. The multi-colored shingled siding of the sink box blind is reminiscent of playhouses. The artist's alter ego—a woman preoccupied with the outdoorsman's activities of hunting, trapping, and fishing—is at odds with the cultural traditions of femininity and Victorian architecture.
Dummy boards, painted constructions of figures, were utilized in European painting to trick the viewer with the presentation of illusionistic space. This particular installation employs this technique, overlaid with written descriptions of the bodies that were extracted from U.S. military prison autopsy reports released from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cuba.

Rajkamal Kahlon received a 2008 New York Community Trust Emerging Artist Fellowship
Rooted in the notions of 20th-century Americana, this larger than life trophy, complete with eagle adornments and a Trans Am spray-painted gold, calls to mind the spoils of hard won competitions. Losh, who collects trophies from various thrift stores throughout the country, examines the displaced meaning of the objects once separated from the owner, simultaneously paying homage to his own childhood American fantasy.
Based on the formation of graveyard plots and comprised of over fifty sculptures that are uniformly painted white, this installation recalls the somber sculptural traditions of cemeteries. Readily accessible and experienced by the public at large, graveyards are rich with personal stories and cultural histories. Here, each “grave” is represented by distinct pieces of found objects, bringing to mind the temporality of life as well as that of the materials used.
Strips of wood and bamboo, cut at various lengths and dyed in an assortment of colors, are intertwined in this woven sculpture. Responding specifically to the site, the installation takes as its point of departure a location adjacent to the East River, arching over the fence line to access the main body of the Park. This form recalls bridges, airport structures, and sail boat riggings. Tension is a key element required for stability of the whole installation.
TED McCANN

Discarded man-made materials, such as canisters, flags, and broken bits of furniture, recycled by nature into abstractions of their former selves, are recreated in McCann’s sculptural translations. Shapes that allude to a broken window, a fan shaped structure, and the frame of a sink are reproduced in high quality materials and finishes, such as a gold powder coat, aluminum and marble, highlighting the beauty of simple objects.
A pine tree in the Park has been replicated in every detail. The trunk and branches are fashioned out of steel, and the leaves are cut vinyl, painted green. This synthetic tree is placed alongside its original, mimicking its vibrance, scale, and orientation with precision. As an inorganic form, however, the tree's inauthenticity becomes more apparent in winter, when it is contrasted with the bare trees around it.
Discarded panels of wire mesh were salvaged and attached to steel frames, creating structures similar to fences and barricades. The sheets, arranged in a geometrical, maze-like fashion conjure images of playgrounds and schoolyards. A ceramic bird, the lone sentry, is perched on one of the higher panels.

Harriet Salmon received a 2008 New York Community Trust Emerging Artist Fellowship
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

MARTIN BASHER
*Happiness, Pleasure. Entertainment*, 2008
Wood, Plexiglas, steel, fluorescent lighting, fans, acrylic paint
10' x 22' x 6'

CHELSEA BECK
*From Here*, 2008
Wood, MDF, wallpaper, Paverpol, Plexiglas
Dimensions variable

KIM BECK AND OSMAN KHAN
*when laughter trips at the threshold of the divine*, 2008
Prefab automatic bi-part door
7'6" x 14' x 4''

MICHAEL BERENS
*Hammocanopy Project*, 2008
Polyester felt, plastic, plastic resin, wood, steel, spandex, relaxation
Dimensions variable

SARI CAREL
*How to Fix a Doorbell*, 2008
Plywood, gravel, sound
16' x 30' x 45'

ADRIANA FARMIGA
*cenotaph*, 2008
Wood, fiberglass, clothing, paint, Paverpol
12' x 7' x 7''

KIMBERLEY HART
*Gingerbread Blind with Unicorn Charm*, 2008
Wood, cedar shingles, tin roof, acrylic mirror
20' x 5'6" x 6'

RAJKAMAL KAHLON
*Autopsy*, 2008
Wood, vinyl, latex
24' x 12' x 18'

JASON BAILER LOSH
*If Wishes Were Horses, Beggars Would Ride*, 2008
1978 Pontiac Trans Am, steel, aluminum, concrete
18' x 7' x 11'

MATTHEW LUSK
*Looking Down*, 2008
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

JONG IL MA
*To you, Little bigger than a sweet summer pink peach*, 2008
Wood, rope, latex, acrylic paint
30' x 20' x 150'

TED McCANN
*Picking up the Pieces*, 2008
Aluminum, marble, rubber, steel
Dimensions variable

JUNIPER PERLIS
*Untitled*, 2008
Steel, glue, vinyl, paint
27' x 24' x 23'

HARRIET SALMON
*Untitled (Structure)*, 2008
Polished steel, ceramic, wire mesh
8' x 15' x 11'
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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