

Accumulation / Extraction

Sergio Verástegui and Frédéric Bonnet, fragments from a conversation

The concept of object in contemporary art brings us to that of the readymade, a concept present everywhere and often stereotyped. If it is intended, the relationship you maintain with the object implies that far from giving it a set character you consider it as a territory that has a purpose, that has been modified before and that reveals traces that may speak of future evolution, a way of keeping discourse open and sustaining a construction process in potential development...

Concerning the readymade I am interested in two operations: *choosing* and *displacing*. If we consider these two procedures as the guiding principle of a certain relationship to the object - especially if we analyze the history of the museum and the exhibition- we will quickly notice that uprooting things from their original context has been a common practice. Such displacements have never been neutral. This become very clear when we consider things from the point of view of domination, through colonization and conquest.

I am also interested in the concept of trophy, which is a form of object closely related to the readymade. Apart from being decontextualizations as such, trophies are proof and symbol of effective domination. It is an idea which keeps coming back, a possible way to relate to the objects in my work. Another interesting item is the relic. And somewhere between these different types of objects, is the small broken arms and hands that I use in my recent sculptures. They are fragments from baroque sculptures from Peru that I bought at an antique shop. They are obviously the result of spoliation given that such objects could not be sold, they belonged to churches or archeological sites which, by the way, are usually poorly maintained. However, in Latin America, religious sculpture itself is the repressed symbol of an older and more complex spoliation, that of colonization. When those fragments are placed in confrontation to other elements and other time periods, different layers of meaning coincide.

I have recently been to see the Giotto exhibition at the Louvre. It was brilliant but I could not stop myself from noticing that each of the paintings and objects came from arrangements found in different locations, like Italian churches for instance, where those works were conceived as imbedded in the architecture. The walls, the ceilings, the beams and the light were all, in fact, part of Giotto's intervention. Here is an example of an *extraction* procedure since these works of art have a different configuration somewhere else. At the Louvre they were fragments, beautiful ones, but different... they were samples. History is mostly told through uprooted fragments. The invisible thread linking these fragments is a very peculiar sort of narrative. It is in that sense that I speak of *accumulation* and *extraction*. This relationship can also be observed in ethnological objects for example, but it is also present in a readymade. I find this is particularly fertile ground for reflection when it comes to sculpture, where presence is crucial.

Coming back to your question, the readymade is very much present in my relationship to objects; however, what is really important for me is that no movement or displacement is neutral. I also carry out other kind of displacements, such as following the logic of poetry arising from the interaction of different materials and body-space relationships, with objects showing traces of

use, circulation, accidents. It is about engaging a process in which forms accumulate, and then we can extract something. A sample extracted from accumulation.

Accumulations can be personal, social. In a way they are metaphorical images of memory, with their light areas and dark spaces. This is where not only my interest in the idea of trace and fragment begins but also my interest on the idea of illusion and on the ghostly relationship between subjectiveness and object, space and language.

Far from being decorative, the object, essential component of your work, becomes the territory where a shift in meaning operates; at the same time, the observation of a perpetual transformational process to which any object more or less naturally is subject, permits to emphasize on the transitive and therefore fragile character of that object. Such fragility allows for different layers of understanding and presence to settle in and for potentially conflicting discourse to merge, which the eye will try to relate in spite of its own perception and their interpretative and narrative potential. I'd like to discuss your relationship to shapes and objects so as to defining what it is that interests you in them. It seems to me that they are often faint, discrete shapes and objects with no particular qualities that you collect and re-use...

The objects I choose have all a very different nature but they always manifest a certain tension between great presence and imminent disappearance. If we consider their abstract side, they have great psychological weight; because of their lack of definition and their invitation to nothingness their nature is nearly one of disappearance. There are also some elements that point directly to the exact conditions in which my work is done and, somehow, of my own presence. I like to include these two aspects in my work as a sort of confrontation, this places them at a paradoxal level, somewhere between different realities. I don't collect or gather much. Objects appeal to me more for what they lack than for what they have, and that's how I choose them, they are usually things I find but they can also be tools that under certain conditions can be reused and reconfigured.

Those objects, even the more ordinary ones, are not the same whether they are placed on the inside or on the outside of a specific configuration. I like to think of them as coming together, fitting into each other, passing through each other, containing one another and keeping their distance one from the other. It is those shifts in meaning that interest me. The relationship between the content and the container, the inside and the outside are notions I reflect upon and which can be found in my work. From the point of view of form this is easy to observe: there are usually boxes, corners, spaces, since architecture is often a sort of box; it is probably for that reason that people see miniature models in some of my sculptures. They are right, but above all, they are very basic representations of space aiming at understanding the limitations of what we call space. Meaning is also capable of containing or being contained, but this is a more complex matter because when we think about the paradoxal relationship between the inside and the outside, do we really know where meaning is? Is meaning content or container? Is it presence or absence?

Then, this is a proliferation of signs: a number of visual and formal elements giving form to elements of a vocabulary scattered around; their formal precision and the quality of their arrangement create an open meaning structure, a conceptual framework that allows for exploration and even digression...

Yes, it is a place where fiction develops, some kind of narrative takes place. There is the recurrent

use of elements such as symbols or patterns that combine and merge into new configurations, with other elements that are not usually easy to seize; all this produces some sort of background explosion, a text is built from scattered notes. In this sense I would speak of *fragment writing sculpture*. In my opinion, we are still referring to a sculpture because the essential questions raised by my work are always related to the notions of space, presence, displacement, accumulation and extraction; that is, questions and procedures that I believe continue to be classical in sculpture.

In my opinion it has to do with thinking about the space in which a work of art exists. I have focused on three different space areas: studio space, exhibition space and storage space. In one way or another, my work is always pointing at some sort of displacement, some sort of circulation through these spaces. At the center of this process, writing is extremely important; whether as notes, incomplete accounts, extracts from novels or poems, it is always a question of language. The articulation of these elements is a structure to my work. I manipulate meaning and language in three dimensions in view of creating one or several independent or superimposed spaces. We are referring then to a complex research territory, somewhere between reality and fiction.