

BODIES WITHOUT ORGANS

By

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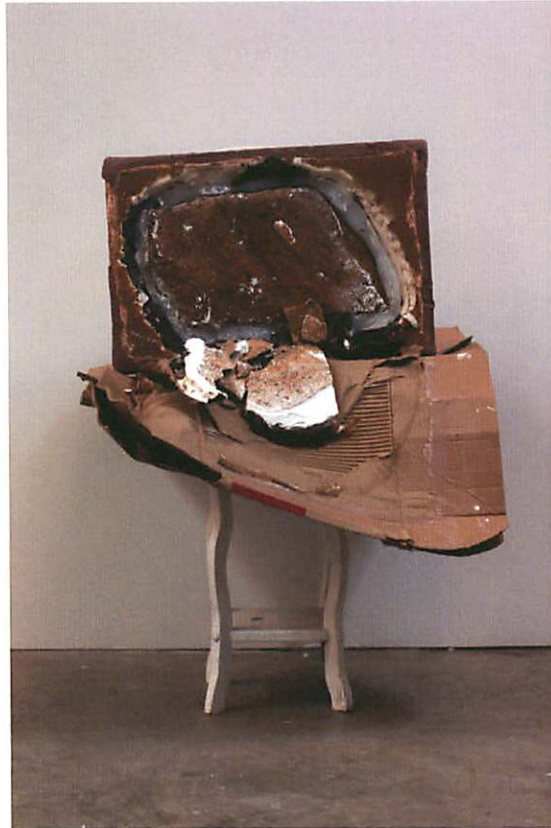
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION-WHAT IS ART?



Experiment 5, plaster, silicone, cardboard, wood, rock,
2012

It is not futile to do what we do. We wake up with energy and we do something. And we make, of course, failures and we make mistakes, but we sometimes get glimpses of what we might do next.

-John Cage

It is hard to define what art is. Often, when this conversation arises, art practitioners find themselves chasing a ghost. The conversation twists and turns, pushes and pulls until each member of the dialogue throws in the towel and moves away from the discussion.

For many, art is communication. Members of this camp support this definition by looking back to the historical function of art. They will note examples of religious art that communicated spiritual narratives to the illiterate but devoted followers.

Others, who may be frustrated with the conversation, argue that art is whatever you want it to be. This is often the argument of the artist. Not wanting to define the elusive beast that is art, they allow art to be anything. In so doing, they grant themselves and their fellow artists the permission to experiment with any and all materials, concepts, or formats that their creative practice might stumble across.

When I entered graduate school, I was determined to establish a working definition of art for my creative practice. I didn't disagree that art communicates; it was that I think there was more to it than that. For if art was solely communication, a stop sign was art just as much as a weather forecast. At that time, I aligned my thinking with the notion that art is whatever you want it to be.

To do this I knew I needed to reconsider the methods I employed in the studio. Arriving as a trained marble carver, I disbanded my passion for the exquisitely made art object to make room for failure, experimentation and the unknown. I began working with cardboard, resin, plaster, chicken wire, found objects, wood, paper, and essentially anything I could manipulate quickly to realize a creative thought. The goals had changed. Before I was making the art object that could be marketed and sold; now I was

realizing ideas that could teach me something about what art was. The studio became a quick and dirty machine. Things were made poorly, and I fought my innate tendency to refine ideas to seamless beauty.

A shift began to occur and out of the madness I began to make discoveries. By freely combining ideas and materials quickly, new work emerged. Working with space and materials in a new way, I created video installations that the viewer entered and interacted with, sculptures that were then burned and recorded on video, objects that fell apart just days after they were created, and performances that exposed the most vulnerable subtleties of my character. The intentional dismantling of my creative practice was a strategy to discover what art was or could be and unveil who I was as an artist.

Experiment 5 is an example of the type of work I was making during this phase. Employing a loose, ad hoc aesthetic, I incorporated what was available to move a work quickly through the studio. Many of the decisions were made using aleatory principles. The purpose of this work was not to create meaning but to allow meaning the opportunity to reveal itself by surrendering my control of the making.

CHAPTER TWO: THEN, NOW, AND AGAIN



Now, Then, and Again, wood, motel room, 2013

Anyways, you're going to be all alone in the most important moments of your life. No advice will do. No recipe. Because every life is totally solitary and unlike anything else, once things get serious.

-Etel Adnan, *Letter to a Young Poet*

Memories are slippery and fuzzy for me. I have a hard time remembering what I did this morning or last night. I struggle to remember what stories I have told to who, and when. Although I have never sought psychological attention for this, I believe this dilemma relates to my many years of smashing my helmet into the opponent's defense. It is a reality for me that I often struggle to definitively remember the occurrences of everyday life. There is one memory that I will never forget, and the transformation I underwent in thirty minutes of walking through the forest

when I was nineteen that forever changed my perception of the world we live in.

In 2001 I embarked on a soul-searching journey. Striving to cut loose of my former identity I carried, I enrolled in several courses with The Tracker School, a private group that originated in the pine barrens of New Jersey, 30 miles inland from the Atlantic coast. My interest for learning survival skills began in middle school; already, at that age, I knew I was going to pursue these interests after graduating high school.

At the Tracker School we covered a wide range of primitive skills. Many of these were practical: making a bow-drill fires, fish trapping, foraging edibles, bow and arrow making, hide tanning, and many others. Aside from this, we also focused on attunement exercises. The goal was to recalibrate our noisy, distracted minds and nervous systems to the rhythm of the forest.

It was during one particular exercise that I experienced an incredible paradigm shift. Wearing only our bathing suits, we were walked far away from camp, down an old fire lane. It was dark and quiet; the moon was just a sliver in the sky, offering little if any illumination. We were instructed to put on our blindfolds and wait for the sound of the drums. Our last instruction, just before the drums began to beat, was to return to camp walking blindfold through the forest.

The first sensation was fear. Without being able to see, I panicked thinking about having to walk through the forest.

As I took my first stumbling steps, nearly falling over, the fear and frustration heightened. I had to surrender to the experience, walking slowly, as if stalking a creature with patient, confident steps.

When I started, I had no idea how important the next thirty minutes of life was going to be. So many changes took place. I realized that by taking away my sense of vision, my other senses could recalibrate to their full ability. The sound of the drum, which began as a soft beat in the distance, soon resonated through my being. The breeze, which had been blowing softly the entire time, became a turbulent force through which I was navigating. The forest smelled sweet and alive in a way I had never perceived. The drums continued to beat, and I carried on with my relaxed journey towards the hearth. As branches would brush across my body, I could feel different textures and qualities of their being. With each step, I had a deepening understanding of my physical body and all that I was connected to.

After an unknown period of time and distance of walking I had an intuitive urge to stop. In that stillness, I continued listening, noticing a slight change in the quality of the sound coming from the drums. Without reason I reached my hand out in front of me, what happened at this moment changed me in ways that I am still unfolding. My reaching hand found a branch head height only a foot away from my face. In that heightened state of awareness that moment was filled with power and sensation.

Now, Then, and Again is a collision of environments. Trees were harvested from the forest and cut to length to fit seamlessly from floor to ceiling. As the viewer walks through the installation, the composition changes with each step and no one view is identical to the next. The viewers' perception is shifted with each movement, the stillness of the trees and the room become an unfolding assemblage of visual juxtapositions. Present is the mundane interior of the motel room, a simulated domicile of our specie, layered with the romantic imagery and objects of a forest-scape. The two poetically collide, embracing each other and the viewer, subtly bringing awareness to the collision of what was there before the construction of the motel, what is there now, and what may inevitably return.

CHAPTER THREE: BODIES WITHOUT ORGANS



Bodies Without Organs, stainless steel, bronze, 2014

It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. People ask, So what is this Body without Organs?—But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveler and nomad of the steppes.

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

During the summer of 2013, I began reading as much as I possibly could. Each day I would walk from the studio to a coffee shop downtown, order my iced coffee, sit down and read. I read a variety of books covering a range of

topics. I began with Dave Hickey's *Air Guitar*, what still seemed to be a foundation for MFA graduate reading. I read *Relational Aesthetics* by Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard and *Why is That Art* by Terry Barret. It was important to me to inform my creative practice with what seemed to be staples of the contemporary art dialogue. After a summer of reading, I still wasn't satisfied, and I found myself wondering, what is contemporary philosophy? Who is the Plato or Aristotle of today? I wanted to be informed of how philosophers were thinking about the world we live in.

At the same time, I was developing a meditation practice. I had read *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity* by David Lynch. Soon I began meditating daily. My meditation practice intensified, and I began to understand one of the simplest yet most challenging goals of meditation, to quiet the mind and feel the power and purity of silence and absence.

Returning to school that fall, I noticed a flyer on the wall advertising a Contemporary Theory class in the comparative literature department focusing exclusively on *A 1000 Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The professor was Dr. Ronald Bogue, one of the world's specialists on this particular Deleuze and Guattari text.

The material we covered was incredibly challenging and complex. It is well understood that Deleuze and Guattari employed a complicated style of writing, featuring run on sentences, internal contradictions, and open-ended arguments. Wading through the rich intellectual mess that

they created involved reading support materials written by other experts. I allowed my eyes to pass over every word and every page, as this was the strict instruction from Dr. Bogue, but it became apparent that the first read of this text would only be a glimpse into a new universe of thought.

One of the most prominent messages I attained from *A Thousand Plateaus* was to look at situations as a series of possibilities. That at any given moment there were hidden solutions, ideas, or connections hovering in a virtual realm. Deleuze and Guattari developed a concept highlighting multiplicity, connectivity, heterogeneity, and mapping which they called the rhizome. *Bodies without Organs* was developed largely as my own response to this text and their concepts. As connectivity became a theme of interest in my studio practice, I chose to represent this idea with the palette. Palettes are a functional utilitarian object of our day-to-day contemporary culture. Much of what we come in contact with in our daily lives has been transported on a palette at one time or another. This discovery prompted me to recreate the palette as a contemporary monument. I also saw the empty palette as a metaphor for the human experience in relation to my meditation practice. Our bodies are the carriers of our thoughts and emotions just palettes are the carriers of our global economy.

The palettes are constructed in stainless steel using a hollow form fabrication technique. The top surface is polished to a mirror finish reflecting the space, in which

the sculpture is placed, the bronze bananas which are on top, and the viewer who perceives the work.

Remembering the aleatory principles I had incorporated into my practice I experimented with placing polished bronze bananas on top of the palettes. The tension between the stainless palettes and the bronze bananas created a strange, ambiguous visual atmosphere. The layering of ideas and materials was remarkable. The jewel like nature of the sculpture invites the viewer into an obscure narrative about absence.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION



Bodies Without Organs, detail

Art preserves, and it is the only thing in this world that is preserved.

What is preserved—the thing or the work of art—is a *bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects.*

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*

My quest to reconcile what art is was still burning, and it came to a head at the end of the fall semester of my final year in graduate school. A required component of Dr. Bogue's Contemporary Theory course was an oral defense where the student discussed and described at length the details of two chapters from *A Thousand Plateaus*. After my

half hour exam, Dr. Bogue offered a suggestion to me in relation to hearing my interests. From his office shelf he grabbed a copy of *What is Philosophy*, the last of four books by Deleuze and Guattari. Bogue thumbed to the chapter Percept, Affect, and Concept and handed me the book. I read the first page and immediately knew what my next task was. I went back to that same coffee shop, ordered the same iced coffee and began reading.

Making art is only a part of the equation. As artists we present our ideas in a variety of mediums and an entanglement of situations for our viewers. As artists we are viewers too, of our own work and the work of others. Deleuze and Guattari talk about art as "a bloc of sensations, a collision of percepts and affects." For me, this simple yet profound description is very important. It allowed me to reconcile the fact that art does communicate, and art is what ever you want it to be, but in the end it is a bloc of sensations, this is there before and after you see it. What is remarkable about Michelangelo's *David*, or Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* is that it is always vibrating the bloc of sensations that was assembled by the artist for the viewer.

Both *Now, Then and Again* and *Bodies Without Organs* are blocs of sensations. Created from percepts and affects of my experiences. Crafted with percepts and affects for my viewer. They will exist physically only as long as the materials of which they were made last, but my hope is that they will vibrate in the memories of those who have viewed them.