

Interview with Kevin Yates for Sculpture Explorations

Dec. 16, 2018, York University

Hi Kevin, here are my answers.
Alejandro

Kevin

Alright here are my thoughts on your work! Answer to whatever degree you would like to take it!

1. Starting off, and perhaps most importantly, how do you refer to your work, your art practice or what you feel you create using found objects?

I think what I do is a response to the given environment in which I am. So I think my work can be seen as site-specific or site-responsive. I work with a variety of materials and objects which have a relation to the space in which they are encountered by the public.

2. Your practice seems to have multiple methods of delivery, from outdoor site work, to studio/gallery installations/interventions, video and photo documents, and time sensitive projects, which all use found objects at the core. Why do you choose to work with found objects, both inside and outside of the gallery? what have you found as key differences in using found objects in those contexts? The gallery/studio tend to isolate and elevate objects as art, what strategies have you employed or discovered that have a similar effect outside of the gallery?

Bringing an object into the studio is a strange feeling because the object is coming from a different context. So when I bring an object into the studio its meaning changes. If I rescue an object from a trashcan this particular object was somehow destined to become trash. By bringing it into the studio its meaning is transformed because I have interfered in its path and diverted it.

On the other hand, when I am walking on the street and I find a situation that calls my attention I do not alter this situation. My usual response is to take a photograph.

The gallery is a third space that is neither the studio nor the street. It has its own logic of operation and a different set of expectations that are brought to it by the public.

Going back to the question, the studio allows me to play freely with objects and materials and to explore relations between themselves and the space of the studio. The situations that I observe and photograph on the streets are the result of processes and logics that are proper to their own context, they are free from the intention of producing art, they just happen, they are the result of life. What I experience or discover in the studio and on the street inform the way I approach the gallery.

3. What draws you to choosing particular objects over others when selecting what found objects to collect or explore?

It is a given space that prompts me to look at certain objects and materials rather than others. On the street I seem to be drawn to particular configurations, and if I am in the studio I will be drawn to other configurations because they are responding to the conditions of the studio. But when I develop a show for a gallery I try to create a situation in which both my likes and dislikes are somehow short-circuited by the global situation, so that I have to confront the situation as it is, the totality of what is there.

4. How do you develop work which use mundane found objects, but which will still resonate for others? Being that your work is so striped down, or raw, what sorts of things have you played with in order to activate the work on a purely visual level?

I think this has to do with what we call work, and most precisely perhaps with the limits of the work. A work is never perceived in isolation. There is always a floor, a wall, a ceiling, in other words a background. And there are also other layers, other backgrounds, like the social, political, economic and ideological contexts in which a work exists, and there is also a metaphysical layer, if we want to call it that way, and all of these layers surround and pertain to a given object. I think that what I try to do is to orchestrate these layers so that one layer alone doesn't overcome the others, so that all possible meanings are still open to be encountered...

5. What strikes me as interesting about your kicking found object video (<https://vimeo.com/303793566>) is that through the process of repeatedly nudging and kicking the object that it intensifies the object and action, that it affirms a new sense to understanding an object. That the object is elevated or revealed through the process, which through a very simple comparison isn't that different to adding or removing traditional sculpture materials until the subject and object materialize. Why did you choose to record and deliver this idea as a video?

It was an unplanned exploration. My attention was on my feet and in what I was encountering. I was not expecting a particular result. I was simply exploring and I happened to have a camera with me, after all we carry a camera everywhere we go now in our phones. It felt natural to use the camera while I was doing the exploration. Maybe it was a way for me to better familiarize myself with the materials that were accumulating around the building, that were mostly left overs from student's projects. That area around the Sculpture Centre is a blurry zone, where objects and materials that were discarded still coexist with the possibility of being used again for something else. It is an area where traditional labels like "trash" or "raw material" are confused. Maybe what happened was that I brought the logic of the studio into the outside.

6. Are there any artists who explore similar issues that you think my students should look into? I see some comparison to early action/process based artists, Richard Serra's throwing lead, or Richard Long's walking lines as possible influences???

Serra, yes, I think so, although I'm not sure that I am interested in the same issues as him. Before that video, the "kicking found object video", I did another one in which I was just holding a metallic lid from a can and dropping it. My intention of holding was matched by my action of holding and then my intention of dropping was matched with my action of dropping. The dropping of the object also created an interesting sound that I was attracted to. That short video happened in my kitchen without having anyone else around. It was a very short video, and I made it about a year before the other one. I think that there is a notion of time that attracts me when I am working with objects and materials.

(<https://vimeo.com/107274209>)

Besides Serra's, I think students can also take a look at the work of Robert Smithson. He was concerned with entropy, and therefore time, and this is something that also interests me. If they want to familiarize themselves with his way of thinking *The Collected Writings* is a good book but there is a lot in there. Maybe a good starting point could be the essay "A Tour Of The Monuments Of Passaic, New Jersey" (68-74).

And for a more poetic approach, maybe they can take a look into the work of Gabriel Orozco who is a closer reference for me.

7. Why do you feel it's important for students to explore using found objects in their practice?

To start making work, any type of work, a painting, a sculpture, or even what is called conceptual work, one needs to start somewhere, with something. We always start with something that is a given (a can of paint, a steel rod, language), but first we need to choose. I think that was Duchamp's greatest contribution to art practice. Although we usually take it for granted, choosing is a very difficult process because it is a gesture that is full of meaning. A found material or object always comes with the weight of its historical layers, even if we are not aware of all the transformations it has had in its lifetime. Also, any object or material always comes from somewhere else. So there are these temporal and also spatial qualities that coexist in every object. A found object or material is an encounter with all its historical layers. Even if we are unaware of all of them in an intellectual way, we somehow sense them intuitively.

I think that being sensitized to this way of looking at objects and materials opens the possibility to start discovering the multiple layers of meaning that can be explored by following a sculptural practice. A found object can start being seen as the accumulation of all these layers that end up sandwiched together and transmitted to the viewer when they encounter the work. In a way, I would say that this is what we call the "presence" of an object, which is the compendium of all its possible meanings, including the ones that escape the limitations of our written or spoken language. So it is a possibility to explore and expand our understanding of the world.

[Expand on this as much as you like and I may have some follow up questions.](#)

[Does this sound ok for you?](#)

[Thanks,](#)

[Kevin](#)