

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present COMPONENTS, a solo exhibition of sculptures and drawings by Los Angeles-based artist Ricky Swallow. The show includes both new works and works made over the last 15 years and will be on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from March 8 through April 13. An in-gallery conversation between Swallow and artist and curator Michelle Grabner will take place on Thursday, March 7 at 5:30 PM followed by an opening reception from 6 to 8 PM.

Swallow makes sculpture in ways that foreground curiosity, precision, and hands-on process. The bronze works at the center of his project are the results of a highly intimate relationship to material, both the humble objects with which he often begins and the foundry-centered casting and refining procedures through which the works find their final form. He has become an influential figure not only for younger artists, but for those who are interested in redefining the past, present, and future of sculpture as a mode of thinking about the poetry of the physical world.

Index Piece (2010–2024) gives viewers a unique opportunity to survey the scope and particularity of Swallow's approach within the parameters of a single work. The long, shelf-like vitrine holds a group of bronze objects the artist has been making, arranging, and rearranging during an extended period that has included a studio move and significant evolution in production and foundry processes. Some of the objects, for instance, represent the artist's first experiments with the casting of a particular material, while some retain gates and other elements associated with bronze casting that are ordinarily edited out during the completion of a work but remain in this presentation to communicate their own sculptural particularities. Others are studies that Swallow conducted for functional items, such as door pulls or window locks, and perform here as discrete statements which test the limit between sculpture and non-sculpture. For all the formal possibility implied by each discrete object, the work speaks to a sense of ongoing inquiry rather than a fixed arrangement of finished things, an effect enhanced by the top-down view that the vitrine makes possible and the associated recontextualization of what would ordinarily be wall- or pedestal-based forms.

Two recent chair-based sculptures highlight Swallow's increasingly nuanced and far-reaching use of bronze as a medium for abstraction, representation, and compositional experimentation. Each work is cast from an existing, readymade chair that Swallow

identified for its archetypal “chair-ness.” Elegant, plain, utilitarian, and classical, the chairs undergo alchemical transformation as Swallow renders them in bronze and applies patina. They support lengths of wood that Swallow has slot in to fit in and around the seats, backs, and legs, and that also shed light on the intuitive compositional facets of his studio activity. In bronze, their surface textures become vivid, highly detailed patterns that demonstrate the artist’s creative commitment to the multiple stages of production, each of which makes room for its own kind of looking, reflection, and material intervention. Throughout his career, Swallow has pursued the investigation of relationships between things that have been joined and combined so that they accommodate each other in unlikely ways.

Spirit #1 (2024) exemplifies this tendency as well as a surrealist strain that provides Swallow with the space to find energizing strangeness in ordinary things. Patterned after a spirit level, the wall-based sculpture is a study in positive and negative space that contains contrasting geometries: cast bronze chestnut cowrie shells occupy the circular and rectangular openings where the fluid-containing vials would be, setting up a dialogue between organic, symbol-rich forms and non-objective ones. Related concerns imbue Bracket with Cane (2024) with dynamism that reads differently depending on the distance from which it is viewed. The work’s overall design gives it the gestural freedom of a drawing in space and a lightness that belies its honed materiality; closer looking reveals a network of relationships among varying levels of detail. Casts of small lengths of string tie curved lengths of bronze to a seemingly delicate grid. The places where each component joins the others become intersections of weight and color—Swallow’s approach to patina communicates its own set of volumes and spaces, movements and stillness—and make possible a separate but related composition traced in the shadows that appear on the wall behind the work when hung.

The thematic consistency and steady evolution that Swallow brings to his project are everywhere apparent in COMPONENTS, including in earlier sculptures whose roughhewn, craft-inspired feel is the vessel for domestic monumentality. In other sculptures, like those designed to hang in corners, installation specifications draw attention to—and energy from—frank confrontations with surrounding architecture. It is in rarely seen works on paper, however, that the recurring elements of his sculptural vocabulary come into new focus. Produced by tracing sculptural elements or by using

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the elements themselves to make impressions on the paper, these cross-genre works bring together techniques from painting, printmaking, and process-based conceptualism. They allow Swallow to isolate and re-position motifs that, in their new iterations, suggest that sculpture transcends distinctions between two- and three-dimensional form. At the same time, they provide windows into an ultimately immaterial place where mind, eye, and hand meet, and where the instinct to make one thing into another—to make art—arises.

Ricky Swallow has been the subject of solo and two-person exhibitions at the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California (with Lesley Vance, 2011); Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2007); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2007); MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2006); and the Australian Pavilion, 51st Venice Biennale, Italy (2005). He has been included in a number of group exhibitions including In Quest of Beauty: Assemblage in the Ahmanson Collection, Ahmanson Gallery, Irvine, California (2019); L'esprit du Bauhaus, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (2017); Whitney Biennial 2014, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Made in L.A. 2014, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Swallow's work is in the permanent collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, California; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, California, among other museums. Swallow has curated three exhibitions at David Kordansky Gallery: Grapevine (2013), a forty-year survey of artists in California who have all worked in clay, and Weed Pots (2020 and 2023), solo exhibitions of ceramic vessels by Doyle Lane. Swallow lives and works in Los Angeles.