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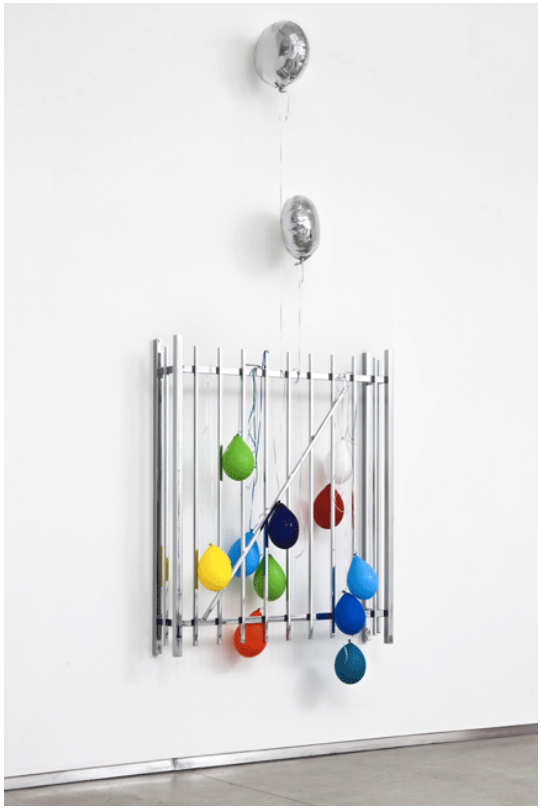
Double, Issue 23, Spring/Summer 2012, pp. 98-103

double

Timothée Chaillou: Do you think that your work is a combination of the visual vocabularies of Minimal Art and Pop Art?



Kathryn Andrews: One could think of my work this way. I’m not really sure how to define those terms. There are the obvious ways, but then there are many counter examples of artists whose work is lobbed under “Minimalism” or “Pop” who expand the category, who don’t neatly fit. I’m more interested in our attachment to these headers when upon close examination they fall apart.

TC: Do you have « some critical nostalgia of the 1980s »?

KA: I like how certain aesthetics can call to mind an historic moment while offering a way out, like how when you look at a Bridget Riley painting, you feel a great sense of dislocation. I’m very drawn to the optical qualities of many of the forms of the 60s and the 80s. They speak to an era, yet when you look at them they ask the eye to really let go and move around.

TC: Could you please talk about the influence of Los Angeles art in the 1960s, the so-called “finish fetish” in your production?

KA: Part of my interest in finish has to do with trying to remove the signs of my hand from works in order to slow how the viewer can locate them in relation to “Kathryn Andrews.” If I use surfaces that anyone can use, that are ubiquitous in the world of manufactured goods, then it takes time to connect these to me specifically. This interests me. Once viewers can easily identify an artist’s gesture, they stop really looking at it. There’s an assumption that they know it.

In terms of California, I don’t think one can talk about the fetishization of finish here without recognizing that the settling of the American West is a relatively recent phenomenon. With the rise of the Internet this seems to be unimportant, as if we had all entered a singular developmental moment. The presence of finish in LA art, also made possible by the technological infrastructure that supports Hollywood, relates directly to a kind of idealism about conquering space. The car surface, the navigation of vast terrains, the surfboard surface, riding the ocean. The physical fact of the landscape in LA invites these considerations. Art exists here visibly in relation to this history, its relics. Of course

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this gets complicated when you fast-forward to the era of global warming where such surfaces come to also suggest unregulated industrial pollution, globalized capitalism, etc. We like what we eat. We shit where we eat. We don’t want to smell our shit.

TC: Are the pure forms of minimalism, with their reliance on industrial materials, a kind of prison? Does pop offer any real kind of escape?

KA: I think Pop’s use of reproduction equally relies on industry so I don’t make a differentiation there. And I don’t per se connect industry and imprisonment. I think more about the viewer’s categorical impulse as a kind of prison—the unconscious ease with which we are willing to substitute a representation of a thing for the thing itself. I am interested in what we unwittingly give up in this exchange.

TC: The subtitle of the article about your work in Paper Magazine is “The artist’s beautiful juxtapositions are so L.A.”. What could characterize your production as “so L.A.”?

KA: There are many ways to talk about LA and how its products are specific to its character. I feel like that’s the kind of thing people outside, not from here, like to talk about.

TC: Marnie Weber said that clowns are “stuck in an existential quagmire of being cheerful. To be happy is a very dark journey.” Could you please talk about your use of clowns’ costumes in Rainbow Successor (2011), Return to X (2011), Larry Walters’ Plan (2011)?

KA: I have used clown-related memorabilia in various works, but I’m not particularly interested in clowns. I used them for reasons other than what you describe. In 2010 I began working with “the birthday” as subject matter. At that time I was interested in problematizing how we understand materials, when they are in a specific form. One of the ways to do this is to construct a history for a material that is surprising. In essence, to reveal its origins as something unexpected.

I began thinking about the birthday as a sort of ultimate locator or mark of origin. I decided to unfix the birthday—to work with its associative content and to talk about how even the sort of shallow iconography of that event, something that we all know—balloons, candles, clowns—could have more depth.

In the works you mention I was attempting to create a tension between the specter of the clown and the absented figure in the sculptural playpen form. The combination seemed odd because the relationship was unclear, yet it was logical; one could imagine clowns and children, and thus a clown costume and a child’s playpen, co-existing in the world. The costume implied a missing body, the playpen also lacked a body. From there one could begin a sort-of Where’s Waldo game.

What I most liked about those works was that the costumes came from Adelle’s Costume Shop in Hollywood. (The costumes are rented under a long-term agreement.) She has been in business since 1945 and now her daughters work there. Her costumes have been used for thousands of events, everything from parties, to commercials, to films. On them is the material residue of that history.

The costumes in the sculptures bear that residue if you look at them closely; they are worn and stained. I liked how this aspect of them substantiated a body in the work, a historic one. When I first

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saw them I thought of all of those things: the fun of going out in disguise, the being at a party, having too much to drink, throwing up. I don’t know, the weird things people in clown costumes do. I doubt real clowns had used them. Real clowns tend to have their own costumes.

Rather than creating a simple happy/sad dichotomy for the implied figures in those works, I wanted to suggest something more active, more complex, more mundane even. Something that might mirror my experience of making the objects, the experience of seeing them, the experience of owning them and dealing with their weird rental business, the experience of all of the actions and histories that led up to their being. I was trying to speak to a more complex subjective space.

TC: Could you please talk about the wooden sawhorse with stickers of butterflies that spelled out your name?

KA: I was invited to be in a group show in Berlin and I asked another artist to make a work for me. They made that and titled it Kathryn, 2010. It amused me greatly, particularly because if you didn’t know this you might think I’m very girly and have a fascination with my own name. It was a great liberation to have my identity attached to something I could care less about.

TC: Could you talk about the sexual dimension of John Hancock (2011) ?

KA: That work is another example of how in process I often give away agency in terms of allowing outside forces to heavily influence decisions I am making. That work emerged from a conversation with someone. They were very interested in seeing me arrange the bat on the chair in a manner that had a sexually aggressive connotation, like a big phallus. I didn’t identify with that suggestion, it didn’t interest me. But often I try to work against my own inclinations.

I’m not usually drawn to making overtly sexually aggressive work because that type of content can easily distract from other things I’d rather think about, questions of how we perceive materiality. Here though I wanted to rupture the rubric “Kathryn Andrews” set up by other works lacking that politic. I titled the piece “John Hancock” which obviously heightens the sexual read but it also asks a question about signature. (In the U.S. that term is a synonym for signature: “Put your John Hancock to it.”) For me, that was a way of acknowledging that the artist doesn’t always exist in a one-to-one authorial relationship to the work.

TC: Could you describe Mr. and Mrs. Smith (2005) (2011)? Does it symbolize loneliness?

KA: The bench is a site for people, but as an artwork it largely sits empty. On it rests a t-shirt Brad Pitt wore in the movie “Mr. and Mrs. Smith.” His name is scrawled in marker on the collar. I purchased it from a movie memorabilia store.

It certainly is about man’s relationship to representation. The title of the piece refers to the connection between the characters of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie in the movie, which of course gets doubled by their real life affair. The work sets up another doubling, there is Brad Pitt and Kathryn Andrews, in that I exist as the work’s author and the engineer of what supports Pitt’s relic. Then there is “Brad Pitt” and an empty seat “for the viewer.”

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Ultimately I think the piece sets up a marriage between the viewer and the work. The viewer is left to sort through its constructs with the final realization that what it promises is hollow. The viewer is left with his images. I’m not sure that that’s a lonely place.

TC: Could you please talk about Ashton (2010)? You said that « a tension is set up between what’s handmade and what’s readymade ».

KA: That work consists of a silver ring Ashton Kutcher wore in the movie The Killers and a coat hanger and a coat rack, both cast in stainless steel. The ring rests on the hanger’s neck, which hooks onto the coat rack. When you first see it, the object appears to be unified—all of one material, perhaps produced by the same source and process, almost like a Brancusi sculpture. When you look at it further, at its listed materials, you begin to notice that it isn’t so tight. The ring is listed as a « certified film prop », which tips the viewer off to the idea that I didn’t make it. One then begins to question the other components and my relationship to them. Are they mundane ? Or do they come from a system, one external to the artist, that has its own value system, like that of celebrity memorabilia? I believe this calls into question the value of the artist as a point of origination. A tension is set up between Kutcher and myself. Very literally « the icon’s hand » and « the artist’s hand » are wedded yet they’re at odds.

TC: According to Susan Sontag, the Camp “is the love of what is not natural, of the device and of exaggeration.” It is “a style of excess, garish contrast, assumed ridiculousness, theatricality of a deliberately bad taste which blurs the clear boundaries of the beautiful and the ugly, the convenient and the unsuitable, but also the copy and the original.” Is this an important aspect in your art?

KA: I would say it occasionally figures in my work though I rarely talk about it. Obvious instances of artifice—how they announce that you are looking at something in quotes—this is very important to me.

TC: Do you aim at “visual efficiency working 100%”(Xavier Veilhan)?

KA: I do think about the economy of the art object in terms of the various signifiers that can come into play. I spend a lot of time thinking about how to make works that do as little as possible yet that still do something.

TC: Are you interested by the idea of virginity – like Koons is with his Hoovers?

KA: I am interested in the idea of deflowerment. I like the idea that one could have both the before and after.

TC: Do you think that the words “grotesque” and “tragicomic” could be applied to your work?

KA: I don’t think my work is really dealing with the grotesque. In terms of the tragicomic, I do think it deals with loss and attempts to hook the viewer by offering up familiar subjects some of which seem funny or light on the surface. But I am not averse to different reads.

TC: January 23 (2010), a wall-mounted chromed steel gate, like jail bars or security grilles, floats cheap balloons off its posts. You underline that this piece is a juxtaposition of an « hyper-produced object with something that took half a second to buy on the street, something that cost no money »,

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and you mentioned that you « think of the balloons as active agents, like living beings. » Could you please talk more about this aspect of the balloons? In what ways is this juxtaposition an aesthetic stake? Does this piece symbolize the end of child myths and beliefs? Is the party over?

KA: do think of the balloon elements as performative. Time markers. Their deflation is an action. And somehow the juxtaposition of the balloons with the more permanent gate-like structure perhaps engages a question about how certain materials in art exist in a more complex relationship to language than others. How can you fix in words what deteriorates? Of course in this piece the collector can replace the balloons according to a set of rules that accompanies it. But the artist’s original gesture is then altered. For me it isn’t about the end of childhood as much as it is about the end of the artist.

TC: The End of Vaudeville (2011) is a wardrobe in the manner of Pottery Barn. On its mirrored surface lies a photograph of Mae West dressed as the Statue of Liberty from her 1934 film Belle of the Nineties. Between the wall and the chest of drawers reflecting down and across the room, is an enormous sheet of polished steel. It is a mirror mirroring the mirror. The viewers look at themselves within a space, while a mirror is mirroring its own, mirrored logic made out of an industrial and commercial material: The viewer is caught within his own personal and social network and the mirror is caught within its own commodified networks.

KA: In that piece there is a lot of doubling. The viewer sees the photograph of Mae West on the dresser and they see their own image in the mirrors. They are instantly caught in a comparative loop. This mimics the doubling of the glass and steel mirrors you mention, which though quite similar in appearance have different connotations in terms of the aesthetic, industrial and social histories they reference. On top of this, the image of Mae West is very layered. Of course there is Mae herself, an icon of complex femininity. And she is dressed as another icon of female power, the Statue of Liberty, yet her gaudy garb is a parody of that. In addition, she is performing a role in the film you mention, so there is her character too.

I like how when you see this piece you shift between all of these different identifications. This reminded me of Hollywood’s eclipse of Vaudeville and Mae West being a transitional figure in that shift. You go from the live act to the imaged one. And somehow the materials of the piece fight against this. They have a presence that suggests perhaps that some things can’t be imaged.

TC: Is the mirror an abyss for you?

KA: I think of glass mirrors as quite different than metal ones. I think of the former as almost non-sites. They are ubiquitous, we understand how they work and thus their physical properties and our image in them seems unremarkable. By contrast I find metal mirrors to be surprising. They are rare and have relatively unique properties. Largely impractical, they are expensive to produce and are easily scratched. When I come across one I am interested in seeing how they reflect and exist as weighted objects. To me they feel much more like bodies of great presence.

TC: You said: “I was unsure of my own relationship to style; I felt uncomfortable taking a particular stylistic position.” How can you escape in order not to be recognizable by your own style, by your choices?

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KA: It’s not possible unless you make work under no name and to which no name can be attached.

TC: You mentioned that authorship can be a kind of readymade.

KA: What I meant by that was that an artist can give over their agency to other parties. They can sample authors who make their work just in the same way that they might include a found object in a sculpture.

TC: “I realized that props-the kind you can easily rent in Hollywood, which get returned at the end of the rental-would afford a “truer” readymade experience.” What do you mean by truer?

KA: When I said that I was making a comparison to a Duchamp-type gesture where an object from the world was chosen to be an artwork. I was trying to say that nowadays the inclusion of ready-mades have become so standard in artistic practice that the question of whether or not the artist made the object is of little consequence. I was arguing that in the gesture of a rented object there is an understanding that that object has to be returned to the rental house, to its source of origin. And so, that it can only temporarily be the artist’s work is of more consequence than how that question plays now around the traditional readymade.

TC: You have curated two group shows, and you told me that you « ceased doing this curatorial type of business. I drew certain conclusions after these exhibitions that led me down to other strategic paths... ». What are these conclusions?

KA: At one point, I was interested in how curating could permit more control over the exhibition context. I felt frustrated that I had very little to do with how my works were situated and perceived in relation to their environments. I later decided the solution was to put this frustration in the works themselves, to use them as a site to directly address questions of agency, in particular, how odd it is that an object gets attached to one person’s name when so many subjectivities inform its coming into being.