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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

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Suddenly, There: Discovery of the Find Curated by Eileen Jeng and Tamas Veszi

by Taney Roniger

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“In order to invent, one must think aside.” This observation, made by the French philosopher Etienne Souriau, might have served as the inspiration for this refreshingly exploratory group show. Thematically oriented around the “find”—a work that reveals itself in some unexpected manner during the creative process—the exhibition brings together a wide range of works that represent a departure from the single-minded focus commonly associated with creative intensity in favor of more peripheral awareness. In all the works on view, the kind of lateral thinking embraced by Souriau led to a discovery that could not have been otherwise attained, and the result is a provocative collection that sheds light on one of the lesser-known conditions of creativity.

Of the 29 works presented, which run the gamut from painting, drawing, and sculpture to photography, video, installation, and performance, many fall under the “process art” rubric, in which accidents and the unexpected typically play a central role. Others feature assemblages of found objects and discarded materials. Some of the more intriguing “finds” were created unintentionally, either while the artist was making another work or while he or she was engaged in some other activity. Tamas Veszi’s “Work in Progress 360” (2013) was in fact the inspiration for the show. It is a short video taken by the artist’s iPhone while he, unaware, was installing another piece for an exhibition. With jerky movements indicative of a hand-held device, Veszi’s scattered tools and moving feet are recorded as he busily goes about his task. Projected onto the gallery’s floor from above, the piece draws our attention to the overlooked and/or marginal, inviting consideration of the latter’s poetic potential. In a similar vein, Eve Bailey’s “Playtime” (2013) came about when the cast for one of the artist’s sculptures had to be disassembled for some technical reason. Seeing the fragments laid out on the floor, Bailey noted their unexpected dignity and decided to consider them works in themselves.

Equally compelling are the works that represent diversions.

These are works that were discovered when, during the making of other works, the initial goals shifted as other ideas presented themselves. Mónika Sziládi's large-scale inkjet prints, "Anxiety Unspecified: Untitled (1)" and "Untitled (3)" (both 2011) for example, originated as reference photographs for another series. In each, a figure

(or figures) is seen enacting a dramatically absurd gesture, such as embracing an amorphous bundle of plastic shrubbery. The appeal of these pieces, which the artist astutely recognized as finished works, lies precisely in the narrative ambiguity they would lose in the context of a more explicitly thematic project.



Daniela Kostova, *Fixing Reality*, 2004 (video stills). Single-channel video, Edition of 3 + 2 AP. Courtesy Garis & Hahn.

Along with works instigated by a chance event and later consciously pursued, as in Thomas Lendvai's formidable installation made from black bungee cord ("Untitled" 2013), and works initiated as a kind of amusing distraction from "real work," there are the anomalies. These are works that represent a significant deviation from the artist's signature style that either remain outliers or eventually prove pivotal in informing new directions. Although these pieces function autonomously with varying degrees of success, seeing them isolated from the context that makes them anomalies attenuates their significance. Robert C. Morgan's swimming manual-inspired realist painting, "Learning to Swim" (1974), is just such a case. While not without interest on its own, the piece is bereft of what might be its greatest intrigue—namely, its utter strangeness in relation to the artist's signature abstract geometric paintings.

And then there are the works borne of failure, which are, arguably, where the show achieves its most powerful impact. Of these, Daniela Kostova's "Fixing Reality" (2004), a five-minute video documentation about the psychological conditions of cultural displacement, is a standout. The video records the artist working on location in various urban settings to which she has brought a portable blue screen. The screen, a device videographers use to create composite images in post-production, quickly becomes the work's principal character as it defies all Kostova's attempts to keep it in place. As the artist struggles to secure its position, the recalcitrant screen is ripped aside by a gust of wind or collapses in on itself, continually thwarting the intended mission. What begins as a somewhat mundane sequence turns comical, but the piece concludes as a poignant work whose ostensive failure is its greatest strength. We watch as superimposed images of Kostova's native Bulgaria flicker inside the portable screen while the latter twists and turns with resolute unwieldiness. It is difficult to imagine a more powerful metaphor for the anxiety of identity than the one provided by this fortunate misfortune.

Ultimately, the act of noticing that occasioned these works gives the show a significance that extends well beyond the arts. In every case here, the work could have been overlooked, cast aside, or discarded, but because the artist was "thinking aside," attention was drawn to a gift quietly delivered to the back

door of consciousness. If concentrated, linear thought has a role in the creative process—as surely it does—it is not necessarily master of the house. This show makes a strong case for the value of maintaining a soft focus for anyone struggling to achieve a goal. By relaxing the single-minded intensity to arrive somewhere, we might just discover that sometimes we are, suddenly, already there.

CONTRIBUTOR

Taney Roniger

TANEY RONIGER is an artist and writer based in Long Island City and the Catskills. She teaches in the Fine Arts Department and Honors Program at the School of Visual Arts, where she earned her B.F.A. She holds an M.F.A. from Yale University.

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