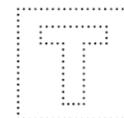


The Order of Things

or, The Second Conference of the
International Network of Personal Relationships (INPR)

Leif
Low-beer



TYOLOGY
PROJECTS

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This publication is produced in conjunction
with the exhibition

THE ORDER OF THINGS
or, The Second Conference of the International Network of Personal Relationships (INPR)
LEIF LOW-BEER

curated by Shani K Parsons
and presented at TYPOLOGY Projects, Toronto

April 24 — May 31, 2014

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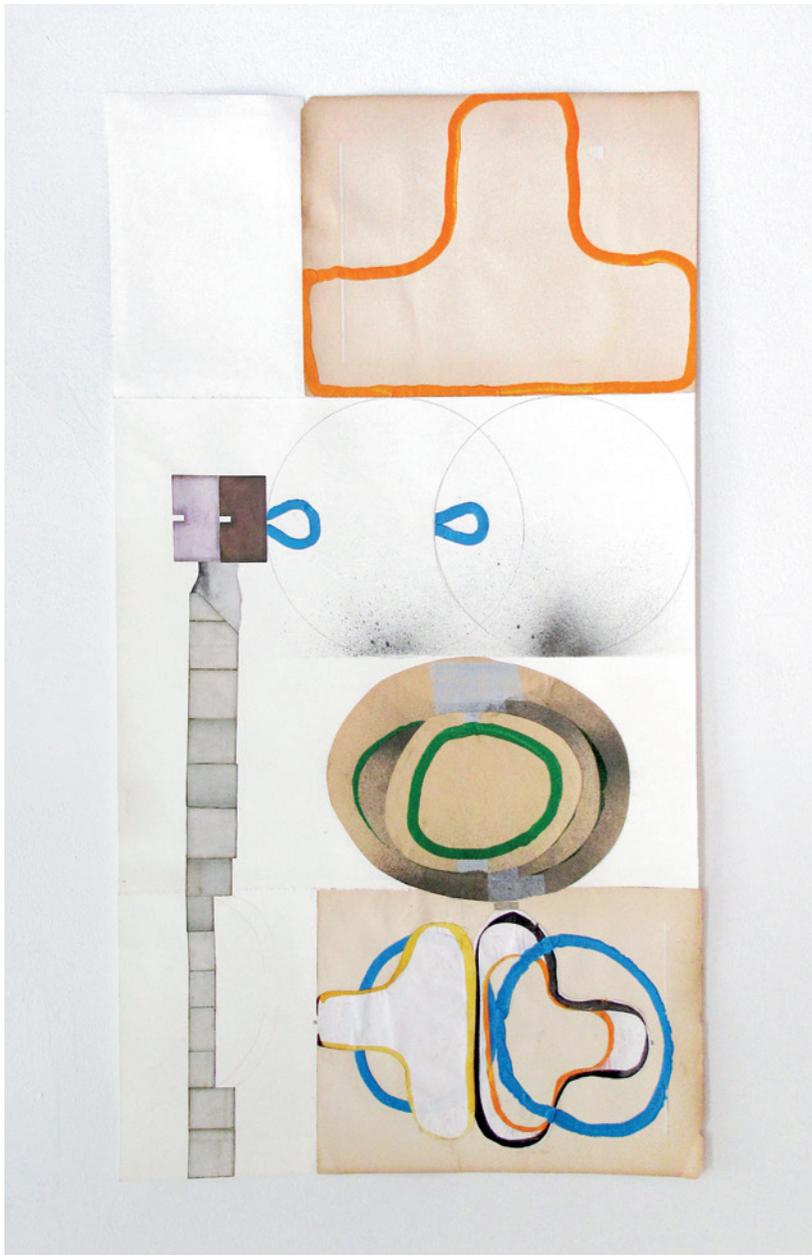
Essay
by
Shani
K
Parsons



The Order of Things

It was, unfortunately, les mots et les choses (the order of things), 2012
Mixed media on paper
88 x 34 inches

AMASSED ON A WALL, a bevy of enigmatic drawings and collages invites the curious eye. Like a kit of richly varied paper parts, individual artworks — some colourful, some cryptic — are affixed to the wall and one another to form a roughly pyramidal composition. Upon closer analysis, the arrangement resolves into a series of discrete stacks rising up from the floor, suggesting an array of abstracted figures; fragmented faces atop tenuous bodies. As each stack or column coalesces around a unique personality or identity relative to the others, the effect is suggestive of certain social situations or configurations; an abstracted family portrait, or police line-up perhaps. But in fact this is just one possible arrangement of many. Titled *It was, unfortunately, les mots et les choses (the order of things)*, this site-specific work changes shape and name over time and place, in response to new contexts and considerations.



Indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is being offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being.

Michel Foucault
The Order of Things

THE ORDER OF THINGS, or, *The Second Conference of the International Network of Personal Relationships (INPR)* is an exhibition of new and recent work by Leif Low-Beer, an artist who engages in a playful reordering of ideas, images, and expectations through the use of constructed, multipart, and/or recombined compositions of drawings, collages, assemblages, and sculptural tableaux. The exhibition takes its name from the title of the aforementioned wall-based work, which in turn references Foucault's seminal 1970 book, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. In the book's preface, the philosopher launches his inquiry into the foundations of contemporary intellectual culture with a passage from Borges which "shattered ... all the familiar landmarks of my thought — our thought ..., breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things." This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' in which it is written that animals are divided accordingly:

- (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies' (Foucault 1970, xv).

In his delight at this seeming absurdity, the philosopher comes to the realization that "the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought" is nothing less than the fundamental, even shocking, limitation of our own (xv). Only through this realization can we begin to question our most basic presumptions of exactly what "order" means in contemporary culture, where those presumptions come from, and how they may or may not be accurate, appropriate, or legitimate representations of our common social reality.

Reflecting this interest in questioning established frameworks through visual means, Leif Low-Beer embraces similar incongruities in constructing his own "atlas of the impossible" (xvii). Through an ongoing cycle of creation, combination, deconstruction, and reconfiguration of both standalone works and complex aggregations, the artist's abstractions can be seen purely as dynamic puzzle pieces in play, whereby each element within a larger composition may be viewed independently, in relationship to adjacent elements, or as part of the whole.

However Low-Beer's hand-wrought gestures simultaneously convey a sense of the absurdity and perplexity inherent to human experience, giving visual form to the continually shifting nature of our socio-political selves.

Both formal and conceptual considerations are thus given equal weight in each object — each thing he makes — through a process based in play. However it is the order of those things which constitutes the primary mode of investigation for this artist, an impulse that distinguishes Low-Beer's practice from that of other artists working with found objects or invented graphic symbologies. More than the making of stable works for display, Low-Beer constructs unstable, changeable images through a process of creating, assembling, and adapting individual works to each other and to the exhibition space. In so doing, he questions how changing relationships between things can alter meaning, and encourages viewers to playfully and actively engage in the interpretation, and creation, of these meanings for themselves.



previous spread and right

Selected details from *One way method (notes to notes)*, 2014

Mixed media on paper

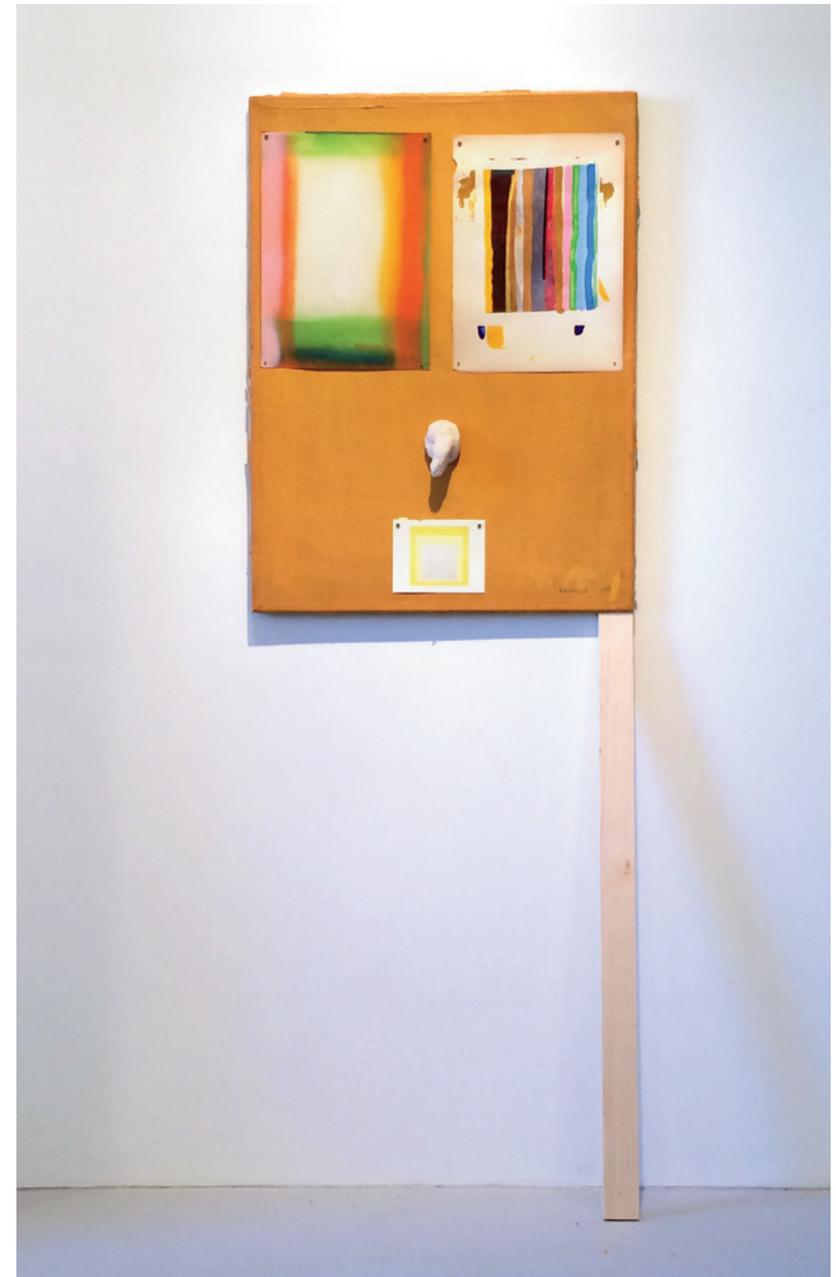
Dimensions variable

foldout: installation view

One way method (notes to notes), 2014

Mixed media on paper
13.5 x 9 feet

This installation at TYPOLOGY is the latest incarnation of Leif Low-Beer's wall-based assemblages. While the previous version (image p. 6) features a linear arrangement and is organized by height (resembling a family portrait or police line-up), the current arrangement evokes the social organization of crowds, particularly with reference to the structure of an audience. Larger figures at floor level and smaller figures placed at the top conjure a sense of multiplicity, perspective, and depth. The title provides a narrative clue to what this audience may be watching, even as the physical reality of the work is that all of those eyes are focused on yet another audience in the room — us.





HAVING LONG ENVISIONED the page as a “gathering place” where objects, languages, and gestures come together and interact in unexpected ways, Low-Beer has recently taken principles he developed in two dimensions and moved them into three, so that his drawn and collaged abstractions are made manifest in the physical world as sculptural arrangements and tableaux. Pursuant to an overarching interest in spatial ambiguity, Low-Beer’s compositions in space, like his multipart wall-based works, function as a set of relations between independent elements and several possible interpretations of a unified whole.

One example is *Olive Pit Pedestal*, a past work comprising a series of small mixed media sculptures placed on a shelf at precise distances from one another. Seen from one perspective the works relate as individuals within a larger social milieu, much like the stacked drawings and collages in the wall installation. But rather than family portrait or police line-up, these resemble an impromptu parade of quirky characters. Viewed through a framing device however, the discrete sculptures snap into an entirely new order — that of a fixed columnar arrangement. As the shape of a parade is recast into that of circus acrobats, or a fantastical figure, tower, or totem, meanings shift and multiply as the work changes form: what was horizontal has become vertical, what was arrayed has become stacked, what was many has become one.

previous spread and right: installation views from side and front

Olive pit pedestal, 2012

Mixed media

20 in x 20 in x 16 ft





Through such playful, unexpected gestures and a highly personal lexicon of forms, diagrams, and juxtapositions, Low-Beer makes work which invites the viewer into his world, then asks them to contribute their own interpretations. As he states, “viewers and art interact in space, creating surprising collaborations that go beyond any single or preconceived vision.” In his wall-based compositions, sculptural assemblages, and mixed media couplings, it is we who transform Low-Beer’s lines, shapes, and colours into eyes, windows, bellies, and back again. We catch an artwork’s glance (or it catches ours), traversing Foucault’s “slender line of reciprocal visibility [which] embraces a whole complex network of uncertainties, exchanges, and feints” (4).

left and middle
 Details from *The indefinite time period after the present*, 2013

right
 Details from *Misplaced desire*, 2013

Drawings and sculptures are mixed media with variable dimensions.

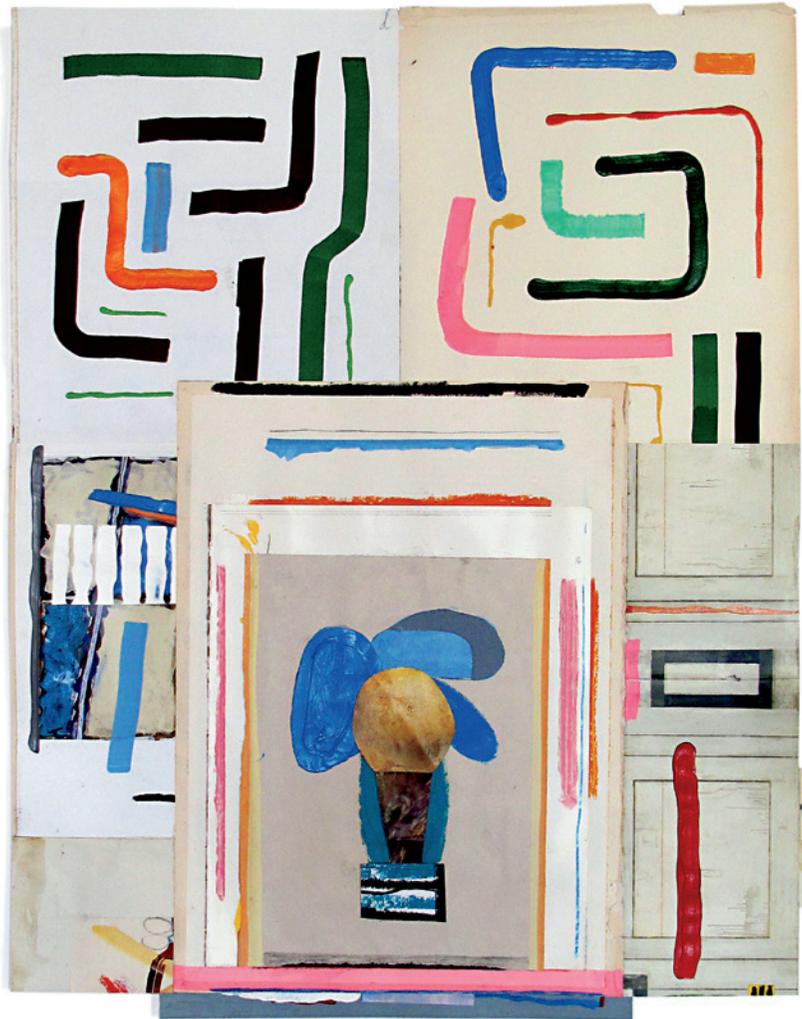
In the sculptural tableaux, Low-Beer’s fantastical world is further extended into our familiar one, with stacked and assembled sculptures populating carefully arranged scenes. Composed as a re-consideration of a series of mixed media assemblages from the studio, these colourful abstractions come alive when arranged in the gallery space, becoming expressive of bodily forms and functions and representing for the artist a cast of characters (and their respective meals, table settings, and surroundings) who interact socially with each other and the viewer to often humorous effect. Framed compositions on the walls anchor each tableau as artworks within artworks, where emblems of the everyday such as windows, TVs, microwaves, and monitors stand in for mirrors as illusive sites of reflection.

next spread: tableaux (installation view), from left to right

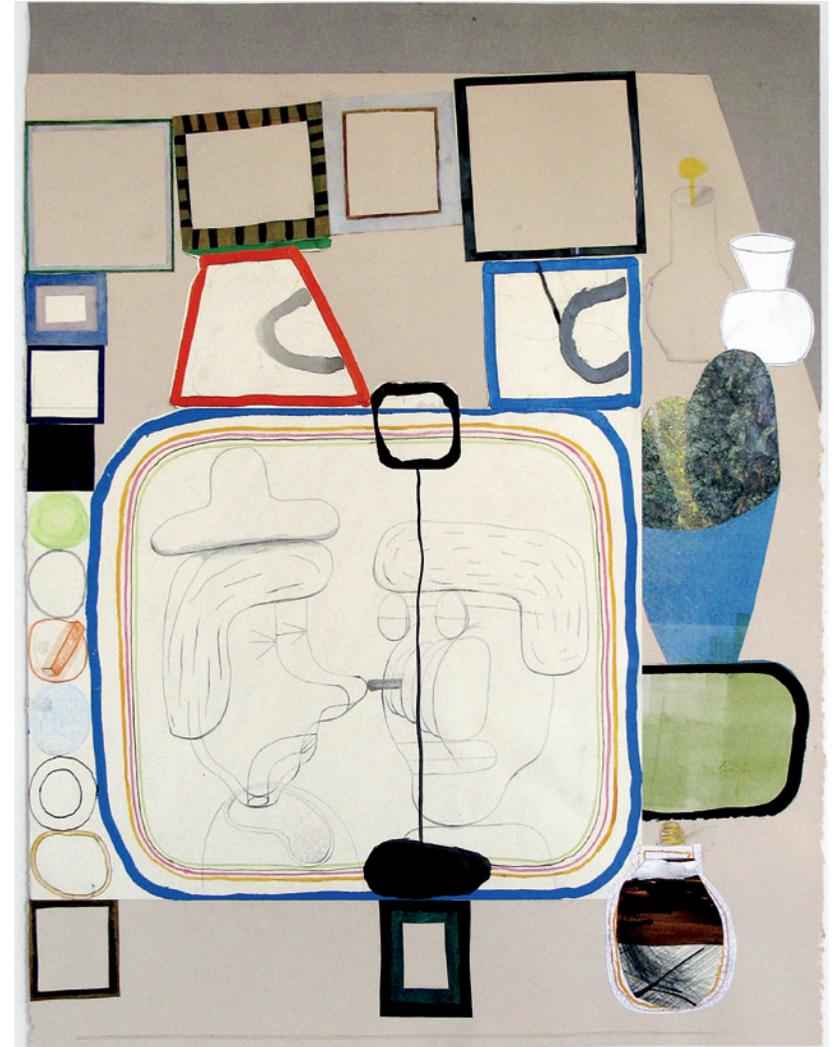
Misplaced desire, 2013
 \$2,505 eating out (4.01%) and \$3,624 eating at home (5.8%) — (AAC), 2013
The indefinite time period after the present, 2013

Tableaux are mixed media with variable dimensions; see checklist for details.





The root of this old sailor's adage, 2013
Mixed media on paper
19 x 24 inches



Increases motivated response for food and energy intake, 2013
Mixed media on paper
22.5 x 30 inches



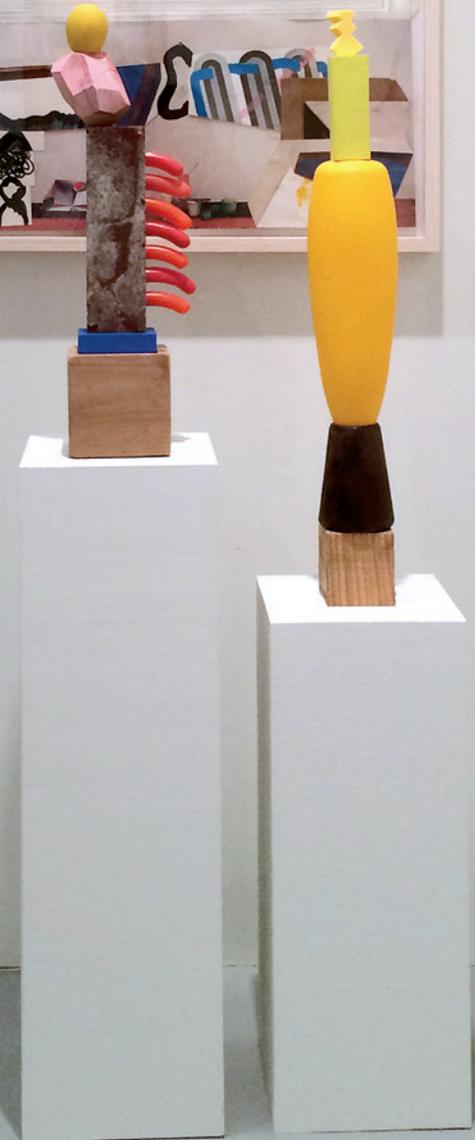
All the elements for a single-serving meal (out west), 2013
Mixed media on paper
24 x 30 inches

EVOKING PARALLELS with Borges' encyclopedia, Low-Beer's process is like a game through which he moves intuitively between different mediums, techniques, and translations. In describing his process, he speaks of fostering "accidental encounters" in part to "attempt to collaborate with [himself]". While some of his works flirt with pure abstraction, they remain yet rooted in an exploration of psycho-spatial potential, both as a way to visualize relationships between figures in space, and to graph lived experience in the form of social tensions or internal enigmas that exist as an underlying narrative layer. Objects, in their arrangements, made to convey the full range of states of being, from solitude, to couplehood, to crowdedness. However the endgame always remains unknown; moves are made in a search for narratives the artist "did not know [he] knew". Seeking to transcend fixed ideas or story lines in his work, Low-Beer prefers instead to create opportunities for meaning that can evolve and expand over time.

One such opportunity lies in his approach to titling, through which the artist provides entry to his abstractions and encourages the viewer's participation in story creation. Just as Foucault argues that knowing the identities of the characters in Velázquez's *Las Meninas** is secondary to understanding the greater meaning behind the painting's constellation of gazes, titles such as *Misplaced desire*, *The indefinite time period after the present*, and *He could always dance through (no matter his state they never tipped)* hint at conundrums, connections, and conditions springing from the artist's personal experience, yet "keep the relation of language to vision open, ... treat[ing] their incompatibility as a starting point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided." Indeed the exhibition's subtitle, *The Second Conference of the International Network of Personal Relationships (INPR)* stands as a wryly humorous proof to Foucault's theory that "it is perhaps through the medium of this grey, anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the [artwork] may, little by little, release its illuminations" (10).

**Las Meninas (image p. 40) is held by Foucault to be one of the earliest examples of reflexivity in art. Subverting classical painting's traditional function (to closely represent reality as seen by the artist), Velázquez constructs an impossible scene which transposes artist, subject, and viewer through his strategic placement of characters, devices (canvas, mirror, reflection), and sightlines within the composition. In so doing, Velázquez creates a meta-painting in which the primary subject is not what appears to be represented (the child, her parents the king and queen in the mirror, or the artist at his canvas), but rather the ambiguous relationships between them and their respective gazes. The painting looks back at us through the eyes of the characters within it, focusing on a point beyond the pictorial realm which can be said to be occupied simultaneously — and thus paradoxically — by the artist, the king and queen, and the invisible viewer (us).*

In other words the true subject of the artwork is the act of looking itself — by artist, subject, object, and audience — and therefore Las Meninas is, in Foucault's words, a pure representation of representation. Velázquez's painting thus breaks with the classical tradition and heralds a new way of seeing, whereby the true relationship between reality and illusion is acknowledged to be complex, uncertain, and perhaps eternally elusive. (Foucault 1970; Searle 1980).



Perfect weather while facing a dearth of opportunities, 2014
Mixed media
14 x 18 x 7 inches

Force per unit area applied in a direction (as it relates to one's father), 2014
Mixed media
9 x 14 x 6.25 inches

He could always dance through (no matter his state they never tipped), 2014
Mixed media
25 x 61 x 13 inches

THUS FRAMED AND REFRAMED, both visually and verbally, through strategies of positioning, layering, stacking, joining, reconfiguring, and referential titling, the sculptures and wall-based works of Leif Low-Beer flicker between dimensions and realities, refracting a spectrum of possibilities for interpretation in the process. Trusting the viewer, and eschewing the need for explanatory texts, the artist engages a subtle critique of conceptualism and its reliance on contextualization in his search for different and new orders made possible through the “pure experience” in art (Foucault 1970, xxi). In so doing, he carves out a territory for himself that is, as Foucault cautions, “more confused, more obscure, and ... less easy to analyze” (xx). But we, the viewers, are nonetheless invited to join him in this anomalous space — by turns vexing, absurd, and unabashedly beautiful, even as it is “overburdened with complex figures, with tangled paths, strange places, secret passages, and unexpected communications” (Foucault 1970, xix). In such a space, objects facilitate the exchange of gazes — between viewers and artworks as a matter of course, but also between artworks and artworks, and viewers and viewers, engendering mazes of looking in which to lose oneself. Just as the philosopher concluded when he gazed upon *Las Meninas* and declared representation free, finally, to “offer itself as representation in its pure form”, so are we, as participants in Low-Beer’s world, free to see his representations for whatever, or whomever, we may wish them to be (Foucault 1970, 16).

SHANI K PARSONS
APRIL 2014

Works cited

Foucault, Michel. (1970). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1994 edition). New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Searle, John R. (1980). “*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 6, No 3. Retrieved from http://rhondataube.com/Rhonda_Taube/Art_2_Honors_files/Searle%20las%20meninas.pdf



Detail from *\$2,505 eating out (4.01%) and \$3,624 eating at home (5.8%)* — (AAC), 2013
Mixed media
25 x 36 x 4 inches

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST



Tableau
\$2,505 eating out (4.01%) and \$3,624 eating at home (5.8%) – (AAC), 2013
Mixed media
48 x 53 x 60 inches

Framed artwork
Increases motivated response for food and energy intake, 2013
Mixed media on paper
22.5 x 30 inches

Individual sculptures
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

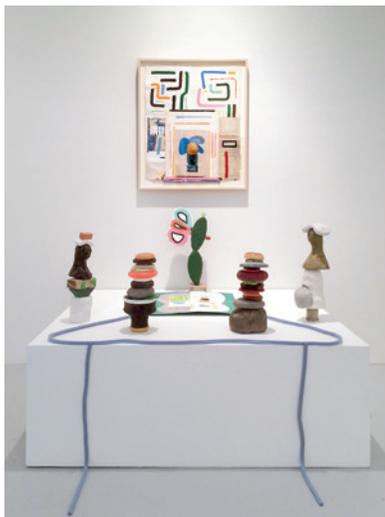


Tableau
Misplaced desire, 2013
Mixed media
43 x 38 x 64 inches

Framed artwork
The root of this old sailor's adage, 2013
Mixed media on paper
19 x 24 inches

Individual sculptures
Mixed media
Dimensions variable



Tableau
The indefinite time period after the present, 2013
Mixed media
56 x 48 x 68 inches

Framed artwork
All the elements for a single-serving meal (out west), 2013
Mixed media on paper
24 x 30 inches

Individual sculptures
Mixed media
Dimensions variable



He could always dance through (no matter his state they never tipped), 2014
Mixed media
25 x 61 x 13 inches



Perfect weather while facing a dearth of opportunities, 2014
Mixed media
14 x 18 x 7 inches



Usually cleaned while they are empty, 2014
Mixed media
25 x 70.5 x 6.25 inches



Force per unit area applied in a direction (as it relates to one's father), 2014
Mixed media
9 x 14 x 6.25 inches



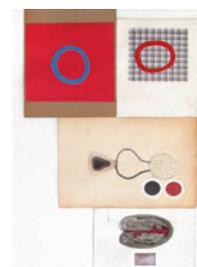
One way method (notes to notes), 2014
Mixed media on paper
Installation: 13.5 x 9 feet
Individual artworks: Dimensions variable

TPOLOGY Editions

Also produced in conjunction with the exhibition is a benefit edition of 6 x 9 inch archival digital prints and a large format poster featuring the artist's sketch for his wall-based installation



Sketch for *One way method (notes to notes), 2014*
Digital print on matte poster paper
18 x 24 inches
Open edition



God in a pill... (it was clearly the right discipline, but he could not tell if this lecture was specifically of interest), 2014
Archival inkjet print on Epson Enhanced Matte paper
6 x 9 inches
Edition of 15

Artist Q+A

Where does an artwork begin for you? How do you develop ideas and imagery? What materials and processes do you employ? How do you experiment or play?

It begins with movement and continues with looking. I hope to surprise myself, and for that reason I try to collaborate with myself over time, integrating works from all different phases of my working life and creating new and unexpected narratives. This is a way to tell a story that I didn't know I knew — it keeps me engaged and concentrating. Things meet and marry, living happily together — unless they realize it is not for the best and grow apart.

Discuss some of the formal decisions you make in creating your artwork. How do you make connections between parts? How do the parts relate to the whole? Are the sculptural components balanced or fixed in some way?

With the drawings and the sculptures, there are sometimes rules. For example, at one point each stack had to balance on its own accord, without glue or tricks. But mostly it is about telling a kind of story. Colors pinching each other, different gestures making a dance, multiple sculptures making a sculpture park.

I have used the metaphor of a sculpture park before: each sculpture is independent, but should also mingle well. There is a push and pull between maximalism and minimalism in my work.

Your reuse and remixing of various components in your work over the course of several iterations raises questions with regard to what constitutes a completed work. How do you know when a piece is finished?

Push on the edges until right before it is broken!

I am not so interested in when things are done — and I am also completely interested in when things are done. A work is finished when it has told me (and hopefully the viewer) an interesting story — a narrative or aesthetic story — but then again that story could change and shift, narrow or expand. A sad figure at a table has a story — as does her face, as does the sculpture who looks at her, as does the man who also looks and feels jealous. Zoom out and zoom in, expand and contract, minimal and maximal. As we know, everything can seem static, but nothing is static.

Your titles are sometimes long and known to change. How do you title your work?

The titles come after the work is done. The narrative is discovered during the working process, and then I title the work to provide clues about that narrative. I don't want to explain it — I just want to provide a way to enter it.

I am comfortable with things shifting though. If I look again and see a different story or a better angle then I will change the title. If the context changes then the meaning can change — It depends on factors such as the location, or the other work a piece is shown with.

What memorable responses have you had to your work?

I love it when people laugh.

What is your background and how does it shape your interest in visual art?

I studied philosophy and art before studying design. The study of art turned me against it — too much language and too little “music.” Working in the commercial world turned me back to art and allowed me forge ahead without a clear path — a way of working that I have embraced entirely as part of my artistic process.

What art/artists/movements do you most identify with and why?

Generally, I like work that has not been pre-conceived.

Do you collect anything? What? Why?

I have become a hoarder of things (materials for sculpture). If I throw them out, they begin to represent lost options. On the other hand I am running out of space...

Name 1-3 contemporary artists whose work you feel deserves more attention.

Joseph Hart, Michael Swaney, Keegan McHargue, Stacy Fisher

LEIF LOW-BEER
BROOKLYN, 2014



ABOUT THE ARTIST

I approach my work both literally and metaphorically as a gathering place — a place where a collection of languages and gestures come together, where I can explore the relationships between a variety of objects. In this place, eyes can play between light and dark, foreground and background, people and objects. Much remains ambiguous, allowing the viewer to bring his or her own experience to the work, an experience that will hopefully evolve and expand over time.

By placing different works together and working on multiple pieces over long periods of time, I stay spontaneous. New ideas meet old interests, heavy paint meets light pencil, abstract meets pictorial. Momentary flashes of inspiration come together, creating the exciting possibility of telling a story I did not know I knew.

It seems that the “what now?” void left by the Abstract Expressionists has often been filled by concept-heavy work that can be explained away through language. This deification of “idea” seems at times to threaten the basic appreciation of beauty, mystery, and perhaps even whimsy. In opposition to this, artists like Philip Guston, Cy Twombly and Jean Dubuffet use the decisive mark of the hand to access moments of immediacy, spontaneity, and clarity. Through such a mark, the viewer transcends idea and moves towards experience. With this in mind, I have come to embrace the liberating effects of “do” rather than “think” — to regard artmaking as process and play, a mode of visual contemplation.

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ARTIST'S BIO

Leif Low-Beer is an artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Growing up in Toronto, he attended Guelph University (ON), then the School of Visual Art (NY), garnering degrees in philosophy, visual art, and design. His sculptures and drawings have been shown in solo shows at Buffalo Arts Studio (Buffalo, NY), Beginnings (Brooklyn, NY), Okay Mountain (Austin, TX), and Wild Project (New York, NY). A large-scale installation at Socrates Sculpture Park (Queens, NY) was part of the VISTA exhibition in 2011. *The Order of Things* is Low-beer's first solo show in Canada.

www.leiflow-beer.com



ABOUT TYPOLOGY

Opened in 2013 by independent curator and exhibition designer Shani Parsons, TYPOLOGY is a not-for-profit project space devoted to curatorial and artistic research and experimentation in the production of exhibitions, editions, and related events.

As a curator-led initiative, TYPOLOGY's programming foregrounds critically engaged, collaborative and cross-disciplinary practices, strives to support underrepresented artists and art forms, and emphasizes community outreach and education in art and exhibition-making. With an eye toward stimulating dialogue between artists, art forms, ideas, images, objects, and environments, TYPOLOGY seeks to engage and inform audiences from all walks of life.

www.typology.ca

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DIRECTOR'S BIO

Over the past fifteen years, Shani Khoo Parsons has built a multidisciplinary practice focused on exhibitions and publications for cultural and educational institutions and organizations.

Blurring the boundaries between art, exhibition, writing, and design, she has produced an eclectic body of work ranging from intimate book works and small publications to immersive installations and large-scale exhibitions for venues including the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Modern Art, the Rhode Island School of Design, the Museum of Chinese in America, and Mixed Greens, a contemporary art gallery in Chelsea.

After nearly a decade of living and working in New York, Shani moved to Toronto with her family. Bringing together her experience in all aspects of exhibition-making — as artist, designer, editor, critic, and curator — she is building a hybrid space for collaborative and cross-disciplinary experimentation in TYPOLOGY Projects, an independent venue for exhibitions on all forms of local and international contemporary culture.



Leif Low-Beer: Thanks of course to friends and family who have been supportive (there are a few of you in particular that always help me push forward). Other artists who are friendly and supportive are always really appreciated. Special thanks to Shani, Alicia, and Luke for their help on this project.

The curator would like to thank the following people for their dedication, support, encouragement, and/or advice:

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CATALOGUE DESIGN

Shani K Parsons

PHOTOGRAPHY

Artwork, cover, and studio process shots by Leif Low-Beer

TYPOLGY installation shots by Shani K Parsons

[Diego Velázquez. *Las Meninas*, 1656. Oil on canvas. 10.5 x 9 feet. Museo del Prado, Madrid.](#)

