

Provisional Zones
An Installation Exhibition
by
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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Provisional Zones is an installation made up of found or discarded objects to which I apply paint or painterly conventions. I do this to make something new from that which was forgotten or unremarkable. I place unusual combinations of objects together to create a sense of strangeness in the gallery space - a strangeness that takes the viewer out of the ordinary everyday experience of the world and into a heightened space - one that points to a threshold between what is known and what is unknown. This in-between space is important to my work because it allows for the possibility of instability and “not knowing” by myself and the viewer. I choose this field of instability when I work because it provides the most fertile ground to make an affective connection between myself and the objects of the world.

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Dedication

For my mother, Marilyn MacLean, and my father, Edmund MacLean - both of whom showed me by example what it means to take risks in the pursuit of an artistic vision. Thank you for that gift.

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Introduction

Provisional Zones is an installation made mostly from found and discarded objects. My working method is quite fluid and performative, similar in approach to how Robert Rauschenberg constructed his Combine works in the 1960s. Together my works create an immersive environment where objects mirror the heightened experience of a fractured and disjointed world, an experience that unfolds as the viewer negotiates the space. The indeterminate meanings between provisional forms that are propped, dragged, dropped, suspended, or portable, speak to issues of dislocation, rupture and anxiety. This indeterminacy also points to the 'Liminal', a space where instability and transformation are represented by objects of passage and a state of transition.

My work embodies an 'affective' assemblage with unexpected juxtapositions that invite the viewer to engage with the work on an intuitive level. The writer Simon O'Sullivan, in *The Aesthetics of Affect*, defines affect as:

Affects are moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter. We might even say that affects are immanent to matter. They are certainly immanent to experience. (Following Spinoza, we might define affect as the effect of another body, for example an art object, has upon my own body and my body's duration.) As such, affects are not to do with knowledge or meaning... You cannot read affects, you can only experience them. (O'Sullivan, 126)

The following support document details the theories and processes that envelop my current art practice and thesis exhibition. My process involves a sensitive relationship between myself and the materials, one where my affective responses to materiality inform everything from what objects to choose to when the work is finished. I look at and respond to the found object's form and its embodied markings, deconstruct the object, and then reconstruct the object with the addition of paint or other objects to animate it as something new. For this support

document I have considered my studio practice and working methodologies in relation to four categories (with several sub categories in each): Materiality and the Body, Destruction, (re)Construction, and The Installation Zone.

Materiality and the Body

The materials I use in my work are found objects discovered in big box stores, thrift shops, or unexpectedly found on the street. I then take these found objects and add other objects and paint or traditional painterly elements. This is similar in approach to how the New York artist, Robert Rauschenberg, made his Combine works in the 1960's. The Combines were neither sculptures nor paintings but combined both approaches and defied traditional artistic categories at that time. This approach was and still is highly influential in the world of art. Rauschenberg added paint to found objects in his Combines, but I take a different approach. In my work the paint is a material body, a body that is placed next to, on top of, or inside found objects. The objects in my work also represent either bodily functions, or the living body that is acted upon by other objects represented in the work.

I have studied traditional Asian painting in the past and am influenced by connections that Asian art makes between materials and the body. In Li Yuping's PhD dissertation he writes of brush strokes as they historically connected to "human tissues" in Chinese painting theory. He mentions that the Five Dynasties (907-979) Chinese painter and theoretician Jing Hao, in his monograph *Essay on Brush Methods*, describes brushstrokes in terms of bone, skin, muscle and sinew (Yuping 184). The blogger Paul Noll on his website poetically elaborates that this aesthetic painting theory assigns four qualities to the individual brush strokes and the ink:

1. Bone: Such a feeling of strength in the strokes that it appears impossible to break them, yet without bitterness.
2. Flesh: A well-nourished quality in the strokes, without, however, self-indulgence or fatness.
3. Muscle: The appearance of one stroke being joined to the next by invisible ligaments, and also one character to the next.
4. Blood: A full texture in the ink, which should resemble neither water nor sludge.

(Noll, paulnoll.com)

Similar to this, my work uses materiality as both form and bodily expression, where posts or doors become figures and streamers and paint become skin and connecting ligaments or bodily fluids. Capturing humanness - the material reality of our physical presence is central to my studio practice. This attempt in art is not new and an example of this approach can be found in early electronica:

At the beginning of electronic music, some German studios claimed that they could make every sound that a natural instrument could make—only better. They then discovered that all their sounds were marked by a certain uniform sterility. So they analysed the sounds made by clarinets, flutes, violins, and found that each note contained a remarkably high proportion of plain noise: actual scraping, or the mixture of heavy breathing with wind on wood: from a purist point of view this was just dirt, but the composers soon found themselves compelled to make synthetic dirt—to ‘humanize’ their compositions. (Brooks, 79)

Like the search for “synthetic dirt” in early electronica, my work looks to discover the primal expressions of the body; to find the basic forms and materials that metaphorically stand in for bodily conditions and experiences.

The Liminal Body:

I choose objects that have a weathered or durational appearance that already begin to suggest the liminal body. Liminality is originally an anthropological term and refers to a state, place or zone that is indeterminate, somewhere between a beginning and an end. It is often thought of as a threshold that is unstable and ambiguous. I want to present to the viewer liminal bodies in the gallery space so they are confronted with that which is often ambiguous and goes unnoticed in society. I purposefully choose objects that have already gone through the stage from being a new object to a used one and are waiting further development. Using these weathered or used objects allows me to jumpstart the liminal process due to the object already being in a state

of transition. I usually take the found object and push it physically further towards something strange and still indeterminate. The finished art work, however, remains in the liminal stage and has yet to be fully transformed. The final transformation is to be determined by the viewer, if they so choose, as the liminal object is open and undecided.

I purposefully choose objects that are unlike, or rarely seen together. I use this as another method of referencing the liminal, or the undetermined, because the viewer is unsure as to how to interpret the newly assembled object. An example of this placement of disparate elements or unlikely objects is in my work titled *Slippage*. In this work there is paint on soft mulched fabric that appears to be flickering like a flame atop an L-shaped pipe that pierces a free-standing wall. The flame itself appears to be dripping down the pipe causing a clear yellow plastic puddle on the ground (see Figure 1). The actions in this work create a relationship that points to the disconnect or rupture of the physical body, a traumatic event that pierces the body, and a leakage that points to loss of control and vulnerability.

The embodied history of marks on the surface of an object is important to my working process and is often specific, a specificity that I find hard to define but points to the liminality and the vulnerability of the object. This is what determines the direction the object will take in my studio. I could look at 10 different brand-new stacking crates in 10 different back alleys and have no inspiration, but seeing just one tattered, worn, pre-painted or stained crate leaning against another object 'just so' might give me immediate insight into what the stacking crate could become. An object with an embodied history of markings generally creates a much greater affective response from me than a brand-new object as the tattered object connects to a body that has survived an event or lived process.



Fig. 1: Aaron MacLean, *Slippage*, assemblage of found objects and paint, 2017.

The Strangeness of Things:

In these works, the strangeness of two or more disparate objects placed next to each other creates an ‘other’ possible reality for the viewer. I approach found objects like a traveller in a new country, one who has stumbled upon an object that baffles the senses and sets the mind and imagination racing to try to determine its purpose. As Jane Bennett noted in her book, *Vibrant Matter*:

I will turn the figures of "life" and "matter" around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange, in something like the way a common word when repeated can become a foreign, nonsense sound. In the space created by this estrangement, a vital materiality can start to take shape. Or, rather, it can take shape again, for a version of this idea already found expression in childhood experiences of a world populated by animate things rather than passive objects. (Bennet vii-viii)

Like Bennet, I approach objects as strange things, ones that are suggestive of a lived, estranged bodily experience in the world. The objects I collect could be a tool or material at a hardware store that I have no idea of its function or how to handle it but could point to things such as stressors or pressure people experience in life. This object, embodying a type of force in the world, becomes further animated when it is placed on objects representing the body. The found or discarded objects I use could also have markings, scars and gestures that physically mirror those of the living human being experiencing all of life’s trials and tribulations. Sometimes these relationships take longer to reveal themselves than others. In these cases, I leave the objects in my studio until I see them in a new light, or a newness is revealed in combination with another (i.e. “other”) object.

Bennet mentions in her book *Vibrant Matter* that the writer Bruno Latour speaks of a term called the ‘actant’. The actant is “a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference,

produce effects, alter the course of events” (Bennett v.iii). This is also the way I look at the objects in my work in that they have the possibility of producing a durational effect on the other objects in the work. When you see objects as influential things, things that have the power to act upon and affect others in the world (including humans and other objects), then the possibilities become endless. These new combinations offer new points of departure, new connections, which then culminate in a new affective object that appears in a state of transformation, a state that is inherently precarious in its newness and that leads to a heightened state of vulnerability.

The vulnerability expressed in some of the works, for example, the ones that rest on the gallery’s floor, are also connected to an intensive experience of ‘weariness’. As noted by Roland Barthes, “Weariness = exhausting claim of the individual body that demands the right to social repose...In fact, weariness = intensity: society doesn’t recognize intensities” (Barthes 18).

By placing these works on the floor, or as painted bodies that lean against the wall – ones made up of found weathered objects, broken pieces, failures of past works, or reclaimed house paint – I point to a haptic and visceral experience that occurs as a durational life lived, a physical mind and body of this world. The work titled, ‘Weight’ (see figure 9), points to this weariness as the door in the work is leaning against the wall in a deflated position. A position where the body is unable to stand upright and has yet to fully collapse to the ground. In society the advice given to a person in such a vulnerable position would be to either “stand up” or “lie down and have a rest”. This in-between state is uncomfortable for the witness as it is a state of irresolution. The need for the individual body to wearily lean against a wall, places the body squarely in the middle of the dialectical positions of the vertical and the horizontal. These two positions I will also address, as they too are critical to understanding my work.

The Vertical and the Horizontal:

Claus Oldenburg: "A refuse lot in the city is worth all the art stores in the world."

(Bois 173)

By using materials that are sometimes discarded, items that have been thrown on the ground or on the garbage pile, the work takes on a kind of vertical/horizontal dialectic, the rising up of the human from the baseness of the horizontal "animal" view. Krauss describes this as a movement of the "lowering from the vertical to the horizontal" or "horizontalization," and mentions that Bataille thought that "man is proud of being erect (and of having thus emerged from the animal state, the biological mouth-anus axis of which is horizontal), but this pride is founded on a repression." The lowering of self to a ground replete with discarded materials is further explained by Krauss:

With their feet in mud but their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space. Human life entails. In fact, a fury at seeing that it necessarily, implies a back and forth movement from refuse to the ideal, and from the ideal to refuse – a fury that is easily directed against an organ as base as the foot. (Bois and Krauss 69)

Regarding the operation of the formless, that as Krauss states, is a process that obstructs our "drive toward the transcendental, which always tries to recuperate the excremental, or the sacrificial fall, by remaking it as theme" (Bois and Krause 146). My works that seem to float, the ones that defy gravity represent the need to move away from the excremental, but the leaning and fallen works are reminders of our connection to the ground's reality—the dirt and mud—a primal connection to the origins of self. It is also an attempt to get to the essential nature of what art is and can be.

I would, however, like to make it clear my interest in waste has nothing to do with an ecological concern - one that points to the overproduction of products and the hazardous wastes they produce. My interest is in the concept of waste as excess of the body or mind. I also see the waste or refuse object in connection to people who live in society and are not recognized because they are in the transitional stage of the liminal. Regarding the first approach of bodily waste, James Elkins also makes a connection to how the waste objects operate in the studio:

As the *materia prima* reminds us, paint is very much like waste. That is so in both senses of the word “waste”: some paint is like the refuse of the studio, and some is like human waste.... Circulation is the esoteric discipline of recycling substances, especially the body’s products, but also whatever is despised and overlooked, including the dusty waste material of the studio. Circulation is a metaphor, as well, for recycling the waste products of the mind, and somehow going on when nothing new can be found. Old discarded thoughts become new ones, and the work starts again. (Elkins 138)

Artists working in the avant-garde movement *Arte Povera*, used discarded or common objects as I do. *Arte Povera* artists were a group of anti-elite artists that worked in Italy in the 1960s and had a similar approach to art-making as mine. They often chose common or ‘poor’ objects for their artworks placing materiality as the main focus of their investigations. The decision by the *Arte Povera* group to allow any available object to be considered for artistic use helped advance what was materially acceptable at that time for art-making. This use of the everyday object influenced the artist Robert Rauschenberg, in the United States. My process is an investigation of the mundane object that is on its own seemingly unremarkable, and to then appropriate it into my work as a form of transformation. In talking about the “objects” in the artist Sara Sze’s work, Arthur Danto states that “the mundane products and materials out of which her installations are made – are themselves totally devoid of preciousness and they are “too commonplace for separate meditation” (Sze & Chiu 17). Her installations of ripped and

torn everyday objects express the disjointed onslaught of imagery we experience as viewers every day (see figure 2). This approach by Sze is very close to my own interdisciplinary approach to art.



Fig. 2. Sarah Sze, Installation view, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, 2015
<https://dailyartfair.com/exhibition/4444/sarah-sze-tanya-bonakdar-gallery>

Destruction

Raphael Montanez Ortiz: “Of this stuff our art will be, that which is made will be unmade, that which is assembled will be disassembled, that which is constructed will be destroyed.”

(Spieker, 75)

I should address the fact that for the past 20 years I have been a painter who worked solely on two-dimensional surfaces, primarily with oil on canvas. A major change in my artistic practice occurred a little over a year ago when, in my first semester of a graduate program, I broke through the canvas plane of a painting I was working on. I did this by spontaneously cutting the canvas with a blade, creating a flap in the centre of the painting. This cutting of the canvas literally destroyed the integrity of the flat two-dimensional surface, an integrity I held dear as a painter for so many years. This destruction of the flat surface plane changed me; I quite literally felt an opening up and a freedom after I did it. I believe this destructive act informs much of how I approach my practice today; it is not purely formal experimentation, it is an attack. I want to destroy, deconstruct or alter my own working approach to making art as I’ve known it up until now. This change in working method is why I now rarely leave an object that I encounter in its original state – I feel compelled to bend, break, muddy or deconstruct it (as opposed to a readymade approach of very few alterations on the object by the artist). These physical destructive actions are freeing and performative in nature for me, allowing me to begin the making process from the point where an altered object has no recognizable function or form.

Due to the destructive nature of my process and the vulnerable appearance of much of the finished artworks, there is the look of the aftermath to my work. The objects often look like they have been through a traumatic or disastrous event that has changed them, and they are in the

process of recovery or transformation. Similar to my approach the artist, Ser Serpas, deals with found objects that reference the body (but differ in that her work has very little physical intervention by the artist's hand). In *Dust Patterns*, Serpas's solo exhibition at Current Projects gallery, all the works reference the body and were made during her having gender affirmation surgery. The objects in the exhibition all were reclaimed household items from a foreclosed home in Florida (see figure 3). The artist did not know the residents but took the furniture and objects as they were, that is, in a state of rot or transformation from a home that had been abandoned and neglected.



Fig. 3. Ser Serpas, Pen ultimate warrior (self-portrait), Armchair, latex and ash, <https://hyperallergic.com/422452/ser-serpas-dust-patterns-current-projects/2017>.

Serpas placed the found ready made objects (some of which she considered to be a self-portrait) in the gallery as figures, objects that make reference to the aftermath of a vulnerable body affected by the damages of time and hypertrophy. The writer, Monica Uszerowicz, wrote in a review of the show in the popular art website, Hyperallergic, that:

The conceit of object as body is evocative, but it's also a kind of a truism. Furniture carries the literal outline of the muscles that sleep and sit on them, creating a continuous loop of bodies and beds claiming each other. Your vacuum cleans your floor in exchange for your own sticky fingerprints. (Uszerowicz, "*Finding Art...*")

The objects I choose are also often domestic in nature and often contain the "sticky fingerprints" of life on them. These markings could also be seen as the remnants of a destruction, a destruction from an owner's past use of the object, or of nature having its way with the abandoned object. I respond to the already evident destruction displayed on the object and take that process further to create and widen the gap between what I think I know and what I don't know about the object, as in my work titled *Lost and Found* (see figure 4).



Fig. 4: Aaron MacLean, *Lost and Found*, assemblage of found objects and paint, 2018.

In 1961-62 the artist Raphael Montanez Ortiz, wrote a manifesto on destruction titled *Destructivism: A Manifesto*. In it he states that the artist, like the objects with which he works, is going through a transformational process. In a quote that is strikingly similar to Serpas and my own working themes, he claimed that:

It is therefore not difficult to comprehend how, just as a mattress or other man-made object is released from and transcends its logically determined form through destruction, an artist, led by associations and experiences resulting from his destruction of the man-made objects, is also released from and transcends his logical self. (Spieker 76)

Ortiz expands on this theory by also stating that there is a purging that occurs in the destructive art-making process, one that in death also produces new life. He looks at this a kind of sacrificial release, a release of guilt, fear and anxiety. These issues of fear and anxiety are an interest of mine as well.

Creation of an Art Work:

It would be quite helpful to explain my approach to art making by extrapolating the steps in the creation of one my works. The work entitled 'Afterbirth' (see fig. 5), is made from a used storm door that I found. I initially wanted the work to hang out from the wall and into the viewer's personal space. The door informed me as to how to hang the piece. I hung it by the chain at the top of the door, as there were no other holes or lips at its top that would enable it to hang without falling. I used a long plank of two by four-inch wood, propped on the wall to force the bottom screen portion of the door outward and away from the wall (see figure 5). Tension was created as the weight of the screen door pushed itself against the plank of wood causing the screen to bulge out. After more than an hour of applying a muddy paint to the sides of the door and in between the sliding top windows, while also repeatedly changing the angles and positions

of the door, I spontaneously decided to push the plank of wood straight through the screen. I did this by grabbing the door and by using my body weight to push the door towards the wall. This action created a piercing or hole in the screen which completely changed my view of the work. This new opening informed me that the work had been about the entrance or exit from the screen. I knew now the object needed to deflate or bend so as to sit on the ground. I proceeded to strike the door until it bent in the middle of the metal frame. As the door bent, the object fell to the ground and sat of its own accord. I then made the decision that the screen itself also needed to revert to a nearly horizontal position, thus making the ruptured opening in the screen point to the ground. I applied paint over the entire object as it now needed the activation of colour. I dripped the paint from the top edge of the door using 3 primary colours of red, yellow and blue. As I observed the dripping acrylic paint land on the ground plane of the door and the screen, I realized that there was a type of 'Afterbirth' being expressed here. I allowed the primary paint colours to swim and smear across the ground facing surfaces, by pushing them with white gauze.

The bent door and the tear in its screen pointed to an object that is vulnerable due to external forces and is in a state of transformation after something has passed through its form. Living creatures are often most vulnerable in a state of change, being unstable and weakened, such as the cocoon state of a butterfly or a person coming out of a traumatic event. They are not yet what they were nor are they what they will become. It is an indeterminate state, a provisional space or zone where boundaries are not yet defined.



Fig. 5. Aaron MacLean *Afterbirth* -before and after shot, door, paint, gauze and mirror, 2018.

(re)Construction

Paint:

In the book, *What Painting Is*, James Elkins explains something akin to the way I view paint and how the application of it affects the work. Elkins states that the paint marks, “preserve the memory of the tired bodies that made them, the quick jabs, the exhausted truces, the careful nourishing gestures. Painters can sense those motions in the paint even before they notice what the paintings are about. Paint is water and stone, and it is also liquid thought.” (Elkins 14) Paint is an organic matter, one that holds a lot of potential material energy and descriptive emotive power by its ability to be applied with gestural expression and presence. I use paint to clarify all the objects I make by emphasizing the colour used or the physical appearance of the gesture of the paint. Paint, like a torn piece of metal or a hanging fabric, becomes an object itself used in combination with other objects.

Elkins refers to the idea of paint as a living object when he states, “hypostasis is the feeling that something as dead as paint might also be deeply alive, full of thought and expressive meaning.” He continues, “ordinarily paint is a window onto something else, a transparent thing that shimmers in our awareness as we look through it to see what the painter has depicted: but it is also a sludge, a hard scab clinging to the canvas... a blob of yellow paint is a wet sculpture, a hanging adhesion on the linen threads, coated in a slowly thickening elastic skin.” (Elkins 129) Another way to view paint, according to Elkins, is that paint can depict skin but also is skin, a literal skin of paint; a concept I use in some of my work by peeling off a dried layer of paint and applying it to other objects.

Strategies of Failure and Disconnect:

Upon first inspection, my work may look unfinished, a common trend in art today. Sharon Butler wrote of what she named ‘Casualist painting’ in her popular blog, *Two Coats of Paint*, a style of approaching art that has similar characteristics to my sculptural work. She describes this artistic method as, “a concern with imperfection, extending beyond traditional Bauhaus principles of good design to the unfinished, the off-kilter, the overtly offhand, the not-quite-right. And, to my mind, they refreshingly embrace almost anything that seems to lend itself to visual intrigue – including formal artistic failure” (Butler, twocoatsofpaint.com). I am not so much interested in the purposefully unfinished or frustrated artistic gesture, but in the appearance of an object that presents itself in this world as a by-product of an attempt to struggle, to live, and to fail.

When I finish a work of art I ask myself, “What have I done here? Is this art?” I want to be unsure of these answers. This place of not knowing is the most fertile and engaging place of operation for me as an artist. I am in a state of constant instability when I create these art objects, and my goal is to stay in this uncomfortable space, to allow for continued and sustained personal growth in my work. I do this by constantly adapting to what the material tells me, approaching the work as a collaboration, and questioning my previous approaches to art-making. Roland Barthes addresses this approach on the topic of the Neutral: “I define the Neutral as that which outplays (dejoue) the paradigm, or rather I call Neutral everything that baffles the paradigm” (Barthes 6). He continues, “The Neutral as such requires that the sequence of figures be unstructured, inasmuch as it embodies the refusal to dogmatize: the exposition of the nondogmatic cannot itself be dogmatic. Inorganization = inconclusion” (10).

On the Tate Gallery's website, the photographic works called *Equilibres / Quiet*

Afternoon 1984, by Peter Fischli & David Weiss (see figure 6), are described as:

...precariously balanced sculptures at what appears to be the exact moment before their collapse...Everyday items such as vegetables, kitchen utensils, tyres, chairs, and tools, are piled in elaborate configurations that – for an instant, at least – appear stable. 'We discovered that we could leave all formal decisions to equilibrium itself', Fischli has said of these sculptures. 'There was apparently no way to do it 'better' or 'worse', just 'correctly'. (Tate, tate.org.uk)



Fig. 6. Peter Fischli & David Weiss, *Equilibres / Quiet Afternoon*, photographs, 1984

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/fischli-weiss/fischli-weiss-room-guide-room-1/fischli-weiss-1>

I allow the materials to act, to move and to land in physical space of their own accord during the making process. The objects respond to factors that I introduce: pressure, height,

angles, weight, etc. However, if the materials fall or collapse creating a visual form that does not align with my own artistic intentions, I take the work completely apart and try again until the materials form something that seems ‘correct’. Through the process of a constant negotiation with the objects I push the limitations of the different materials to discover what they can and cannot do. Also, like the *Equilibres* works, my practice depends on precariousness combined with the illusion of stability. Some works represent this precariousness by traces of actions that occurred during the making. In these cases, the works appear physically stable in the gallery space. Other works are literally in a precarious physical state of balance (i.e. if moved slightly, they would collapse). These works, such as *Fallen Door* (see figure 7), can be approximated to their initial form during installation.



Fig. 7. Aaron MacLean, *Fallen Door*, assemblage of found objects and paint, 2017.

The Installation Zone

The Liminal Zone:

According to the writer and professor of anthropology, Bjorn Thomassen, liminality can refer to anything “betwixt and between situation or object” and can actually include space and time. Thomassen, in the book, *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, provided a simple breakdown of the spatial dimensions of liminality: 1) specific thresholds (a doorway in a house, a line separating holy from sacred in a ritual, specific objects, in-between objects in a classification scheme, parts/openings of the human body). 2) Areas or zones (border areas between nations, monasteries, prisons, sea resorts, airports). 3) countries or larger regions, continents. (Horvath et al 48). My interest is in using specific thresholds to create liminal areas or zones in the gallery space. Some of the ‘threshold objects’ I use are doors, windows, or cave-like objects such as the built-in shower object (See figure 8). I place these objects together in an installation environment, one that references an aftermath. This constructed installation creates a kind of liminal zone for the viewer, a place between the border of two states including the known experienced by the viewer in her or his daily life, and that which is unknown.



Fig. 8. Aaron MacLean, *Passage*, assemblage of found objects and paint, 2018.

The Wall:

Another concern of mine in the installation process is the gallery wall. I am interested in how something as common as walls can feel like either a comfort or a prison, something to overcome, or something to go unnoticed in everyday life. Terms like ‘private’ and ‘safe’ in reference to the four walls of one’s home or work space can speak to the common feeling that walls provide as sanctuary. For others – the invalid, the shut-in or the recluse – walls can feel like they are ‘closing-in’ on them and make the home or work environment feel like an insurmountable prison. Generally, walls just blend in to the literal architecture of our lives, but I consider the walls in the gallery or studio space to be sculptural objects.

Two of the three walls in my studio do not reach all the way to the ceiling so, with the help of a ladder, I am able to see them from above. From this aerial vantage point I become clearly aware of the wall as a sculptural object or a readymade in my studio. The writer, Thierry de Duve, challenged critic Clement Greenberg’s theory that the physical properties of the canvas defined painting from non-painting. He stated that the blank canvas is already a readymade and can be attained at any art supply shop. The wall is a readymade sculpture that is in the shared space of my art work. Therefore, the objects I create have no choice but to respond and interact with the walls. Many of my works are either hanging on (literally or figuratively) or leaning against the gallery walls to brace or support the objects. In the work titled *Weight* (see figure 9), the angle of the cinderblock hanging from the chain connected to the wall points to a constant stressor or a manifestation of a physical pressure that the world is placing on a figure (in spite of the fact that the figure is barely remaining upright). The work is showing the movement of the event that is connected from the floor to the wall by the chain and paint trail, thus the wall is essential to the creation of meaning for the leaning or hanging works.



Fig. 9. Aaron MacLean, *Weight*, assemblage of found objects and paint, 2017.

The wall in my studio and in the art gallery also has a skin, quite literally a coloured skin of paint placed on its structural plane. This painted object (the wall) acts as another body, one with weight and a stable physical presence that plays off of, and magnifies, the provisional and precarious nature of many of the objects that my work entails.

The artist, Sara Sze, further explains the importance of the surface of the wall in relation to the other objects in the installation. She stated:

For me this show is really about the tension of the walls. I heard Kazuo Ohno talk about *butoh* dance, and he said that *butoh* dance was about three spaces. He said it was about the space of the skin, the space below the skin, and the space outside the skin. That was a

really interesting idea to me. He said that these spaces were equally important even though the skin and below the skin are not always what we think of as spaces on the same level as everything exterior to the skin. It readjusts your whole sense of priorities in terms of space. For me this idea of surface...is very interesting (Sze & Chiu 17)

Colour and Time:

As a painter, I have previously spent time studying paintings and looking at the world in terms of a painter's viewfinder – analyzing colour interactions, planar colour shapes, and atmospheric colour relationships, just to name a few. The colour used in my work may already exist on the found object, or it is added later if the colour of the object lacks specificity. The addition of colour is a very important component to my work. An artist who uses colour and objects in a similar fashion to my own work is Jessica Stockholder (see figure 10).



Fig. 10. Jessica Stockholder A-H, 2013, mixed media, 43 x 34 3/8 inches
<https://dailyartfair.com/exhibition/1924/jessica-stockholder-1301pe>

Stockholder states that one of her interests is how colour travels to the viewer in space and time. Time in both its meanings interest me: the actual durational time a colour has lived in the world on a found object (how that has affected its appearance and meaning) as well as the effect colour has as it visually travels from the object to the viewer. An example of this colour-time relationship would be that the closer and more immersed the viewer is to the coloured object the more intense the vibrational experience of the colour. My work seen in an installation setting has many intensities and colours that surround the viewer in order to disarm them (see figure 11). This technique is used to de-stabilize the viewer, to get them to break away from their usual modes of approaching the world which opens them up to having an affective response to the objects.



Fig. 11. Aaron MacLean, Installation View, 2018.

Conclusion

The question for my work is what objects in my immediate world (ones that are at hand) can I put together as succinctly as possible with the addition of paint, or painterly conventions, to convey the feelings of dislocation, rupture and anxiety that I have seen or experienced in my life. The used, the found, and the broken objects express the broken promise of an interconnected, healthy, harmonious world, and the feelings of alienation this self-awareness induces in the individual. My work is an attempt at creating a rupture in the viewer's experience, to allow the viewer to experience a kind of shared understanding.

As O'Sullivan mentions regarding the rupturing possibility of art in his article 'From Aesthetics to the Abstract Machine':

There will in fact always be moments of rupture – irrational points – within life that open us up to something different. However, from another perspective, we might understand these affective ruptures as ruptures in an already ruptured world, as it were. This then is a rupture of the already existing rupture between subject and object, which is to say the production of something 'common' that operates specifically contra alienation. The common notion overcomes the rupture between subject and object and it is this that allows Deleuze to use the former to examine the transcendental conditions of individuation as such, beyond the subject-object determination. (O'Sullivan 198-199)

The indeterminate meaning between the objects in the work helps create the feeling of dislocation, isolation, and anxiety. I do this to de-stabilize the viewer in order to allow for a new heightened awareness of their surroundings, to set the scene for a more affected visual experience in the gallery. This artistic approach is relevant to today's social conditions, as O'Sullivan, in referring to performance art, states that: "Put simply, indeterminacy is the very operating logic of certain objects and practices... Indeed, if the current strategies of fear (and especially the production of a kind of ambient anxiety) are to be countered they need to be met

with something operating with a similar logic and on a similar level, albeit for different ends.”

(O’Sullivan, “From Aesthetics” 202)

In my work, it is important to show the messy details of the process – the organs and bodily fluids of materialism – it is essential for countering the “strategies of fear” that O’Sullivan mentions. The material performative actions that have taken place with the painted objects in my work are not hidden but are self-consciously laid bare for all to see.



Fig. 12. Aaron MacLean, *Post Frame*, assemblage of found objects and paint, 2017.

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