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2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
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A View From One Point to Another, From the Outside Looking Out

Maryanne Casasanta

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The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. –Sol LeWitt (1965)

Maryanne Casasanta is a multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto. In her work she investigates the everyday as a potential point of departure by observing and photographing the objects that surround her home and studio. Before the documentation process takes place the objects are deliberately staged with an almost fetishistic appreciation of these "life artifacts", making them into a sculptural entity of an ephemeral nature (it is likely that the sculptures will only exist once in a particular arrangement, for the sake of the photograph). The objects are then rearranged, rephotographed and thus recontextualized again, in order to maintain an active link to Maryanne's shifting idea of personal space, and her memory.

There is a strong tension between what we see and what is left unsaid, almost as if the viewer arrives at the aftermath of an action. Imagine two bright succulents on a windowsill looking out a foggy winter window, or a parade of household objects arranged according to size on a clean parquet floor, a tropical plant reflection in a small decorative mirror, a seashell enclosing four perfectly peeled pieces of tangerine within its aperture. The objects support and cradle each other. In their placement Maryanne's objects wordlessly reference something other than themselves, almost anthropomorphic, while retaining their "object" quality. There is a sense of inwardness, of the inside looking out, which makes the title of her current exhibition "A View From One Point to Another, From the Outside Looking Out" very curious. Maryanne and I got to chat about it briefly prior to her show.

Can you talk a bit about your everyday work and decision-making process? What was your actual starting point with this project? What is the relationship between the objects you've chosen and how did it evolve? What is the intent of the work?

I believe that it started simply by noticing my bedroom ceiling light. I say noticing because it literally came from a moment of glancing upwards from my position on the bed and really looking at the fixture. I wondered how old it was, where it had come from and how many people had lived under it. By free-associating, I thought of circles, bowls, saucers, ufos. I unscrewed its hardware, removed the light fixture from the ceiling and noticed that when held at a certain angle against light streaming in through the window, that all the lines in the glass produced a beautiful and interesting shadow. In a way,

anything in my apartment that I've felt compelled to shoot typically begins from this place - the act of really looking at an object or objects, finding something subtle and beautiful about them and documenting that through photography as a way to share it with others. I started to see my photos as physical objects and became interested in the notion of a photograph's ability to accurately replace the object featured in that photograph. Through that, I wanted to explore the space between a photograph's identity versus an object's identity and draw a conversation in this reflexivity that mimics a loop in thinking about photos and how we see them. In this way, I'm attempting to facilitate a space that allows more visual information to slip through, while still grounding my practice in my home/studio life and more broadly, art within the common place.

With that in mind, I began this specific project by photographing the light from below and then made a poster from that picture. I hung the poster up in my living room so that I had two versions of the light in two different rooms in my home. This started a conversation in my head about a photograph, an object, a photographic object such as a poster and the relationship between those things. I wondered what form of representation took precedence and if they were competing with each other. I thought about the object's transition from a private to a public space and how that might displace its usual function and if it became more interesting or less interesting. If the photograph could replace the object or vice versa. I also wondered how viewers would receive these options and what position they would take. I was undecided myself and thought that it would be interesting to see a few different examples of one thing on the same wall - thus informing this window installation. There are 3 different photographs of three different angles or perspectives of the ceiling light, a found circular material that is almost exactly the same dimensions as the light fixture, along with the fixture itself and its components mounted to the wall.

You've mentioned earlier that one of the questions you're struggling with is the "ultimate goal" of the art object, whether it is the object itself or its image (documentation). That is interesting because one of the things you first learn as an artist is to document everything you do. As if without documentation the work doesn't exist. Someone told me recently about trying to put together a catalogue retrospective of an eighty year old artist's works on paper but failing to do so because most of it was undocumented and unaccounted for (sold). And yet the artist continued to produce more, unaffected. And then there's your work, which exists almost solely through documentation. How does this affect the "ultimate goal" in your eyes? Is that why the urge to represent all aspects of the work in the show? Is there ever an "end product" in your practice?

The question I most often get is if my work is photography or a form of documentation of an object, performance or installation. To me, there is no clear answer to that and in many ways, no difference. It just comes down to semantics. I'm personally really amused by this conundrum and like to keep that decision unfixed or ambiguous. I guess my ultimate goal is not to have an ultimate goal. Indeed, I believe this is why I wanted to present a few different perspectives for this project. I prefer to not have an end or a beginning, rather a flexible bouncing of possibilities that remain in flux.

I see self reflexivity and humour in many of your recent images. Is this something you intend to do? Do you think humour is necessary when dealing with objects or is it incidental in your work? There's a fine line between heaviness and pure entertainment when dealing with found objects and I find that generally no one wants to be too heavy. How do you balance the two?

I think the humorous element is incidental, but I am aware that it's surfacing in some viewer's readings of the work. Having said that, I've now become more and more conscious of humour in art and am slyly utilizing it as a strategy for precisely the reason you pointed out, wanting the work to be taken seriously, but not too seriously. I think I'm attempting that balance by taking what I hope is an interesting photograph and presenting it, either alone or in the context of other elements in a relaxed but settled manner.

Because your images are of the everyday they seem seductive and banal - at first. But your work is heavily curated. There is obvious intent behind each grouping. Do you find yourself more self conscious or careful in your decisions and work process because you wish to separate yourself from the abundance of "banal" imagery online (cell phone photos, instagram) or do you think it's something that should be embraced?

Both, very equally. There are a lot of contemporary photographers and artists working with banal or provisional materials, I don't like to see my art practice in competition with that, rather have it exist in conversation with their work. Because cell phone photography really mimics the way that I take pictures - immediate and spontaneous, I've actually begun to produce medium sized prints from my phone as a way to embrace the movement and incorporate it as a contemporary dialogue in my practice.

I've known you for many years and can easily recognize your aesthetic at this point. It's sort of contemplative and quiet and seems to touch every aspect of your life. Do you find that your life is influenced by your aesthetic or is your aesthetic influenced by your life? What are the main references in your work (anything, life, music, space, time of day)?

It would be difficult for me to separate my art aesthetic from my "life" aesthetic so to speak. I think each year that I grow older, my tastes, influences and decisions become so much more refined that they begin to overlap and blend. I'm very influenced by music and slowly that is becoming more and more apparent in my art practice. My work has often been described as "quiet", "chill" and "intimate" which could easily describe some of my literary, film or music tastes or even the kinds of conversations and connections that I relish and yearn for in others and which ultimately feeds into my art work.

— Yuula Benivolski