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### **Non-Functional Objects in Space**

Georgina Lee Walker

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*“ Our own era... seems to be that of space. We are in the age of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered. A period in which, in my view, the world is putting itself to the test, not so much as a great way of life destined to grow in time but as a net that links points together and creates its own muddle.” – Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias**

Amongst the many aesthetic triumphs that design and construction have achieved, the materials that they employ have little to say on their own. The concrete slab has never been seen to amount to anything more than a means to an end.

Construction sites are a disruption in the eyes of our everyday lives. They give the passerby the sensation of a project unfinished, a visual upheaval that seems dangerous and raw. Piles of scrap metal and broken stone heaped on top of each other are kept separate from the common pedestrian, as construction work signs redirect ones path away from the site. We are told these heaps of material are not only a disruption in our visual field, but should be avoided physically as well. We develop different relationships to different spaces based on the ways that we are socialized to use them. Here we understand that spaces in construction are in progress, liminal spaces that are not meant for use until construction is completed. Georgina Lee Walker’s window installation *Non Functional Objects In Space* addresses the understated concern that what makes a material function is not only its physical qualities, but the relationship between the material and the environment it is placed in.

Materials that are associated with construction have a generous capacity to influence space. They contain an understanding of human intervention that is present, but also in transit. *Non-Functional Objects in Space* aims to explore the issues surrounding the categorization construction sites as transitory spaces, and the artist's understanding of them.

For Walker construction brings to mind the idea of half up- half down assemblage. Assembled as well as disassembled. This ambiguous suggestion of transformation in progress allows for the collapse of space, where the building site gestures at the possibility for a completed space in the future, while also inhabiting the unfinished quality of a site under construction. Traditionally, when a dwelling lacks completion, we forsake the possibility of becoming attached to it, since we do not see ourselves as belonging to it. However, Georgina Lee Walker's installation gives the viewer permission to become attached to the space based on aesthetic principles, rather than functional capability. Walker approaches the scene from a painterly perspective, by arranging and rearranging her hand made renditions of cinder blocks, sheet metal, and other construction materials until they have left the realm of a creative destruction, and instead have become a disruptive innovation.

In this way, the space the artist creates allows us to negotiate within ourselves our own personal boundaries of habitation and belonging.

By hand, Walker recreates the forms of cinder blocks, i-beams, caution tape and sheet metal in her reconstruction of a delicate scene. The Materials aestheticized in Walker's installation are for the most part commonly associated with detritus, meaning the left-over, or excess. When we consider habitable spaces we traditionally find these leftover materials make the space unlivable, and as a result they are never seen as prized or sacred. For Walker, the detritus of the site is what makes up the landscape. It is not the decay of the space that she romanticizes, but instead the dynamic that the material creates with the space arouses the viewer's excitement. Having previously worked in the actual, physical labor of construction, Walker is familiar with the experience of preparing and handling each component that makes up the installation firsthand.

In efforts to stay true to the temporary nature of the original source, Walker creates her casts with paper maché. Rather than attempting to paint the essence of construction using archival materials, she has purposefully chosen a non-archival format. At the same time, she challenges the notion that the materials she uses are not precious, by her constant experimentation with their form. As iterations of the objects are more easily produced, she imagines the possibilities of the space without being confined to physical limitations. A crushed i-beam, the graceful arc of barrier fencing draped over the entirety of the installation, there is a loss of purpose to the original visceral meaning of the shape. The final element used to derail our understanding of these newly rendered construction materials is through their immediate visual impact. Walker paints the objects with soft pastel hues to amplify an implied invitation to the space. Using gentle pinks, blues and greens she reflects on the psychological nature of the space, overpowering the presence of reason. Deconstructing the inherent intention of the object, these new ruins defy by being estranged from their native purpose. Stripped of their function, the materials become re-imagined as art objects, valued for their aesthetic and formal qualities.

-Inez Genereux