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Extensions

Carolyn Code

November 21—December 19, 2014

“Chests, especially small caskets...are objects *that may be opened*. When a casket is closed, it is returned to the general community of objects; it takes place in exterior space.” Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*¹

For her exhibition, *Extensions*, Carolyn Code has cement-cast twelve clasped purses into pure exteriority, closing off the possibility of interiority. As indivisible, impenetrable units, the purses withhold the intimacy of the inner compartment: their very fullness barring interior content. Unlike Gaston Bachelard’s chests or caskets, which are hard-edged, stationary vessels tasked with the preservation of valuables, the purse is a more flexible membrane that acts as convoy to an ever-changing miscellany of objects. Purses are implicated in a daily economy of circulation, and are fittingly the storage places of the currency that enables our entry into the marketplace. However, Code’s purses undermine their referent’s characteristic malleability through materiality. As to-scale, earth-bound, solid masses of concrete—playfully resolute in their immobility—the weight of their cement bodies untethers them from mobilized human companionship. Emptied of wallets, change purses, notebooks, keys, pens, snacks, pills, lipsticks, phones or any object they might hold in our daily travels, the bags are further absolved of the human subject. They no longer belong to the individual, and, so, no longer serve as a model for the organization of our inner lives in the way that Bachelard’s “objects that may be opened” do. They are envelopes become content. They are solid surface.

Moored in staggered groupings that eschew a sense of linear arrangement, Code’s sculptures are displayed in a way that is reminiscent of the splayed out contents of a bag

¹ Gaston Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. pg. 85.

² Michael Thompson, “Rubbish Theory: the creation and destruction of value” in

accidentally dropped and subsequently nudged into formation. In addition to the purses, *Extensions* also features a series of abstracted, imagined-tool-forms composed variously of wood, metal, and plastic, nailed to the wall like a Home Hardware tool organization board gone rogue. Code's vertically suspended hooks, pokers, wires, blades, knobs and scrapers, dangle in a loose cloud formation opposing the thoroughly earth-bound quality of her purse sculptures. Making a similar ascent up the wall are tufted, pale-blue triangular sections of upholstery finished in dark wooden trim. As hostile, pointed structures of upholstery and wood, these works prohibit their expected function as a resting place for the body. Code further distances the human occupant by mounting the upholstery on the wall.

Each series of sculptures in *Extensions* overturns the objects' conventional relationship with fixity and transience. Code pushes the form of her sculptures just outside of functionality, so that the objects function in the realm of symbolism. While Code's purse sculptures have been cast from a variety of molds, the assortment of forms is homogenized by the artist's standard use of concrete sometimes punctuated with metal chain as a strap. A similar flattening of difference is carried out by the tool sculptures, which formed from a limited range of shared media, appear as variations on one another. The strategy of standardization is further played out in the unvarying use of blue upholstery and in the show's cluster of brushed metal cans hand-stitched with unifying floral insignia.

Where Code's concrete handbags are carefully divested of inner space so that they *cannot* be opened up, the entire conceit of *Extensions* is premised on a kind of opening up. *Extensions* reimagines the shelves, drawers, closets, cabinets and other interiorities that constitute storage spaces as, in Code's words, "accidental cabinets of curiosities". Here the physical architecture of the cabinet has fallen away, so that the objects begin to drift impossibly across the wall. The garage pegboard has been replaced by the gallery wall and an assortment of objects which have forfeited the intimacy of human contact now belong to the theater of window display. Perhaps we might also conceive of the floating upholstery and tool sculptures—those hooks, chains, blades and points—as the objects that would spill out from the cement and chain purses.

Extensions is keenly interested in exploring economies of valuation, particularly as informed by Michael Thompson's 1979 *Rubbish Theory*—an idiosyncratic text that theorizes the process whereby the value of “things” is continually created and destroyed. Thompson presents a conception of cyclic temporality linked to the objects' fluctuations in value. He posits,

“When we take stock of our world, we are very selective; we only include those items that are of value—anything that has no value is excluded...Those objects that we include fall into two categories: those that increase in value over time (the *durable*) and those that decrease in value over time (the *transient*)...A transient object, declining in value, can sink into rubbish and then some later date be discovered by some creative individual and transferred to durability.”²

Since the deterioration of an object can be tempered by maintenance, the transient object relies upon intervention, notably, as Thompson's explication of his theory states: “by some creative individual”. *Rubbish Theory* is premised on the economy of objects, wherein the possession of objects has moral implications for the human owner. Thompson notes, “those who own and control durable objects enjoy more power and prestige than those who live entirely in a world of transience or, worse still, a world of rubbish”.³ If we consider the nature of the storage space from which the objects in this show have been drawn—one where empty cans intermingle with impractical tools and inaccessible bags—Code's selection of objects, which she recasts in cement, metal, wood and plastic, ostensibly originate from the category of “transient” or “rubbish”. Overturning their inherited constitutions of mobility/immobility through materiality and spatial orientation, Code's process simultaneously enacts *Rubbish Theory*'s economy, transferring the objects from the categories of rubbish or transient to durable. The act of creating and reframing these objects as art objects ushers them into a new realm of circulation.

- Shannon Garden-Smith

² Michael Thompson, “Rubbish Theory: the creation and destruction of value” in *Encounter*, United Kingdom, 1979. pg. 12.

³ Michael Thompson, “Rubbish Theory: the creation and destruction of value” in *Encounter*, United Kingdom, 1979. pg. 18.

