

LVL3

Artist of the Week: Katy Cowan

Katy Cowan lives and works in Los Angeles. She is currently in her second year of graduate school at Otis College of Art.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

I work with a variety of different materials and processes, used accordingly with what I am trying to communicate and where that communication takes place. Constructing (versus deconstructing), labor, subverting notions of craft, expanding boundaries, questioning viewer assumption, and economy in making are some of the ideas I am working with – those ideas are addressed per situation in display, by working with the semiotic characteristics of varying materials, in how much or little time I spend making, and by physically involving the viewer. I am completely interested in breaking down barriers of categorization but that doesn't mean the work is undefined – markers of painting, sculpture, photography, display and installation are totally evident, but I think it is important to weave in between those terms. By creating a dialectic between mis-categorization and categorization, my works speak about the 'temporal' and the 'concrete' –



What materials do you use in your work and what is your process like?

Following this train of thought of the temporal and the concrete, I find this to be an interesting approach when speaking about brevity in tandem with physical density. I am also interested in using very cheap materials because I think a lot can be said with very little. The majority of the works right now are composed with bedsheets and concrete, mylar sticker mirror and bricks, and fabric dyes and poplar wood. The materials in the studio bleed into one another and forms re-appear all over different works - kind of like re-appearing characters. For example, bricks that were used in a sunprint, are later mortared into a free-standing sculptural block, and then re-cast as a new brick.

To illustrate a couple of my processes, I am in the thick of two different ones right now – those of photograms composed on bedsheets, and concrete forms embedded and imprinted while drying. Both of these processes involve the materials solidifying from a wet state into something hard or fixed, and both offer a small window of time for manipulation or composition to occur (about 5-10 minutes). The works composed on bedsheets are painted with a sun-sensitive dye - so I am essentially making very quick photograms/photocopies of objects and struggling with and against the properties of this process. The concrete works are all poured into molds and are amalgamations of materials and traces of other forms. The rest of the materials listed are pretty self-explanatory and all reside in a language of construction. The act of constructing versus just speaking about construction materials is huge – and my decisions in how I handle these materials allows their referent to hide a little. In the photograms, I choose only tools that are unrecognizable for their purpose when printed – i.e. the level becomes a bar, versus a hammer which could only read as a hammer; the concrete works meld all remnants of the studio, act as a marking block for forms used in other works, and have quick gestures of color from fabric dye.



How has your work developed within the past year?

By placing a less central emphasis on my sentimental attachment to the objects own personal labor, my work has been stripped down a lot, loosened up, gained some humor, and is made much quicker. Because of this, I can involve myself with a larger conversation.

What kinds of things are influencing your work right now?

Funky bricks, mortar, circus mirrors, the sun, the beach boys, palm fronds, sand, crowbars, trowels, levels, string, the fabric district, vacant desert, cacti arms, hummus, sleeping, loving, reading, eating, working, running, silencing, fumes, garages, Lowe's, deciding, wrapping, stones, dogs, beer, the woodshop, blood oranges, and plastic.



What are you really excited about right now?

I am (probably) way too excited about circus mirrors, walking on top of my artwork, making objects that physically hide themselves in spaces, and listening to lite jazz radio in Los Angeles traffic jams.

What are some recent, upcoming or current projects you are working on?

Right now I am working through some ideas about display and scale. I had this (actually really obvious) revelation that scale could be translated to multiples instead of just bigger. I have no interest in creating big objects as I think that solution is too fixed in a Minimalist conversation, and equally too obvious of an answer. So, I am at work casting tons of dyed, embedded and imprinted concrete bricks – to make a huge brick pile like those found near a building recently torn down.



What's your favorite thing about LA?

Well I moved from the Midwest, so the obvious answer would be the weather. But something that I really enjoy about living in LA is the ability—or maybe better said because of the extreme emphasis on movies and set design—the expansion of what I think I can actually make. For example, there are five prop shops and an amazing special effects store in my neighborhood, so the possibilities have changed for my work. I am working with different modes of exposing ideas about truths, illusions, and accessibility so having this outlook has done great things for my work.

What's your absolute favorite place in the LA?

Favorite place in the city right now is actually out of the city - either in the middle of Joshua Tree or sitting on this windy ridge over the ocean at a spot called Point Dume.



What do you do when you're not working on art?

Thinking about art, talking with my husband about his writing, cooking long meals and drinking nerdy craft beer, driving myself and my neighbor to school, and bowling.

If you were a drink, what kind of drink would you be and why?

Chocolate milk or Coconut LaCroix – even though I don't drink either.

