

A conversation with Adam Thompson
Vincent Honoré

Your new project at MOT International marks a somewhat important change in your practice. Your works (installations, sculptures) mainly focused on using what Dean Kenning had called "rescued residues". However, in this project, one of the four works displayed (Untitled (Components & Variables)), probably the most significant in the exhibition as you placed it so the visitor faces it when entering the gallery, includes a totally and carefully crafted model of a NASA telescope. To my knowledge, it's the first time one of your installations is incorporating so obviously an object entirely crafted by you, and moreover, a realist model of an existing architecture. So, could you explain what is the story of this telescope and why it was important to recreate a model of it?

I first discovered an image of the object on an obscure Japanese website that archives a range of astral instruments and equipment. I was immediately drawn to such a weird and oblique form. It took a while before finding it to be a telescope used on a satellite during the late 70's and, now unoperational, is still circumnavigating the globe as space waste. In this sense, it carries with it the obsolescence and redundancy of much of the found objects I've been incorporating previously.

Not knowing its true scale and working from one image, making it was very much an experiment. NASA objects like this don't care for aesthetics and design which seemed to make the perfect sculpture in my mind, but making it brought these issues up to be problematic. I attempted to reconstruct the form as closely as possible, like making an Airfix model, in a way decisions were made for me. I made a few versions at different sizes and then selected one specifically for the space and installation at MOT International. Despite making it I still look at it as a found object, I'm wary of calling it Sculpture and placed it alongside another found object (broken plasma screen) as one work, in an attempt to draw a tension across the different materials and associations. Once the piece was installed then the different components created a situation, beginning a conversation that resonated, albeit in a kind of broken language or dialect with the other works in the show.



Untitled (Components & Variables) (revision), 2010, Scaled model of Ice One (Satellite telescope), broken 42" plasma screen.

This object does not then contradict what you called, in the conversation we had when visiting your show, a « phobia to create objects »?

Phobia may be too strong a word but i certainly hesitate, dwindle and distance myself from hands on making. I'm not adhering my practice to the dematerialisation of conceptualism, I want to engage with materiality and it feels more natural for me to work with what is already in the world, shifting and gathering material that crosses my path. The weight of everyday stuff around me hangs heavy and I see little interest in adding to it, preferring to

keep my intervention to a minimum. Having said this, it's not a rule; I do make things from scratch, in part to contradict myself. The ambivalence between the constructed and the found is important to me, in a way to nullify the differences, superseding my choices with that of chance, questioning control and the legitimacy of the accident on some level, dissolving my will.

I'd like you to explain the title of your series, *The Thanatosis of Objects*, and what it implies as an artist, especially in the light of the « dissolving of your will ».

This is a series in early development that is solely reliant on found objects, the series develops an ongoing collection of parts installed together in dialogue. A slight and fragile equilibrium holds together elements, usually installed in a dumb, disparate manner, I want them to appear like unauthored compositions, rendered by gravity and awkward balance. Thematically and formally, these works read as arrays of possibilities, where styles and subjects are collected and examined as if specimens. Taking this characteristic, the objects appear from a method of archaeology, a practice of collecting and archiving found objects. Things that were eminently useful in the world are constantly being interred as waste. Every single day a new batch of materials methodically emerges from the black hole of modern times into the light of such archaeological or artistic research. We often use the truism "out of sight, out of mind", concerning waste, but in reality it is in sight everywhere. Like animals in thanatosis, objects lay evading unwelcome attention.



Untitled (Installation part of *The Thanatosis of Objects* series), 2009., Concrete, screen print suction plate, aluminum globe. Dimensions variable. MOT International Gallery, London

(From the Greek noun meaning 'putting to death', thanatosis, is the process by which an animal feigns death in order to avoid attack, form of camouflage or mimicry in which the "mimic" imitates itself in a dead state such that the animals' life hinges on the pursuer becoming unresponsive to its victim).

Applying this concept, the material and immaterial logic of this theatre makes available philosophical insight into the relationship between objects, language and perception. My material begins to operate as phenomenological staging grounds which are highly tuned to their surrounding architectural spaces. The writing of Graham Harman has resonated this idea for me, he asks us to stop being concerned about what an object means for us, and consider the object itself, the way its constructed and constituted by our minds, alluring in its partial opacity. He calls his work 'weird realism', and wants to attune us to the incongruity of objects once they are liberated from

common sense's somnambulant gaze. In this sense, the series could be seen as a kind of 'weird realism', levitating objects from their state of thanatosis in order to scrutinize even the mundane of object relations.

Despite the works phenomenological and philosophical associations, a central polemic is also, arguably, to challenge the terms of creativity. In a sense, there is not anything new here. It's an unassuming process of collecting and composing found objects like the archaeologist. Simple composition of what already exists. Nothing is transformed. This points to a broader conversation about creativity and the creative behaviour of critical art today, when the consumer/subject faces constant and unrelenting injunctions to be creative, I want this deskilling to push the question of the importance of invention as a requirement of the artwork's agency.



Untitled (Proposal for an Eclipse), 2009. Found brass and porcelain. 18 x 12 cm

This points to collection versus production (although your installation are not made of ready-made per se, understood as a Duchampian prerogative. Indeed, you carefully select the objects and materials whereas Duchamp claimed not to select his objects, and you alter them). In his essay « Sculpture as Recollection », Benjamin H. D. Buchloh writes, addressing Gabriel Orozco's Penske Project (1998) « the semblance of being attached to that which has passed, to that which has become dysfunctional, to the exhausted object, bespeaks – at least within sculptural propositions – a sudden turn. It signals resistance against the destruction of the object, solidarity with matter and memory itself. » Your practice goes beyond the object and its material, it also points to a memory of forms: minimalism with the basic forms (sphere, rectangle) and their positioning in the gallery (directly on the floor), the post-minimalism with the perversion of the forms themselves (the violence sometimes attached to them: broken spheres, for instance), the land art, etc. A memory of forms that is at stake in a number of sculptural or semi-sculptural practices of artists of your generation (Oscar Tuazon, Cyprien Gaillard, Raphaël Zarka, Karla Black to name a few). But your work addresses more frontally the traditional genre of the landscape: what is your relationship with the landscape as a tradition?

It's tempting to say the idea of landscape is a thread that runs through all my work, not necessarily as a scene but as a contingent space to move through in time. In much of my earlier work references were more obvious within a dialogue between nature and the built environment but now it's hinged more delicately.

Landscape for me simultaneously combines intimate proximity and irreducible distance, no beginning, no end. Some things known but all ultimately unknown. It's this otherness of being within landscape that still interests me, the horror of the cosmos for example, philosophical questions of metaphysics and materialism, non-human worlds, the decentering of the subject. The correlations between man and the meaning of 'nature', particularly as a primitive or 'wild' state in opposition to human 'culture', still, despite its ageing traditions, seems ever fertile ground in our era that is scientifically dematerialised and saturated with trauma.

I do tend to use a basic structure of framing landscape that is essentially referential toward the traditions and movements you mention but I'm more interested in a philosophical questioning towards landscape and our human comprehension of it than in deciphering and distilling its art historical underpinnings, or at least, I try a juggling of the two.

Some of your installation's fragments or materials - possibly taken from construction sites - reference to the architectural dimension of sculpture and the sculptural dimension of architecture. What's your relationship with the sculpture's problematic in architecture?

My materials arrive from a variety of locations and sources. Some from construction sites yes, others from skips or the back of a factory, some from friends, some stolen. There is no logic or conceptual code for inclusion or exclusion, more an essence or relationship of a given time.

I think the relationship between the objects, architecture and space is paramount. I rarely complete work in the studio, it's only when installing in the gallery when decisions and space collide that the work draws to a close. The studio for me is a contingent space for objects and ideas to develop relationships but this always changes once moved into a different space.

This problematic is exemplified by my upcoming project for Showreel, the space is very particular, a small shop window, framed by a beautiful facade, it acts like a frame within a frame, much like my work. I generally like work to be navigated spatially but this doesn't allow this, screened off and sovereign the space develops a new set of issues for me. As yet, and until I visit the site, it's impossible to select the work. I have a couple of suitcases of materials to take for installing, so on arrival the work starts.

*

January 2010

VINCENT HONORÉ is an independent curator based in Paris and London. He is, since its creation, the Artistic Director and Head of the Collection of the David Roberts Art Foundation, in charge of the artistic programmes (exhibitions, studios and residencies), the collection's orientations and the Foundation's developments as a production unit and a critical platform for artistic dialogues. Prior to taking up his role with the Foundation, he was a curator at Palais de Tokyo - Site de Création Contemporaine in Paris where he worked with Nicolas Bourriaud (GNS, Play List, etc) and at Tate Modern where he worked on exhibitions such as Jeff Wall, Catherine Sullivan, Pierre Huyghe, Carsten Holler, Louise Bourgeois and Learn to Read. He has been commissioned as a guest curator on a range of projects including most recently Proposal (Nacht Und Träume) for Stavanger at Gallerie Opdahl, Norway, Past Forward at 176, the Zabłudowicz Collection and From a Distance at Wallspace Gallery in New York.

SHOWREELPROJECT.com, is a project curated by Paola Caravati with the aim to present for the first time in Italy the work of 5 young international artists. After the show of Teresa Gillespie (september 2009) and Alice Channer (december 2009) the project will present the research of Adam Thompson (february 2010), Sinta Werner (march 2010) and Emily Speed (may 2010). For more info: www.showreelproject.com // info@showreelproject.com