

GLASSCHORD

Art & Culture Magazine

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Secondary Structures by Michael Zelehoski

Glasschord Editor Noah Post interviews with Michael Zelehoski:

Noah Post: Hi Michael, I just came from your solo exhibition at the DODGE Gallery on Rivington Street. A great Show! It looks like you had a good time in the studio last year. Can you share a brief explanation of your process?

Michael Zelehoski: Like a lot of what we think of as representational art, I'm basically rendering the three-dimensional objects in pictorial space. I'm just doing it in a very literal way and whereas the whole point of Magritte's pipe was that it wasn't, it's important to me that these objects continue to be what they are even when collapsed in space. I deconstruct found, mostly utilitarian objects and rebuild them two-dimensionally. I fill the negative space with cut wood creating a picture plane that incorporates the actual object.



NP: How has working in Beacon, NY contributed to your work?

Beacon is great, just close enough (and far enough away) from the city. There's a good community of artists and space is relatively cheap. Changes of context are always productive but I think I might stick with this one for a while.

NP: The pieces in your show at DODGE are an interesting expansion from the series at Christina Ray Gallery in 2010. Those were more about recreating an object – a chair or table, for example. The new work is walking the line between the objective and the subjective. How has the push towards abstraction opened up your style?

MZ: Every step in the process of collapsing an object is necessarily fragmented and abstract – except the last one. It was important for me to get to the point technically where I could distill an object in pictorial space and have it appear



to be dimensional. Now I'm much more interested in the process of collapse and how our brains struggle to complete a composition that is contradictory or somehow unresolved. That's what I do all day in the studio and I hope it's an experience that's shared by the viewer.

NP: The Ammo Box Series is an interesting example. This trio of Flattened portraits share meaning and tonality, but each have cool, unique compositions. Where did you find these boxes, and how did you go about making these?

MZ: The Ammo Boxes are a good example of what I'm talking about. They could be flying apart or coming together



but I think that they are more active and productive on the level of our experience than a simple four-sided reminder of what a box looks like. At the same time, their condition as ammo boxes is implicit in their very materiality, their color, every mark on their surfaces. I found them at a shop off of I-90 in Nebraska. I'm still using a number of them to store hardware in my shop. I always look for prototypical utilitarian objects, but sometimes they're too successful in that capacity, too useful to make into art.

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NP: It is interesting to dismantle an object, and then try to figure out a two-dimensional way of reassembling it. You create difficult, aesthetic puzzles for yourself. Have intricacy and collage always been a part of your process?

MZ: The work I'm doing now can be traced back from three-dimensional installations incorporating found objects to my clumsy first attempts at forcing them into pictorial space. Before that I played with Legos. Collage, for me, sort of misses the point. In real space nothing is ever static or resolved. Our perceptions of things change as our relation to them changes. There is a staggering level of inherent complexity and the challenge becomes how to express it simply and effectively. Still working on that one.

NP: Considering that the Glasschord subscribers are seeing the images on a computer screen, it is important that we really emphasize how completely flat (level) these assemblages are. Every tone is a different cut of inlaid wood. There is an illusion of depth here that you take very seriously. "Crate" is a perfect example of this. What differentiates "Crate" from the rest of the Secondary Structures Show?



MZ: Crate is probably the most ambitious piece in the show – I had to get a new sliding attachment for my table saw to cut the large angles. It's also the first of these pieces that were actually found in the neighborhood, less than a block from the gallery. It's interesting for me to try to create an illusion of depth while simultaneously undermining that illusion. It's an amazing exercise. My rational mind recoils.

NP: Focusing on the negative space, in and around an object, can be an interesting exercise when making an artwork. In your show, each piece shows a unique relationship between the found wood and the surrounding painted surface. Is "Balance" a key element to your work?



MZ: Balance and a lack thereof. Duality certainly, between two and three dimensions, between sculpture and painting, the object and the representation. The background is the continuation of the picture plane, what seals the found object within the realm of art. There is a certain balance, a certain symmetry that though I embrace it in some cases and undermine it in others, ultimately reaffirms my humble appropriations as objects of aesthetic value.

NP: And what about "Intent"?

MZ: Intent is a difficult thing to prove. In my case it's what drives me to work with an object and ostensibly toward a certain result but objects have their own intentions and in most cases either we compromise or one of us gets hurt. The impulse is key but so is letting go of it. Some of my best ideas have come about unintentionally.