

METRO ARTS // EXHIBITION PROGRAM



***THE REMAINDER***  
**SUSAN HAWKINS**  
10 - 27 MAY 2017

# I, OBJECT

By Kate Woodcroft

The things in this show might have come from a home, a school, a factory, an overgrown junkyard or a high-end interior design showroom. Some things I cannot place. This grouping conflates domestic, commercial and industrial domains. It suggests the pervasive coincidence of old and new, part and whole, idle and operative. The works in *The Remainder* hit us in two places: first at an uncanny, corporeal register evoked by the partially organic or anthropomorphic properties of the materials; second as a comment on the troubling consequences of our attitude toward things that we deem inhuman. A century after the exhibition of the first readymade,<sup>1</sup> Hawkins' work made me wonder: What are the relationships between industry, desire, domesticity, and art's interdependence with capitalist production, networks and distribution today?

Before my research for this essay I might have said that the pithiness of the early readymades seemed to put a cap on the political potential of art objects. Suddenly dead end questions like 'what is art?' and 'what is an artist?' seemed to override more nuanced assessments about our attitude toward objects. More careful theorists than I have considered this problem. Helen Molesworth, picking up from Benjamin Buchloh, writes, "We cannot purely relegate the import of the readymade to the linguistic, for then 'we run the risk of deny(ing) the implicit political dimension of this radical decentralization of the subject'".<sup>2</sup> In denying the expressive and masterful hand of the artist, the readymade does not just mock the practice of art for the sake of it. It does so in order to point toward art's co-constitution with other capitalist institutions<sup>3</sup> (the production of most art works begins with the act of shopping) and to shift our attention away from the artist and toward the agency and circulation of materials and things. The things in this exhibition, in the tradition of the readymade, help to de-centre ourselves and consider the breadth of what we can and can't know about the material world.

The first work in the show is (made of) large satellite covers fastened together and wedged into the entrance to the first gallery. This work signals the extreme geographical reach of our material footprint.<sup>4</sup> It also blocks our way. Twice. We cannot enter the doorway and much of the work's volume is not visible. The work deflects us and contains a universe of its own. This resistance is suggested elsewhere in the show too, beautifully so in a dressing table mirror facing the wall. These works leave us out in the cold.

But not all of the objects in this show are so unapproachable. The series of circular lights and gold metallic Perspex mirrors light us up and reflect us.

They suggest the exhibition as the set of a gilded life, a perfect photo opportunity. Are we the objects in this scenario? These works are in the austere style of many of Hawkins' other found objects but have been manufactured specifically for this exhibition. This prompts me to relate the niggling persistence of the handmade process in the history of readymades. Long after their original appropriation some of Duchamp's readymades needed to be reproduced by hand (to exacting specifications!) as they were longer produced industrially. Similarly, barring Hawkins' disclosure, I'm not sure I would know what was found and what was made for this show.

The kinetic components of this show summon a dystopic foreboding. One work comprises a number of bone-like cabriole<sup>5</sup> timber legs suspended together from the ceiling, each attached by a long strip of woven black cable sleeve, knock softly in a breeze produced by a large industrial fan. The beating heart of the show is a pair of roughly carved drumsticks swinging at a suspended snare drum originally played by Hawkins' grandfather. The drum is a powerful nexus for many of Hawkins' concerns. It marks the passing of time and asserts that we march to a rhythm beyond our control. Depending on your philosophy this might disturb or comfort, for it suggests the idea that we do not have a monopoly on aliveness.

Hawkins moves not toward a rejection of the consumption of materials necessarily but toward a deeper materialism. We are asked "not to leave the exhibition with a gaze that can see art in everything, but to use the exhibition to see commodities [things] as they really are, as imbued with their own language, interests and will".<sup>6</sup> She does this by expertly drawing on our tendencies to relate to what is anthropomorphic and by creating a place in which we are alternately consumed and reflected, a place of austerity and subtle resplendence where we can lose ourselves in a world of everything.

1. Readymades are a genre of sculpture designated by the French artist Marcel Duchamp and exemplified by his work *Fountain*, an industrially manufactured porcelain urinal first displayed in New York in 1917.

2. Molesworth, H. "At Home with Duchamp: Readymades and Domesticity" (PhD Thesis, Cornell University 1998) [Ann Arbor, MI : UMI Dissertation Services, 2005], p40

3. *Ibid.*, p6

4. Most satellites orbit at around 36,000 kilometres above the earth's surface. As with other land-based infrastructure the lifespan of a satellite is limited. They are eventually decommissioned due to damage or obsolescence. According to NASA there are over 500 000 pieces of space junk currently tracked to avoid collision with functioning equipment. "Space Debris and Human Spacecraft" NASA, Accessed April 25, 2017.

[https://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/station/news/orbital\\_debris.html](https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/news/orbital_debris.html)

5. A cabriole leg is furniture leg typical of Louis XV, Queen Anne and Chippendale furniture. The basis of its design was the emulation of the legs certain four-footed mammals. The term derives from the French 'cabrioler', meaning to leap like a goat.

6. Simon, J. "Neo-Materialism, Part Two: The Unreadymade" e-flux Journal Issue 23 (March 2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/23/67825/neo-materialism-part-two-the-unreadymade/> Accessed April 24, 2017.

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## IMAGE CREDITS

Cover / Susan Hawkins, *The Remainder* (exhibition installation image), 2017.

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