

**Dominic Palarchio**  
**9 July–13 August 2022**  
**3619 Walton Avenue, Cleveland**

A lemon is sour by nature. It's acidic and corrosive; a shapeshifting ingredient that can also, famously, sweeten up if one simply decides to make lemonade. A "lemon" can also be a useless waste of money, specifically a car that breaks down immediately after purchase. Corrosion—of everyday materials like the automobile, machines, tools, and domestic necessities, as well as the body and psyche—is recurrent subject matter for artist Dominic Palarchio. Break-down is visible on the surface of his sculptures. Less visible, but essential to his work, are the home-spun remedies to disrepair, which Palarchio foregrounds both materially and conceptually. He works through an object-oriented approach, with pieces made of pipes, dried gourds, car neon ("underglow"), and the like. Palarchio uses the assembly of things, gallery placement, and predetermined socioeconomic positionings to foreground relations of class and labor in his broader artistic practice.

## Main Gallery

*Untitled, 2022*

Gourd, coconut

18 x 7 x 7 in (46 x 18 x 18 cm)

*Untitled, 2022*

Meter, urethane

27 x 11.5 x 7.5 in (69 x 29 x 19 cm)

*Untitled, 2018*

Key Chains

88 x 3Ø in (224 x 8Ø cm)

*Untitled, 2020*

Curb key, plates

24 x 9 x 2 in (61 x 23 x 5 cm)

*Untitled, 2022*

Insulation

108 x 48 x 1 in (274 x 122 x 3 cm)

*Untitled, 2022*

Gourd, glasses

7 x 7 x 6 in (18 x 18 x 15 cm)

*Untitled, 2022*

Radiators

10Ø x 23 inches (25Ø x 58 cm)

As with much of Palarchio's work, his "lemon" is a floor sculpture with a metallic flavor. It's cylindrical, sleek and shiny, and made of broken aluminum car radiators. The radiators are first modeled by the artist, stacked on top of each other to make one composite block, then carved, ground away slowly using metal on metal until eventually it reaches a smooth, lemon-like form. The material has been mangled, formed through its own abrasion, but it's also resilient. As much as it's ripped apart, the surface mends itself like scar tissue.

There are plenty of lemons that aren't able to repair themselves though, lemons that don't make it to the innovative kind of fix that Palarchio is interested in. In the gallery, dozens of abandoned car keys hang in a strand. The collection accumulated at Palarchio's auto shop, a family business that taught the artist the ins and outs of mechanical repair and the influence of Millennium-era car culture. After decades of business in and around Detroit, the shop amassed countless unretrieved vehicles, the cost of repair too steep to justify keeping the car. These cars were probably lemons, buffed up, purchased for a superficial deal, then abandoned at the shop in worthless disrepair. Metal was scrapped, broken down and compressed or repurposed by Palarchio, as with the radiators. But letting go of a key is an impossibility. A key in hand represents the promise of mobility in America's individualistic society. To Palarchio, the keys represent the intricate equations that build a life and don't actually add up, specifically when one's needs, like a car in the Motor City, unhinge precarious economic equilibrium.

Palarchio's new work at Abattoir is about the leap of faith that one takes to strive for something better—a leap of faith too often motivated by desperation. Anchoring the installation is a large wall sculpture that toys with the symbol of the silver screen. Historically the silver screen is reserved for the stars of Hollywood. Palarchio's portal to ostensible fame and success is made from insulation. The

silver foil-faced material is quilt-like, with interior stuffing made of a yellow fiberglass, stretched by the artist as if canvas. Carved into foil and fiberglass is a constellation of moons and stars. Despite its irregularity in the artist's greater oeuvre, this piece represents what Palarchio is after—a combination of simple, utilitarian material with the idea of improvement through humble and handy means. The work is spawned from practicality, made from bare bones, cast-off material intended for warmth and protection. The emblem of the silver screen is the escape from reality, a way to craft stories, making room for desire and hope.

Palarchio's work oscillates from dark to playful, austere to humorous, as it reflects contemporary socio-economic conditions. Positioned directly in front of his silver screen is a floor sculpture made from a dried gourd. Its twisty knobs take on a figurative quality, like bodily appendages or facial features. The gourd wears a pair of safety glasses, an indication of profession, and appears to gaze at the starry wall work. It has personality, standing in for people both burdened and blessed by their aspirations to climb life's ladder. Dwarfed by the expanse of cosmic silver hanging over it, Palarchio's gourd maintains a stance of impregnable possibility.

The polemics of ownership—ownership of work, ownership out of necessity, with pride and with shame—ground each of Palarchio's sculptures, all of which are made from pre-owned objects. In another piece, dried gourd is conjoined with a single painted coconut and mounted in Abattoir's entryway. It's also figurative, and with the fruits creating a head and torso the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. In its confrontational display it plays the role of bouncer or guardian to the gallery. A bouncer sits in a position of superficial power, guarding the perceived ecosystem of a space. The role fulfills a perverse desire that is socially constructed: protecting what is believed to be yours. This false sense of ownership makes for an agency that is likely unfamiliar in other realms of life.

Understanding that a complex web of social relations creates class systems, Palarchio is interested in how objects—imbued with stories of prior ownership and re-positioned in the gallery space—can call attention to and ultimately complicate preconceived notions of hierarchy and ontological order. This piece locates the tropics, and a heat that goes beyond temperature. It also pinpoints a northern climate, where fall's harvest sustains long winters. There is a cultural collision between the two elements that make this piece. There's also synchronicity in their transformed states, and an equalizing sensation radiating from them in the gallery: "how did we get here?" There is solidarity between gourd and coconut—two things that are better when shared—and an alienating gesture directed at the audience and the idea that what's mine is mine.

In an adjacent wall sculpture, a curb key pierces a stack of paper plates. The plates are flimsy, the kind that could just as well be one or two stuck together, a cheap alternative to dishware. The curb key is an unusual tool, something that's hard to find and passed under-the-table. It has tamper-resistant hardware, and is used by companies to turn below grade water valves on and off, an occurrence for people unable to pay their bills. With this black-market tool in hand, an individual could turn their deactivated water main back on, and do so undetected. It's an arcane hack to the system, only managed by the scrappiest of citizens.

The psychological perspective of a working class person is often one of insubordination, constantly dancing around bureaucracy and authority. This careful choreography can be accomplished, for example, by using a curb key to reinstate water, or packing a house with insulation to keep electric meter numbers down throughout an icy winter. This is skillful footwork and easily fumbled, ending off balance. The working class face a psychological battle of belief. The bouncer thinks they have power, a decision-making voice. In fact,

they work a side job with night hours. But the protective, ownership mindset—the certainties of house, car, and job—can also be undermined by lemons that sour such anticipated necessities.

–Isabella Achenbach

## Viewing Rooms

*Untitled, 2020*

Neon, urethane

Variable dimensions (~60 x 96 in/152 x 244 cm)

*Untitled, 2018*

Rags

60 x 108 in (152 x 274 cm)

Dominic Palarchio (b. 1995, Brighton, Michigan) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He received an AAS from Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor (2015), a BFA from the College for Creative Studies, Detroit (2018), and an MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills (2020). Recent exhibitions include the solo show *You had done nothing wrong* at David Salkin, Chicago (2022), and group shows: *Eponymous* at M23, New York (2021), *Homebody* at Cranbrook Art Museum (2022), and the *FRONT International*, Akron Art Museum (2022).