

Madeleine James

In conversation with

Andrew Kernan

&

Federico Arani

Sharing a background traditionally articulated through the medium of paint on a flat surface, both artists now work within the realm of found objects. Their interest lies in the process, both in the ineffable life of the object and the impact these objects potentially have on our existence. On how we interact with the world.

Andrew's works are almost entirely site-specific, Contact us began as a contemplation on connection within the local community surrounding both his studio and our gallery. Andrew's taste for scavenging has profoundly influenced his current working process, like that of the magpie he gathers without intention of outcome, his works an exercise between displacement and repositioning. We explore this and its inherent barriers, both literal and figurative, and the endless possibilities that the object has to precipitate action.

With Federico we discuss the matter of activation. How can an object activate a space? His works are a coalescence between the found and the made, purposefully playing in that in-between space where multiple narratives may unfold at the same time, dependent only on us, the human, as we interact with it, the object. Odradek Unit-08 eerily activates itself as both found and constructed, he alludes to the symbiotic relationship we share with the devices we make and the objects we encounter. We discuss the overarching ability of objects to work as tools of connection and protection as well the simultaneity of narratives that occur through the activation of the object.

Also, they both just love rubbish and so we talk about it.

MADELEINE: You've both told me you've always been drawn to the act of scavenging. Yet still you were both formally trained as painters. When did you realise your interest in objects and structures superseded painting?

ANDREW: I suppose my interest in surfaces began while I was painting, I'd find scraps of wood to paint on because you know, you're broke as fuck and you can't afford a canvas or stretches. But when I was painting, it was a very different process, you're told "it's never finished, until it's killed". You can easily destroy a painting by overworking it, you can really see that in the work. Now working with these found objects, it's about a less is more approach. Painting was always about the act of looking but with these found pieces, it's about working on them, combining and processing them...it's helped me come to terms with accepting, "this is finished, I don't have to add more". In this space it's about the act, the exercise, the process of shifting something from one place to another.

FEDERICO: My practice in general is pretty multidisciplinary. I started as a painter, that's the foundation, so I really see how my language and my way of working is still influenced by that. Everything I'm bringing now was already there. I was mostly painting still-lives, and like Andrew I've always been a sort of scavenger, I'd always collect these found objects, things my friends would give me, or things I'd find in the mountains or on the streets. In terms of painting...I really see it as a relational device, it's about action and the response from that action. So after I started to delve more into this idea, I started to work with these objects, not just what I look at for use within my paintings but I came to actually play with them in space, which after years of experimentation has led me to my current practice.

M: Andrew, your work Contact Us is a prime example of the object activating action. Could you tell us more about this work?

A: The glass barrier was actually found in Split and I've transferred photos that I took of notice boards around Cranbrook Estate. They're communal notice boards where locals advertise goings on in the area and they're protected by glass but the glass was always aged and frosted. So the glass that kept these pieces of paper, these means of communicating and connecting, safe from the elements and away from the weather, actually became a barrier itself. With it being transferred onto this barrier that we found in the gallery, it really becomes about community, communication, or in fact the lack of community and communication.

M: The lack of communication?

A: Well, when we took over this building initially (Arebyte Studios) it was a homeless and housing services building, run by the council who've since moved, but at the time no one in the building knew where they'd moved. We spent months and months being continuously met by families looking for advice and you can see in their eyes and their face that they've travelled far to get here. Again, it's this barrier.

M: So the council didn't inform any of these people clearly in need of support that they were gone, or had moved?

A: Google Maps was still leading them here and they're just met by a bunch of art students. I wanted to do something about it, I put in the building's group chat, you know, "where do we redirect these people?" but nobody replied so I rang up the council and pretended to be looking for advice because the new address was nowhere online. I finally got through to a human and a few weeks later our building manager had put up displays around the entry points with the address for the homeless services.

M: I couldn't think of a more site-specific work. Not only is it rooted in the local area but it's born out of found materials within your studio and the gallery. The same building.

A: I was taking anything from the building really. But the work had made me pay more attention to notice boards in the area, these tools of communication. There's a trade union notice board up the road which again speaks to these objects and their sort of protective agency. As tools.

Contact us
2023
Photo transfer, paper and glue on
glass of a repurposed barrier
64.5 x 89.2cm
Andrew Kernan



M: You mentioned scavenging surfaces to work on as a painter. Most of your current works seem related to that manipulation of a flat surface. Can you tell me more about the chopping board series?

A: With this piece (Broken heart), I found this on my way into the studio one day, the burnt regions on the wood and the cuts taken out of it kind of imply that this way was used, it was a tool, and so I saved it as a found object. I added some texture and depth but I didn't want to manipulate the piece fully. I didn't want to destroy what was already there. I suppose it goes back to that safekeeping of things. Not allowing things to completely lose their original form.

M: What do you see in the future for your work?

A: I'm excited to see what comes, and comes from the show, I feel I have a trajectory for the work and for the first time I feel I am working with this kind of conversational context, and putting the work back into this context and it being site-specific and its relation to the area...I wasn't doing that before with painting. And that's exciting.

M: Fede, you've started exploring the medium of stoneware in your works, merging them with your found objects. Why have you chosen ceramic as the gateway?

F: Merging ceramic with more dense materials, for instance the bullet hunting primers is to me a kind of alchemy. It also goes back to my foundation in painting because I can see within ceramic so many similarities to oil painting. There's always this idea of dealing with something that you cannot fully control..and it's so simple because oil painting is just light, pigment, and surface. That's it, and ceramic is the same. It's really archaic in a way, just grounds, water and heat. I love the kind of archival dimension of this, of ceramic, it's one of the first human tools, and because of this it's about evolution and how cognitive evolution was based on tools. How the creation of tools and therefore ceramic activated our brains in fascinating ways is interesting to me. How consciousness shifted through the action of making tools, because the creation of tools completely changed the kind of relationship between the human and the non-human.



Broken heart

2023

Teak oil, oil paint, oil bar, and graphite powder on
burnt and used chopped board

53 x 97cm

Andrew Kernan

M: The hands that we have now are a result of the tools that we started to make then, so our understanding of the human body has been profoundly affected by the evolution of us making tools, which I thought was really interesting because you know, we look the way we do because of the objects that we made.

F: It's also all about power dynamics, because they become protection tools in a way, but also signs of corruption and violence. People would tell me, "can you see that all of your works are devices of protection or connection", I tend to create a shelter, a separation from the outside, which is certainly a protection from it, but also an act of invasion and occupation in a way.

M: So the space that your works act in, whether a gallery space or a rubbish shoot, either way that space performs as a kind of refuge.

F: Which gives the devices a kind of mythology, a symbology. I want the encounter to remind you of various narratives, the potential of various narratives. I never give a specific key for how to read the work, it's always about speculation.

M: So as you speculated when you found them, whether bullet shells or pewter, so too will those that look onto them now, in this new space.

F: Exactly. I never start with a kind of intention for the work, for me, my work is a constant discovery of where I'm going and what devices can be found or assembled...what might the effect on me be in the first place and then how will that affect others.

M: You said you disassemble and reassemble your found objects. What else do you do as part of the process of manipulating these materials?

F: I like this idea of always being able to recognise the original object, so that they remind you of what they were before but now they are something else entirely. You're left questioning what the function of the object is, or was, or if there's even a function anymore. I'm enjoying burying things at the moment, just waiting. I have a notebook with the locations of where these things all are, but I'm letting them take their course, and I go there sometimes, dig down and see what's going on, because I really like this idea of letting the real world activate these objects.

Odradek Unit-08 (Filter)
2023

Stoneware ceramic, ancient telescope
components, steel, silicone tube, latex
55 x 6 x 5.5 cm
Federico Arani

