

object(ive) art

sean edwards works on the little things at tanya leighton



There is an odd paradox of object fetishism: often the most minimal of gestures commands the highest meaning. In “Remaining Only” at Tanya Leighton Gallery (26 November - 21 January), Sean Edwards does just that. What look like simplistic readymades, reveal themselves to hold profound conceptual depth. The works, arranged along a 150cm high, standard bookshelf wrapping the gallery’s walls, are in opposition to Edwards’ recent exhibition “Putting Right” at Limoncello Gallery in London.

Whereas those previous works were intentionally still in process, Edwards says those at Tanya Leighton are, “objects whose life in my studio has come to an end. They have had as much done to them, as much time put on them as is suited.” Alongside the sculptures, Edwards will show a series of photographs documenting the works as they existed in his studio. The gesture seems reminiscent of a documentation of performance, holding the life-essence of these objects that now exist in a pseudo-taxidermic state. berlin art journal’s Alexander Forbes spoke with Edwards about labour, the poorness of materials, and “pathetic” sculptures.

Alexander Forbes: In previous works such as *Un, 2007-2011*, you’ve abstractly examined your practice as labour. Do you consider art “work”?

Sean Edwards: Un has just been completed and was exhibited as part of “Putting Right” at Limoncello. That was a work about time, about journeys, and of course about labour, but more about what it is to “do” labour rather than “being” a labourer. Each of the collaged elements were cut and pasted daily from the masthead of the Sun newspaper, a British redtop tabloid. It’s the most popular daily newspaper in the UK and has a natural relationship with working class working habits. This object of information is being purchased by labourers/office workers as they travel to work and consumed during their recreational moments throughout the day. I started to buy it and remove the “u” and “n” from the masthead so that it became this abstracted graphic. It became a marker of time that I was able to repeat across the collage so that they almost became unified into one whole pattern. The seven panels add up to an amount of time, of me traveling and working in the studio.

I’m not sure how I feel about art as work in a “working class” kind of way. I could just as easily be in an office or on a building site, purchasing my copies of the sun for real. I guess I want to somehow try and find a common goal between these two potentials of a life lived.



AF: Is this a political overtone within your work at large?

SE: I guess, yes. It’s hidden, and abstract. I’m interested in the poorness of materials and finding ways to draw on the humbleness people have about certain ways of living and being — whether that be chosen or imposed. I’m also very interested in the notions of skill and how this operates at a political level within class systems.

I think a more overtly political overtone has been contained within *Maelfa*, a recent work that looked at a shopping centre on the council housing estate where I grew up. The building is at the end of its life, so the film is almost a monument to it. The building was built in this civic faux-modernist style that instantly failed, so actually not a lot has changed from 40 years ago up to now, when the film was shot. The point of interest for me, however, was the potential it held. I think that's what I'm trying to achieve with all of my objects/sculptures, to show that they hold a potential, that they are vessels and carriers.

AF: The quotidian element of your sculptures almost seems to have the effect of a one-liner, with an odd sense of the absurd ever-present. Are you poking fun at some kind of ritualistic object-attachment?

SE: I try not to think of them as one-liners. To me I hope that the quotidian element of them actually opens them up to far greater readings than a one-liner, a more conceptual sense of absurdity, which I think is part and parcel of this potential for them to act as vessels to carry these grander ideas. This, of course, is absurd when you look at the pathetic nature of them, but this pathos is all part of the question.

AF: At the same time, this simplicity perhaps belies your process. How do you go about choosing your readymades? Does each fit into a certain schema within a group of works?

SE: I'm thinking of them less and less in this terminology. They certainly use ready-made components, but there is a process of creation that most, if not all go through in some way or another. Sometimes these processes seem accidental but are actually laboured, tried and tested across numerous versions of the same sculpture; others are accidental, but perhaps seem more deliberate; whilst others are found, borrowed or stolen.

There is no rigid schema for me in how the objects exist in groupings or compositions. A certain rigidity can occur during the installation process, when some sort of structure as display mechanism is introduced, but in terms of the gathering of objects, it's very much about an accumulative effect to tease things down to a more finite point.

by Alexander Forbes

[Images: Sean Edwards: (above) *Yellow*, C type Print, 2011; (left) *un*, newsprint collage, 2007-2011, seven parts; (right) *Wedge*, C type Print, 2011. All Courtesy the artist, Tanya Leighton Gallery Berlin, and Limoncello London]