Notes on Themes for the American Kestrel. R.M. 2020

Exhibition Description

*Themes for the American Kestrel* is a multimedia exhibition that uses the tradition of still life as a point of departure to explore different states of observance. A collection of small sculptures fabricated from humble materials act as stand-ins or approximations for familiar objects like boxes, vessels, and tchotchkes. These sculptures become objects and subjects as they participate in a diverse presentation of still life arrangements in works on paper, video, and installation. Formal tension and balance give these stand-ins charge and purpose, putting into motion a network of relationships and contingencies. The objects’ ability to be observed allows them to transcend their status of approximations of real things, but to become relational things themselves.

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Expansion Text from my sketchbook:

A) The objects themselves are presented as sculptural forms, fashioned from found bits of common materials like paper, wood, plastic, clay, fabric, and stone. They appear familiar; bottles, bowls, boxes, fruits, and tchotchke, but are articulated with a poetic clumsiness and burdened by the inherent limitations of their material. They are non-functional stand-ins (approximations) for real objects that could be found in or around one’s home, cast aside on the side of the road, or left to languish in suspicious dumpsters. They have a relationship to real things, they exist in real space, they are at the mercy of gravity, as well as, light and shadow, but they remain deficient as they are theoretical objects, they are in a sense, real and unreal. What is process by which these objects transform?

B) The works on and of paper depict arrangements of these objects in traditional still life compositions with a sense of surface, figure, and ground. The act of being observed and translated onto a two-dimensional plane gives the objects a deeper anchor in what could be thought of as an ecology of real things (relational objects). In some way, the objects arrive through being seen. The objects are the same but have changed, transformed, and solidified through this translation.

C) The viewer is presented with a single channel video of the objects being endlessly organized into different configurations by the artist (single channel video, infinite loop). Upsending the stillness of objects (i.e., think of the airless, still, and silent quality of still life works by Giorgio Morandi) and reaffirming that it is through a process of looking and examining the relationships between objects to each other, from the viewer to the objects, and the artist to the viewer, that the complex of our state of being as observers can be subtle, simple, and slowed.

I sit and the bird arrives or the bird sits and I arrive, or not.

“How much better is silence; the coffee cup, the table. How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here for ever with bare things, this coffee cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself.”

-Virginia Woolf, from “The Waves”