

CONTACT POINTS: K.R.M. MOONEY

Sculpture that attends to its materials and surroundings.

Interview by Maddie Klett

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K.R.M. Mooney is an artist living in Brooklyn. Through processes like soldering and electroplating, he transforms so-called precious metals and industrial materials, like silver and steel, into unassuming abstract objects that call attention to their surroundings. In the conversation that follows, we talk about his sculptures recently on view in the group show *The Poet-Engineers* at Miguel Abreu in New York City and work that is currently part of his solo exhibition at Konrad Fischer in Berlin and forthcoming show at Progetto in Lecce, Italy.

Maddie Klett

In *The Poet-Engineers* you installed works on both the walls and floor. In fact, *Deposition c. (iii)* (2021) was hung in the entry hallway and was one of the first works in the show, but I totally missed it on my way in. It is a piece of white steel that looks like a hollowed-out beam, and there are also pieces of cuttlebone and silver arranged in the center. The work blended into the gallery's architecture, and I am glad I caught it on my way out because the delicate, organic elements in the center require close-looking.

K.R.M. Mooney

Visiting Miguel Abreu over the years helped me determine my work for the show. Because one enters the galleries through a hallway, there's a particular spatial sequencing that offers a moment of suspension before much of the work is viewed. I like that you mention catching *Deposition c. (iii)* by moving toward the entrance or exit. It implies an intermediary position in which you encounter a work's slight edge or physical limit as its behavior blends into your peripheral vision and requires attention and nearness at once.

The Poet-Engineers exhibition coincided with my process of making a new body of work at Progetto, an artist-run space in Lecce, Italy, where I'll be having a show in 2022. The works are one response to Progetto's gallery spaces, which seem vertically oriented. The volume of the space is felt through the height of the

ceilings and its sequence of tall and narrow windows and passageways. The windows and doors all part in the center, and the architecture has many vertical cuts. *Depositions* may be an internalization of these spatial features in dimension and form; they are less an impulse to use the wall than making what is sensed or felt become part of the work's operation, in this case a slight reflection of vertical excess.

Lecce, as a place, is built with limestone calcium carbonate in which cuttlebone is a contributor. The integration of cuttlebone itself is derived from its use as a metal casting mold and formalizes the material as a diagram of flows for metal throughways, including notches and marks made for each dependent counterpart. It is also a biogenic material found on the surrounding coastal areas in Lecce.

MK

Why is the body of work called *Depositions*?

KRMM

Part of it is an indexing of the work's environment and the material composition of the object and its surface. There are a few bodies of work where I've misused electroplating by using a treatment of matte-silver where steel acts as a base alloy. Through an electrical current, layers of silver accumulate over the surface. I'm impacted by the technique of electroplating, in one sense because it uses metal's conductive capacity to act as a throughway. But there is also a connection to industry, energy, and systems of power in which electricity becomes a way that space is materialized through light.

On a formal level, the way the silver treatment changes over time is due to a dispute between steel and silver; the former is a ferrous alloy, and the latter is non-ferrous. Oxidation and iron appear depending on chemical properties found in an environment in addition to the process of the work's production and display. When I'm not able to visit or produce an exhibition in person, this evidencing of a work's duration in a place becomes a way to intimately tie it to a space. As travel and site-visits have become more difficult due to the pandemic, or it might be financial constraints when working with artist-run or smaller spaces, it's a strategy for my work to remain responsive. The resulting forms index the multiple histories of their production while still being sensitive to the future conditions of their display. Atmospheric qualities, handling, exposure to light, air, and moisture all affect the unfolding of each surface.

MK

What led you to work with metals?

KRMM

SYLVIA KOUVALI

Up until recently I've lived in Oakland, or Northern California, and I've been affected by that environment and place. I studied metals through the perspective of Craft, in which the Studio Craft Movement in the Bay Area played a role. There's a specificity in attuning to and working at the level of the object within the intimacy of hand-fabrication techniques as well as a heightened mental and procedural aspect that metal requires.

When pursuing my work, I'm often asked to think with and move across the various needs of materials, what they require to change or behave in a particular way, whether temperature and heat, a certain cut, chemical, or environment. Each one involves attending to various processes and interactions, even potential disputes between materialities.

MK

A new sculpture titled *Citation* (2021) in your show at Konrad Fischer is made from the brass kick plate—or door kick—you found in the Puget Sound in Washington near your family's home. I actually had to look up what a kick plate was. Visually, I only understood it in relation to its position at the bottom of a door where it acts as a kind of armor for the door. How did you decide to work with this object?

KRMM

There is something about that object being tied to its spatial position. It's a base object and intermediary that operates around the ground, and it becomes a site of accumulation between contact points, offering a facilitation between spaces, whether the material itself, physical space, or a body. Its use arrives out of this movement.

For the installation, it is reoriented into a vertical position and projects out into space, almost becoming an extension or surface area. Because it was found on Coastal Salish land near the Puget Sound, a large body of salt water, its surface is verdigris, a patina that has a greenish blue hue to it. This oxidation is inherited, while the brass surface remains susceptible to changing over time.

Konrad Fischer's reception desk is central to its ground floor gallery spaces. To the left is a small room with four repeating works, and to the right is a single work by Hanne Darboven.

I have a lasting pre-pandemic memory of visiting Michael E. Smith's show at Modern Art in London in late 2019 where in the gallery he overlaid a found door that was tacked up to the front of the reception desk. I was thinking about the simplicity of the gesture as it necessitates the gallery's function of circulation and speaking or knowing about the works on view. By using the structure of the gallery, it felt like an

incision by blocking or taking vision away. A door kick as the initial function of this work feels relational.

MK

Can you talk about Darboven's influence on your new sculptures and the inclusion of a work by her in your Konrad Fischer show?

KRMM

I wanted to impart the history of the gallery's program and conditions back on itself and pursue a kind of alignment. I arrived at Darboven's work while in mid-production and was curious about the unruly, notational behavior of her conceptualism. There is a sense of intimacy related to her various knowledge sets, in particular to composition and sound, which are felt through the psyche of their presentation and display; it's a kind of formalism I find very behavioral. For me, her works pick up forms of constraint yet fall outside of the measurables of time, distance, notation. I also cannot unthink these constraints as ongoing actors of a colonial and patrilineal lineage.

The initial object life of the works are brass instrument mouthpieces, and they felt pulled from a parallel social order; a few of them have engravings from their namesake manufacturers such as Roth, Ludwig, or Bach. The serial works in *Partials* are made up of brass, which allows for a conductive capacity where it can be connected and soldered while also being cut apart.

MK

Conducting human breath is a central function of the mouthpieces you've chosen to work with. Is there a reason for this at this moment? The restriction of breath, and of public respiratory circulation during the COVID-19 pandemic, comes to mind.

KRMM

It's true that the exhibition takes an interest in the mouth as a physical threshold, one of heightened corporeality, intimacy, nurturance, and a site of signification and description. The objects are designed with this bodily physiology in mind, and the pandemic certainly brought a heightened awareness to breath.

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