

Interview:

## Clay Ketter toys with familiarity and what is "real"

Joshua Ward, Rooms Magazine: art uncovered

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- *A lot of your work is quite larger, whether it be large hanging pieces or even larger structural installations? What is it about working on a larger scale that interests you?*

In a nutshell, I have realized, all too late in the game, that my artworks should not be *about it*, but *be it*. The *that*. The *the*. The *never before*, and perhaps the *never again*. They should, in the best case scenario, refer only to themselves or their family, and be interested in nothing else. You might smell a faint vapour of Judd here, of the *specific object*, but if we have a chance to dig deeper, we will find that my work is so much more than that, much more willing to be layered and non-specific, but the rule remains— it must be *it*. Whether or not I have ever achieved this remains to be seen, and is certainly not for me to say.

This "larger" scale you mention is actually simply 1:1, or ever so slightly smaller (to create an uneasiness or disorientation). I've been thinking about this alot lately. At least when it comes to drawings and photographic media, I work more and more in 1:1 scale. Auto-CAD is designed for this, and, with ample external harddisk storage, Photoshop files taken from high-resolution material can be (representationally speaking) on a 1:1 scale as well. Dogmatically speaking, 1:1 is "it".

In addition, there is a slightly more experiential or corporeal aspect to my choice of scale. I'm simply not comfortable with art that's smaller than me. We are surrounded by a world of managable, portable (read *consumable*) objects. Art has no duty (no duty whatsoever, to anything, as a matter of fact) to ergonomomy. The ultimate sculpture is a special "building", unfortunately still only in this artist's imagination, a colossus, which does nothing, houses nothing, serves or entertains nothing. It expresses no style, serves no customer, nor does it serve the greater good. It simply serves itself. It has gravity.

I have made many "paintings" (flat works that hang on a wall) in the format 180 x 180 cm. (approx. 6 x 6 ft.) or thereabouts. In the beginning, this size was determined by the standard size of building materials, specifically, European ergonomic standard gypsum wall-board ("sheetrock") sheets at 90 x (length varies)cm., but after contemplating this scale, I realized that it was a magic grey zone between manageable and monumental, at the outer reaches of my corporeal zone. With my arms outstretched, I can just barely grip the piece. In reference to the Vitruvian human scale, one has to consider whether the area in question is just *within* one's grasp, or just *beyond*. In art, the perfect zone is floating in between the two, creating a vibration.

One can of course find contradictions to all of this in my work. I do not purport to achieve what my philosophy (or dogma or whatever) implies.

- *To me, pieces like 'Homestead' or 'Tomb' have a surreal and vivid energy about them, which I find interesting because they're mostly made of recognisable and widely available materials. I wonder if this is in any part artistically intended and why, do you think, commonplace materials can evoke such a reaction?*

I don't think the commonplace, thereby recognizable materials are the exclusive or even primary source of this vivid energy, but they most certainly play a role. Creating artworks that consist of commonplace materials has an effect which I find cheap, or banal. Our continued fascination with the ready-made, found, or appropriated has gone way too far, too long. I question the legitimacy of presenting things as they are, and certainly for what they are. I question the legitimacy of "the real" in art altogether. Art is, for me, fabrication, not only in terms of its being made, but in the literary sense of "making-up" or telling a story. (Even "non-fiction" is essentially made, made-up, thereby *fabricated*. We tell the *story* of an event, and not the event itself). The gesture of presenting a ready-made object as an art object has filled its function in art. This revolutionary gesture marked a significant turning point in art-making, and we still enjoy the liberation it unfolded and continues to encourage. However, the ready-made is a *one-liner*; its greatest value occurs upon the "ah-ha" reception. This is *artification*, (the attempt) to make something into art simply by removing it from its familiar context and into the room of art. This is a ploy or ruse, and I see art as too serious a game and too noble an endeavor to resort to tricks. Here, my fixation on the word *Art* and its etymological family...*Art, Artifice, and Artificial* comes to bear. Art is, by definition, artifice and fabrication. Only through fabrication can the real, or truth, become art.

That being said, I do think that the *made* ready-made, or perhaps the *ready-to-be-made* can claim legitimacy.

I believe this vivid energy you sense is more the result of small adjustments in the otherwise recognizable. Both "Homestead" and "Tomb" are first and foremost archetypes for an American vernacular architecture— a lowest common denominator for a dwelling within this vernacular. They are based on the dimensions of Thoreau's cabin at Walden pond, while bearing a style more resonant of Elvis Presley's birthplace. The adjustments I speak of are simply the removal of doors, windows, vents, stairs— the removal of physical access— perhaps opening up for a more cerebral access, contemplation. What seems, at a distance, cozy, becomes, upon closer examination, stubbornly cold. My Surface Composites or "kitchen" pieces from the 1990's are made in the same way. By "bending" the artwork to the edge of its familiarity, by making it estranged, I hopefully knock the viewer, at least for a moment, out of their comfort zone of recognition. What one thinks one sees, and what one sees, form something new, something sovereign.

- *Why do you think structures, uniformity and repetition play a big part in your work?*

I don't know what to do with this question. I don't necessarily think structures, uniformity and repetition play a big part in my work. In terms of *repetition*, it is, for me, more a question of empirical method or practice, of working in series— something I, at this point, take for granted.

- *Do you think there's a certain amount of sentimentality in your work?*

I am acutely aware that there is a reading of sentimentality in my work. I try to be as cautious as possible concerning this aspect, to not let it become too overbearing. As a human

being, I am sentimental, and do not try to curb my sentimentality, but as an artist, I find my own sentimentality, as well as the sentimentality of others, to have a clouding effect. One must try to eliminate this cloudiness or fog in order to reach clarity. Clarity is paramount, no matter what media one is using. Sentimentality clouds our senses. It is a secondary, projected layer upon our senses, which are the most primary thing we know and have. Sentimentality is not sensible. Nostalgia is the worst of all sentimentalities, in its commonly recognized form— nostalgia concerning the past. I believe there is, however, such a thing as nostalgia concerning the imagined future, and I enjoy entertaining this notion.

- *I'm interested to know where you think the line between design and art stands? What's the relationship or the give-and-take between working with a design mind-set and an artistic mind-set?*

Design is an answer to a question. It entertains the question or request. Art has more sovereignty. It entertains nothing (in the best case scenario), only itself. Entertainment entertains expectations, it feeds a consensus (worst case scenario). Sometimes, art is at its best when it dashes expectations. Art is at its best when it is recalcitrant.

That being said, I believe that the best design is also recalcitrant, and that leads me back to my special "building", a colossus, which does nothing, houses nothing, serves or entertains nothing.

In a perfect world, there is no difference (between art and design).

- *Specifically looking at your 'wall' series or such related works, texture seems to take prominence. In regards to your 'to scale' photography and the photograph becoming the subject through this sense of scale, how does this juxtapose with the concept that the texture you visualise in your photograph doesn't actually exist within the work as it is presented?*

Assuming you are referring to my "Valencia Wall" series of photographs, the scale is based on the 180 x (length) cm. maximum photopaper size available, and the motifs are mostly defined areas within these façades, for example an entire wall of a room. From a formalistic standpoint, a photograph subjectifies an object— it captures the play of shadow and light in a given situation, thereby *implying* what you refer to as texture. It becomes a matter of reading, rather than a sensory phenomenon. In a way, the large, *as-1:1-as-possible*, scale is an attempt to re-objectify the phenomenon represented. My photographs (the *Road* series, for example) are almost always reading a flat surface, with the film plane perpendicular to the said surface-object.

My way of using photography is influenced by modern imaging techniques, especially scanning, and even more simply the constant "experience" of photographic images on flat screens. Flat, flat, flat...

- *In regards to the concept of art serving itself, I was wondering if you think your art serves yourself at all?*

Besides my art being a way to make a living (a meager living at that), I prefer to see myself serving my art instead. I try to make work that insists on being made. Again, the question of entertainment— if I can manage to concentrate on the thing that insists on being made, that which becomes clear to me in the moments when I am both awake and asleep— lucid sleep, or hypnagogia, a state where I reach an alternate form of clarity, where

and when it occurs to me *what* I shall make, certainly *why* and most definitely *how*, and more or less how it will look, then the rest is logistics— *work*. It's a matter of trust. It seems to me that, in order to truly enjoy the freedom of being an artist, one must strive after a self-emancipation from consistency— freedom, not only from established consensus surrounding one's work, but also one's own wretched half-baked dogmas, embracing the freedom to contradict one's self, and enjoying the consequent liberty of this emancipation.



Tomb, 2009

Moderna Museet, Stockholm