



Adresse Fossveien 24  
0551 Oslo  
Norge

Telefon (+47) 22 99 55 00

Post Postboks 6853  
St. Olavs plass  
N-0130

Faktura Postboks 386  
Alnabru  
0614 Oslo

Org.no. 977027233  
Giro 8276 0100265

**Carl Mannov**  
The Hunch

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KHIODA  
Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo,  
Digitalt Arkiv

[www.khioda.no](http://www.khioda.no)  
[khioda@khio.no](mailto:khioda@khio.no)

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# The Hunch

Enter. Most of the time this happens through a glass door, sometimes frosted. This partially mimics the skin of an office but its belly is less comfortable than that of a proper bullpen for knowledge work. It's an odd category of room to begin with since it rarely contains any bodies of humans. A purpose for which rooms of this character were originally built; to be comfortable to our skin, our heels, our elbows and eyes. All of its interior was of course made by the bodies of humans so it naturally corresponds to them in terms of volume, only slightly bigger. This is because many of them used to contain containers for humans such as cars and motorcycles.

I've always felt that art objects, mainly floor works, were inherently awkward and misplaced inside these exhibition spaces, these white cubes. It's always been there as sort of a hunch and the only way I knew how to deal with it was by working site specifically.

At first this was simply about following the architectural direction of the space and make it fit. I wanted the installations to seem like they had grown out of that specific architecture so as to make it feel permanent rather than placed on the floor somewhere, like a tourist with an upside down map. It involved latching onto any anomalies or elements that would stick out. At that time it was easy since the only spaces that I had the opportunity to exhibit in were project spaces such as Oslo Prosjektrom which are seldom very streamlined, as well as the opening of apartment gallery Kazachenko's Apartment. Oslo Prosjektrom was perfect, it had metal pipes running beneath the ceiling, only an arm's reach away when standing on the ground. On the right hand side of the room, right in front of the entrance, was a bench like, stone or concrete element popping out from the right wall; its height being about up to the

back of my knees and its width being approximately twice the length of my foot. All of these elements were of course soaked in white wall paint not to steal the show from the art.

At the time of this exhibition, I had already been working with sculptural installations of both independent and intercepting parts such as in the mixed media installation 'Marskandiser' from 2012. Here, I built a wooden structure that I could intuitively expand with both horizontal platforms and vertical boards. I could then sculpt and paint directly on the installation and record all of the spills and crumbs of the process. In a way, this prevented the cut of the umbilical cord to the studio, when the installation was moved to an exhibition space, since the installation in itself was a sort of studio situation. It was shown at Høstutstillingen that year in one of the rooms on the second floor. Here, it had a different basis for existing within a site because the installation was a form of site in itself.



This work sparked an interest in the hierarchical relationship between the objects and constructions that exist for the purpose of presenting, such as plinths and vitrines for example, and the objects that they present. I started to form my own ideas and thoughts about what it means to work and present sculpturally and what responsibilities that should come with it, such as committing to the sculptural requirements of an exhibition. In other words; if you make a sculpture, it's safe to say that you are interested in issues of volume, so if you want your sculpture off of the ground for example, you damn well better solve that issue yourself instead of relying on a big box of paint-soaked MDF that we're supposed to pretend like we don't see. That's just comical.

The title for the show at Oslo Prosjektrom was “No buddy but our shelves” which, looking back, sounds kind of silly but it did refer to something important to me at the time. I was interested in what it means to make a sculpture, what it takes. By this I mean strictly physically. If all of conceptual or representational content is stripped away, what does the process of making a sculpture look like, making volume. With all other considerations out of the picture, the fundamental job should be to make something stand up and push outward; take up space. Later, when installing sculptural work within the confines of an exhibition, these issues become more broadly about economizing space. I figured that these were essentially the same issues that make up the practice of storing, and of course shelves are a storage’s best friend.

From this logic an installation, mimicking the basic formal structure of a shelf, grew out of the bench-like stone element in the wall. A shelf is a very simple standing construction since it consists only of connected vertical and horizontal sticks with boards on them. This gave me sort of a nuts-and-bolts vocabulary to try and articulate my ideas about the relationship between the space, the art objects and their mode of presentation. It consisted of wooden sticks that were clasped together with orange clamps, in order to emphasize the physics that kept the thing upright; to make it honest.

I cast a couple of concrete ‘L’, ‘F’ and ‘T’ shaped sculptures in molds made from duct tape and cardboard. They weren’t thought of to be specifically representational of those letters, rather resembling fragmented bits of the shelf logic; vertical and horizontal sticks. Two of them were presented on the shelf while the tall ‘F’ shape was standing on the floor, clasped to the rest of the structure and acted as a surrogate for one of the shelves missing legs. Thereby it partook in the job of supporting and presenting the sculptures of its own species.

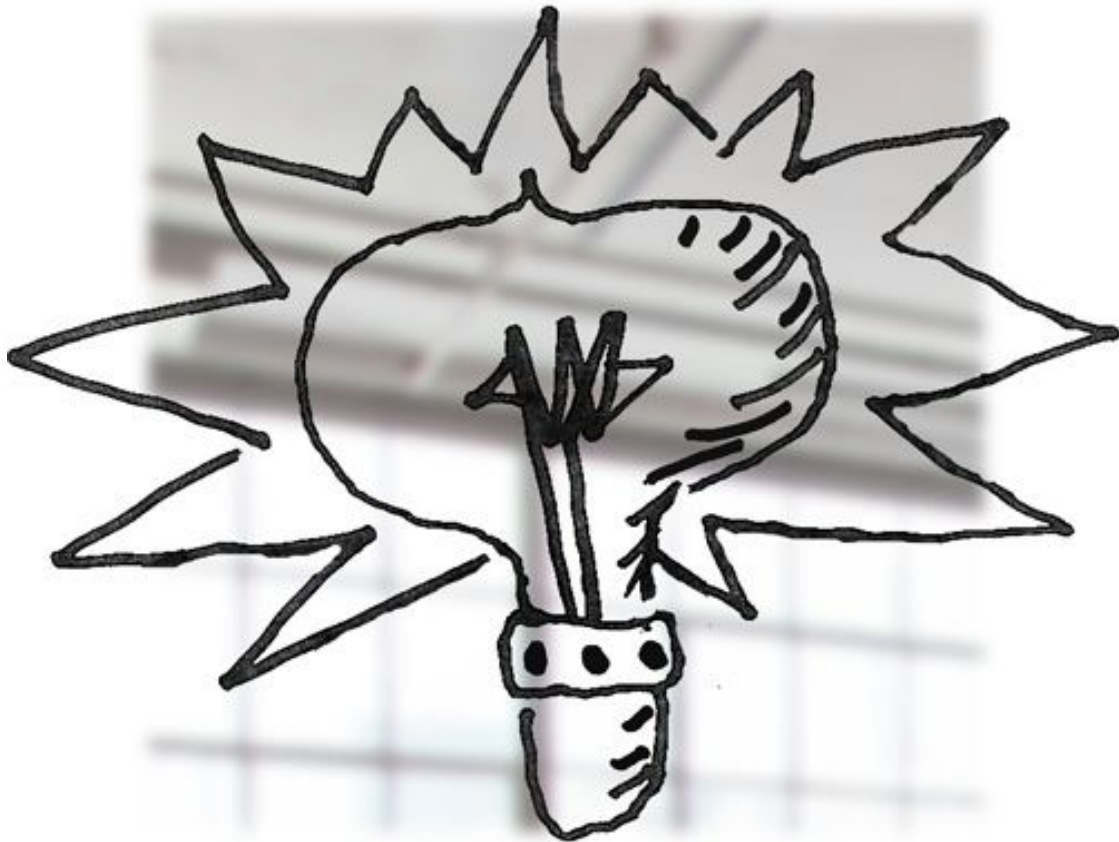
The bottom section of the shelf was aligned with the height of the stone bench, so where two of the shelf's hind legs were missing, it rested on the concrete. In this way, the structure that presented the sculptures physically depended on both the sculptures and the architecture of the place to do so.

Behind this installation was a long and thin, steel-welded construction with a similar, shelf-like principle, only much more skeletal and much too tall to be of any good function. It had the same displacement of its height in one end which, again, was offset by the height of the stone bench. From there it went all the way up and aligned, parallel to the white metal pipes in the ceiling. Up there, the steel rods of the construction had fallen victim to a very bad paint job from a can of white spray paint. Partly, this was to ape the state of those pipes, to obstruct their act of hiding or perhaps contest the idea that they should have to. Also, that white spray paint was a cue to the paintings on the opposite wall.

Here, leaning against the only wall untampered by pipelines and protruding concrete benches, was a big, square painting, almost the size of that same wall. The painting, too, followed the logic of the shelf but in its two dimensional space; vertical and horizontal lines. Except here, instead of having the purpose of collecting and compressing matter, that basic shelf formation of conjoined 'H', 'L', 'T' and 'E' shapes, became an instrument for dividing matter, dividing surface. In a sense a very pragmatic way of solving the composition; what my painting professor Dag Erik sometimes referred to as surface economy.

These divided sections within the painting each offered different proposals for how to cover a surface with white, by paint rollers, brushes and spray cans. Given the size of the painting compared to the wall, the border separating the pictorial field of the canvas and the wall

behind it became porous and allowed for the reading of the white paint job to bleed out into its surroundings.



The hunch. So far I've formed a couple of different explanations for it. The first one being about the artworks conception. Unless the space that holds the exhibition is the same space in which the art objects were made, there is no natural placement for them. Of course this is mainly the case with objects such as sculptures physically made by the artist but also affects installations of readymades, formed in the studio.

Whether consciously or not, most physically compiled artworks will be conditioned by the physicality of the space it is made in. This can affect the parameters of the artwork directly or indirectly by affecting the artist's sense of space. This is partly about scale I think, but also about mood. Exhibition spaces in the traditional sense, the white cube, should not have a mood; in fact one of its main functions is to not have a mood.



The second explanation is a sort of extension of this. The way that these spaces are engineered to be invisible backdrops. They are meant to be neutral in order to draw the viewer's full attention to whatever things are stuck inside it, to "make it pop". It achieves this by being covered from head to toe in white paint. The plywood, MDF, plaster, nails and screws are submitted to hours of spackling, sanding and liters of acrylic. The aim is for the objects presented to have nothing to respond to; to rid them of aesthetic interference. But precisely this creates a precondition for the objects inside of it.

Of course they are not surrounded by nothing, they are surrounded by a blatant illusion of nothing and most contemporary art objects have abandoned the illusion as an instrument. At least most of the artists that I identify with actively stress a point, through their productions, about laying bare the nature of the materials involved, the mechanisms applied and the order of their actions by leaving out a trail of processual breadcrumbs to follow.

The issue is that an object which is structurally open and honest will be in an ideological conflict if presented by- and inside a room which is structurally obscured and dishonest.

It gets away with it much of the time, however, because while having conflicting principles of structure, many of these processual practices are also in stark visual contrast to the deaf, shadowless plane behind it.

The more visually loud and dirty the object is, the better the conditions will be for the white cube to do its job of not being noticed. This is why big grimy sculptures and action paintings that operate within a devil-may-care attitude are the least radical contributions to this

discussion since they help cement the power of the white cube exhibition space as the objective catalyst of aesthetic experiences.

On the other hand are artistic approaches that aim to close the formal gap between the artwork and the exhibition space; the presented and the presenter. Artworks that, for example, mimic the slick, quiet aspects of the white cube without submitting to its use of illusionism. Not to camouflage the artwork in the space but to expose the space around the artwork. To expose the comedy of the white cube and all of its extensions.

At first these spaces appear to be all the same, standardized clones; they stick to the format. They reinforce their neutrality like this, especially now when the digital reproductions of shows from different venues all float around in the same place.

The walls are white but the floor seems to be interchangeable. It can be anything from concrete and formations of wooden planks to terracotta tiles. It's an odd disregard of those values of neutrality which are otherwise upheld so firmly. This hints toward a hangover from a hierarchy between the disciplines. The reason why floor work is not afforded the same



sterile backdrop as hanging work might be because the white cube has its roots in wall works; it was made for it. Unlike sculptures, the only natural place for things hanging on walls, except for maps and mirrors, are in an exhibition setting. My guess is that this explains why this hunch of mine mostly concerns floor work.

Looking closer at these clones reveals more crumbs more under the carpet. Within the small folds around the details and finish of the doors, the windows, the panels resides a set of tribal codes. The lighting; is it yellowish wall-washers or cool fluorescent tubes, and if so what degree kelvin? What about the font of the texts in and around the space, is it “neutral” enough. And what about the font size, does it cry for attention or is it laid back?

All of these subjective decisions are part of the ‘gallery grit’ that violates the illusion of neutrality. By drawing attention to this gallery grit, artworks have a chance to poke fun at the image of the gallery as an invisible presenter or conductor.

Examples of this are the works ‘Paperwork 1-3’ in which Sebastian Black repeats the infinite variations of overlapping, constructivist citations of shapes and colors painted on the printed press release of the show. Also, the work ‘Copenhagen - Bangkok. Light bulb exchange’ where Jens Haaning swapped a fluorescent tube from gallery Nicolai Wallner in Copenhagen with one from a food store in Bangkok, Thailand, points a finger at the grit of the gallery. Another example is the installations of Neil Beloufa that often include deliberately poorly built constructions of plywood that mimic traditional modes of presentation except only halfway covered in white paint with gaps on every corner and countless meters of cable running in and out of holes drilled in the plywood. If artworks are models that we use to make sense of the world around us, then artworks such as these are a very direct and literal way of trying to make sense of the “world” that physically surrounds the artworks.

I've always been very careful to have my mental image of an artwork in the making remain blurry and out of focus. I don't like to spell out the details in my mind, a sketchbook or a piece of text before actually being in the process of making. At the time of writing this, I am juggling thoughts about the circumstances of art objects in transit. Ideas about how art



moves, both physically and in the form of ideas, throughout time. How the art objects physically endure, change and how the ideas around them morph because of this. Something we've seen in recent times, for example, with the discovery of the pure, chalk white greek statues having originally been painted. Despite this evidence, our image of ancient greek sculpture is not going to change because it is, precisely, an image.

These thoughts might be emerging suddenly from having my own artworks moved across distances in crates and bubble wrap for the first time. It might also be a revolt from my earlier obsessions with the state of art objects, static, within a specific site. Or perhaps just another way of dealing with the hunch. Solving the same issue of the awkwardness of art objects. After all, how can an object in transit feel misplaced if it's not really placed at all?