

Toolkit

Toolkit is an exhibition of human-scaled objects that give pause for thought. Made by practitioners of critical design, contemporary art and social action, and existing in the realm of furniture, products and utensils, these are implements — some speculative, some fully operational — that disrupt habitual actions and interactions, and allow us to consider alternatives. Aligning with an idea that change in the world might best be wrought by tools that alter thinking, some of these objects partake of the tendency to make objects increasingly smart, while others are resolutely dumb, reflecting back the interactions that shape the world around them.

The exhibition is a personal, perhaps idiosyncratic, selection of seemingly — or actually — utilitarian objects that have struck me and lodged in my mind, sometimes for years.

Some propositions cause mental hiccups by innovatively distorting known objects. Onkar Kular's *Deformed Cutlery* for fast eaters proposes to affect eating habits by physically handicapping standard cutlery. Like other projects in the designer's *Machines for Living* series, the cutlery reflects upon how we are shaped (literally, even) by our habits. Daniel Olson's *Citizen Cane* also sounds a challenge to convention. A walking cane retrofitted with a bicycle bell announces to the world that its user won't take reduced mobility sitting down — and the expansion from a singular customization into a multiple, further suggests a substantial redefinition of the category. Humorously cranky, it sideswipes expectations.

Sometimes adding a slight twist is enough to alter behaviour and turn a static type into a tool. Justin Gologorsky's *TILT* stools do so by curving one of their edges. Suddenly, the simple shape becomes a plaything, putting its users into motion, and creating an awareness of multiple possible uses.

What makes a tool, anyway? Perhaps simply that it is a means of effecting change, like Heidi Nagtegaal's *Pylons*. They are not real pylons, but soft, crocheted forms in the image of traffic cones. Yet they have served to redirect traffic, and furthermore cannot help but point its viewers, accidental or otherwise, towards a greater acuity to their surroundings. Actually, so do Chris Lindsay's *point of departure* steel sculptures. One could argue that, as abstract objects with no appreciable function, they might be the most 'artful' objects in the exhibition. What the three lengths of metal welded into right angles and placed on the floor *do*, however, is perform the illusion of piercing the physical space in which they sit. They are implements for perception.

Ken Nicol's *small box that tics* also thwarts the anticipation of function. A wind-up box that does nothing but tick down its own 'activation,' it is a reflective tool for altering our habitual experience of time. Another work, his *Clock of Doom*, has the sole 'purpose' of enervatingly counting down to an unknown alarm, thus maintaining a constant, abstract, level of alertness.

Time is also the essence of Sascha Pohflepp's *Buttons* project, focused on our habitual,

even compulsive, attempts to capture moments through photography. The object, a blind, lensless but networked camera, delivers an image taken in the moment one presses the shutter, but one drawn from the volume of images uploaded and shared online. Pointing to the often-conventional character of the photographic situation, the camera (and standalone smartphone app) reveals our connections to others.

Sonny Assu's project *Disposable Wealth* suggests surprising parallels between the First Nations' tradition of the potlatch — a culturally circumscribed circulation of wealth — and the conspicuous consumption that defines everyday life in much of the west. The project's quantity of spun copper cups in the form of paper takeout cups and lids is an ostentatious display of value that not only refers to the potlatch and traditional valuation of copper within native culture, but also seems to have conceptual repercussions for the contemporary art system in which the project circulates. In fact, in this exhibition we are showing the last artist's proof in his possession — a remnant of the art regulating system, in other words.

Michel de Broin's homemade bottle launcher is an impressive invention for charging the world around us, with a nod to the revolutionary tradition of using street materials as weapons. Using water, a bicycle pump and found bottles, de Broin's ceremonial cannon makes explosive use of everyday waste.

Contrary to the modernist adage, when repurposing objects and making them do in a world of excess, sometimes function is suggested by form. The collective Instant Coffee have taken waste tree stumps, roughly shaped them, and — in what begins to resemble a classic sculptural tradition — allowed their forms to suggest how they could be used. Hence we get seating, improvised tables, pedestals, and gathering points. Rather than over-determining how these irregular objects should be used, they are first signalled with a bright pink coat of paint, and then left open to uses that cannot help but be deliberately and self-consciously negotiated.

These works have stayed with me because of how they bring critical attention to the ways in which we intersect with and affect the world, and even alter our ideas about the possibilities that it holds. Many of them seem to confuse the notion of 'function', at least if function is thought of as that which allows business as usual. As instruments of change and thought, however, disruption and friction are exactly the features required.

Germaine Koh

Bios

Germaine Koh is a Canadian visual artist based in Vancouver. Her conceptually-generated work is concerned with the significance of everyday actions, familiar objects and common places. Her exhibition history includes the BALTIC Centre (Newcastle), De Appel (Amsterdam), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Para/Site Art Space (Hong Kong), Frankfurter Kunstverein, Bloomberg SPACE (London), The Power Plant (Toronto), Seoul Museum of Art, Artspace (Sydney), The British Museum (London), the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver), Plug In ICA (Winnipeg), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), and the Liverpool, Sydney and Montréal biennials. Koh was a recipient of the 2010 VIVA Award, and a finalist for the 2004 Sobey Art Award. Formerly an Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada, she is also an independent curator and partner in the independent record label weewerk. Koh is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

Sonny Assu merges Indigenous iconography with the aesthetics of popular culture to challenge the social and historical values placed upon both. An exploration of his mixed ancestry, his work appropriates or transforms items of consumer and popular culture to trace the lineage of his own personal life. Assu's work has been featured in exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada, Vancouver Art Gallery and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. He currently lives and works in Montréal. Sonny Assu's work is featured courtesy of Equinox Gallery.

Michel de Broin is a Montréal-born artist currently living and working in Berlin, Germany. Adopting a critical and playful attitude towards common objects and current ideas, he sets out to render visible, through richly profound metaphors and analogies, the forces at work in the movement of the energies which guide our actions and govern our impulses. The recipient of the 2007 Sobey Art Award, de Broin's most recent exhibitions include *Le Nouveau Pleinairisme*, curated by Kitty Scott at Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, and *Oh, Canada*, MASS MoCA. Michel de Broin's work is featured courtesy of Jessica Bradley Art + Projects.

Justin Gologorsky of **GO.LO.GOR.SKY.STUDIO** is an emerging architect and furniture entrepreneur based in Brooklyn, NY. At his office, things are developed as ideas that (sometimes) work. Gologorsky started in architecture and swayed towards furniture to justify buying more tools. *TILT*, is an active sitting concept that is aesthetically and functionally playful. The multi-purpose stools are intrinsically kinetic, stackable, durable and built with recyclable plastic.

Instant Coffee is a service oriented artist collective based in Toronto and Vancouver. Through formal installations and event-based activities, it builds a public place to practice, where ideas, materials and actions can be explored outside of the isolated studio and in a manner that renegotiates traditional exhibition structures, but is still supported by them. Instant Coffee's most consistent members are **Cecilia Berkovic**, **Jinhan Ko**, **Kelly Lycan**, **Jenifer Pappararo**, **Kate Monro**, and **Khan Lee**. They have presented two solo exhibitions and have participated in several group exhibitions at **MKG127**.

Onkar Singh Kular is a designer based in London, England. He studied Product and Furniture Design at Kingston University (UK) before going on to the Royal College of Art to complete a Masters in Design Products (2002). Kular uses design as a medium to engage with a broad range of social and cultural issues. The development Kular's work is dominated by the way it will be used, not by its formal qualities. His work has been exhibited internationally in London, Tokyo, Jerusalem, Rotterdam and Barnsley and is sold and distributed by Droog Design in Holland and Trico in Tokyo.

Chris Lindsay is a recent graduate of University of Ottawa's Fine Arts program (2011). His current practice blends sculptural aspects of materiality, form, structure and scale. His work explores aspects of human perception, examining how our senses impact our ability to achieve balance and connection and how modes of perception and inherent contradictions be made visible. He is currently living in Victoria.

Heidi Nagtegaal is an artist, writer and facilitator living in Vancouver. Basing her work on emergent natures, she uses an aesthetic of emergency, DIY, utilizing available materials to make "something out of nothing". Nagtegaal graduated from Emily Carr University of Art + Design (2005). She has recently exhibited in the Tate Modern, Vancouver Art Gallery, Burnaby Art Gallery, and portable gallery spaces worldwide.

Ken Nicol work is marked by an obsession with collecting and turning everyday objects into artworks. His process is methodical, laborious and time consuming. He creates objects from start to finish by mundane repetition over countless hours. Nicol studied at several institutions before giving up on any kind of diploma. He currently works in a studio in Toronto where he surrounds himself with old typewriters, clocks and broken things. Ken Nicol has presented two solo exhibitions and has participated in several group exhibitions at **MKG127**.

Daniel Olson is a visual artist with a long list of things to do. He is unhappy with the world, but continues to live there for personal reasons. Olson completed degrees in mathematics and architecture before obtaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (1986) and a Master of Fine Arts from York University (1995). Olson has been seen recently in Montréal, where he is rumoured to be working on his famous disappearing act.

Sascha Pohflepp is interested in science and technology, how they are reflecting our hopes for transcendence and how they are shaping the reality of our world. He has worked with numerous artistic and scientific collaborators on projects ranging from the microcosm of synthetic biology to the macrocosm of space exploration. Recent exhibitions include New Order at Mediamatic Fabriek, Talk To Me at MoMA, Q.E.D. at LJM Gallery Liverpool, What If at the China National Museum and Hyperlinks at the Art Institute Chicago. He is currently working on a publication titled SUPERCALIFORNIA which will explore the compression of the future in the twentieth century.