

A Labyrinth of Assignments and Practices: Jason Kraus's New Work

Jason Kraus's new exhibition *five hundred and thirty-six x five hundred and ninety-one* at Redling Fine Art consists of three different but related projects. The first project, "Wall Paintings" (2015), was realized from photographs that Kraus took of unremarkable sections of his studio walls. Kraus took a selection of these photographs to a painter/craftsman who reproduced them in the form of photorealist paintings. The second project, "Illustrated Frame Work" (2015), consists of wallpaper he fabricated and designed using photographic images of found objects he employed as part of an exhibition held at Redling last year. In this current exhibition, each work focuses on one of the found object images by presenting it in multiples and arranging the multiples in the form of a grid. This pattern of multiples lays on top of a background, which is a photograph of the surface of colored plywood that Kraus used last year in his show at Redling. For example in "Illustrated Frame Work (3)" (2015), we find blue colored wallpaper with a grid of multiples of a container of cheese balls printed on top. The background is actually a photo image of the blue plywood originally used in his work, "Two Pedestals (one for a work lamp and another for something else)" (2013), and the bottle of cheese balls is a photo image of the same bottle used in his work, "Two Pedestals (one for a coffee maker and one for something else)" (2015).

The third project in the exhibition, "Left To Your Own Devices" (2015), is a collaboration between artist and gallerist which allows Kraus to actively integrate the separate domains of curating and art object production. This is a somewhat controversial issue as the difference between the aesthetic and critical decisions and practices that are necessary for each is often blurred, raising questions of whether artists and curators encroach on each other's domain. In this work, Kraus instructs the owner/curator to select commercially-made wallpaper and install it on walls designated by the artist. In this case the collaborator is Erica Redling. The selected wallpaper is mounted in several locations within the gallery including the gallery offices and integrated with the other works in the exhibition. For example, some of the paintings are mounted on white gallery walls while others on wallpapered walls.

In many ways, this project is emblematic of the show. Assignments and practices separately identified under the heading of art or curatorship enter a labyrinth of reflections and projections that give these assignments and practices multiple purposes. Objects are turned into images, creating special and linguistic binaries that allow them to be turned back into objects. This also changes the terms for their consideration as objects or images. For example in "Mortarpestle" (2014), found objects such as a mortar and pestle become an image used for wallpaper. As a result, we find a reverberation between a found object that is deployed as a sculptural trope and an artwork that presents itself as an ordinary or found object (kitsch). In another series of works, color plywood reverberates between a building material and a found object, a continuous echoing created by a language of binaries, which allows the plywood to become both sculpture and pedestal. These are more than strategies of repurposing because the paradox of the reflective space produces an enduring meta-space, which is not overtaken by the linear or sequential space of repurposing where an object finds a new use. The entire installation is an active deployment of a taxonomy of assignments and practices ranging from the useless to the useful, the design and construction of objects of art and objects of utility in a space that is both a labyrinth and an echo chamber, as for example in "Left To Your Own Devices" where the gallerist is asked to make curatorial decisions, i.e., installation design, etc. but using the tropes and practices of art and the artist makes art decisions using curatorial tropes and practices.

Although *five hundred and thirty-six x five hundred and ninety-one* is made up of ordinary objects that we usually associate with kitsch, thereby possibly forming a critical relationship with Jeff Koons, it is actually doing something quite different and much more conceptual. Indeed it showcases a Borghesian-style tautology of practices and assignments that employs a systematic and insular logic. Interestingly, this tautology exposes a critique of the space of exhibition that is more properly comparable to Liam Gillick, particularly his series of late 90s works of screens and platforms that are conventionally used to create institutional spaces of discussion. Gillick's correlations between the language of art and the language of capitalism are played out metaphorically through the binary play of architectural and sculptural forms. Although Kraus is not interested in this precise critique, he is interested in exposing the blurred relationship between curatorial and art practices through a similar deconstruction of binary difference.

Charles Gaines
October, 2015

Jason Kraus
five hundred and thirty three x five hundred and ninety one
October 4th - November 14th, 2015