

CALDER KAMIN

PLASTIC PLANET



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 1 - NOVEMBER 10, 2016

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Plastic Planet Lynx, 2016, recycled styrofoam, plastic bags, glass eyes, and wood block, 18" x 19.5" x 18", photo by Madeleine Hanlon

Cover Panel: *Plastic Planet Red Fox*, 2016, recycled styrofoam, plastic bags, glass eyes, and wood block, 12" x 18" x 11", photo by Philip Rogers

CALDER KAMIN *PLASTIC PLANET*

"I have a very optimistic view of human beings. We are very special creatures. We should be capable of doing amazing things."
CALDER KAMIN

You enter the room, and immediately you're met by a frolicking coterie of playful animals. Here, a curious fox rambles over the crest of a fecund hill, her fur a saturated, cartoonish orange. Her ears appear to perk up at your arrival: she watches with jumpy interest. Over there, a plucky skunk pauses to sniff a clutch of carmine poppies that have sprouted underfoot, her young offspring following close behind. All around you, frisky creatures mug, pose, and nuzzle: a riot of Disneyfied color and romping energy. You approach these playful beings to examine more closely—they're sculptures, in fact, and each is covered with a fabulously textured, enormously intricate surface. It could be twisted fabric, you guess, but it's so shiny.

And then you realize that the title of the exhibition in which you stand—*Plastic Planet*—describes both the condition of the world in which we live and the materials from which these creatures emerge. In her making of these figures, Calder Kamin, the artist-educator-activist-thinker behind the exhibition, deploys the discarded detritus of our everyday world—plastic, a very young invention that has flourished in post-World War II systems of production. The ubiquity of plastic almost goes without saying: we consume and discard so much of the material as a matter of course that we hardly consider it at all. And yet its impact on our world is profound. The average American throws away nearly two hundred pounds of plastic in a year, choking our rivers and seas with colorful, inedible trash that threatens our wildlife. Chemicals from plastics leach into groundwater via landfills, contaminating human and

animal bodies and causing potentially harmful health effects. Floating gyres of plastic trash loom and churn in our oceans, ending up in the stomachs of marine animals and facilitating the spread of invasive species across huge expanses of water. Despite all this, our consumption of the stuff shows no signs of slowing; in fact, in the last ten years, humans have produced more plastic than in the whole of the last century.

But why are we talking trash at an art exhibition? Doesn't art exist in a rarefied realm of experience, mercifully separated from the drudgery and inherently depressing realities that comprise our everyday world? What about Matisse's idea of art—that it should be like a "good armchair, providing relaxation"? Not anymore. The contemporary conceit of art as a site of social engagement, as a place to face the social realities of our world, is today so ubiquitous as to be the default mode for many artists. Participatory art, social practice, relational art, relational aesthetics, community art, living-as-form: the generalized concept of a non-object-centered socialized art experience bears as many epithets as it does physical manifestations. Further, as a medium, socially engaged art practice has in the last twenty years achieved canonization within our most distinguished art institutions. From Rirkrit Tiravanija's collective food preparation and consumption within MoMA's gallery space, to Tino Sehgal's "constructed situations" at the Guggenheim, to Carsten Holler's gigantic slide installation at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, art today can take as its subject—and its form—the very real inherent realities that comprise everyday existence, as opposed to some abstracted concept of beauty as communicated through painted canvas or cast bronze.

All of which is to say: Kamin's manipulation of plastic material into such magnetic, evocative sculptures, and her programming

of a "Neocortex Classroom" to activate the gallery space with interactive educational activities, situates her work in lineage with these broader intellectual currents in the art world. And yet here, I want to draw a finer point on the artist's practice, which I believe stands apart from this lineage in important ways. The most strident and insistent apostles of socially-engaged art are typically not artists and makers, but rather critics and curators—thinkers like Claire Bishop, Nato Thompson, and Grant Kester. This is no accident. Embedded within their advocacy of social engagement is a barely suppressed neo-Marxist mistrust of contemporary systems of art production, dissemination, and consumption. For Bishop, participatory art positions itself against the rise of the spectacle in contemporary society: she relishes the idea that participation is important as a project because "it re-humanizes a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production." Likewise, Thompson decries the condition of spectacular viewing: for him, "typified by



Plastic Planet Fox Squirrel, 2016, recycled styrofoam, plastic bags, glass eyes, and wood block, 21" x 21" x 21.5", photo by Madeleine Hanlon



Plastic Planet, 2016, (gallery view including Neocortex Classroom, an installation where education classes for over 375 children and adults were held), photo by Philip Rogers

the image of an audience at a cinema passively watching television and film, the spectacle can be seen as shorthand for a world condition wherein images are made for the purpose of sales.” While they claim to take issue with the spectacular condition induced by worldwide capitalism, what’s really on trial here is the object itself. Individual, manipulable, consumable like so many cans of Campbell’s soup, the art object cannot be trusted for these thinkers because of its willful, shameful alliance with the market.

But I contend that art like Kamin’s, which makes a direct call on the viewer to activate his or her consciousness towards social change, demonstrates the persistent, resonant power of the beautifully-made object. As an art historian by training, then an educator by necessity, and now a curator by trade, I believe in the vital importance of objects and their capacity for meaning above and beyond their immediate contexts. I reject the notion that objects that don’t fit neatly within the emergent canon of

“participatory art” can’t incite meaningful conversation and subversive social action. Sensitive manipulation of materials, keen attention to formal concerns, and well-considered craftsmanship—all evident in Kamin’s meticulously crafted creatures—will always carry resonance in the observer’s perception, because objects invested with such consideration transcend their workaday objecthood. Objects of aesthetic contemplation existed before the advent of worldwide capitalism, and people found meaning and comfort in them long before the west named them “art.” Art historian WJT Mitchell, in his seminal text on the affect of images in our everyday lives, asked “What do pictures want?” In short, they want to be beheld, and further, they deserve to be reckoned with in all their nuance, formal complexity, and historical particularity.

And so here we find ourselves: wandering among Kamin’s beautiful, twisted forest of transformed plastic. First, we are charmed. Then, intrigued. Finally, horrified: our

everyday actions are indicted by these works. But Kamin’s practice, through its emphasis on education, empowers the viewer to transcend passivity, to take action. Harnessing the inherent power of her beautiful objects, the artist leads workshops for visitors in conjunction with local experts in the Neocortex Classroom. Through these courses, which focus on such disparate topics as dog/human relationships, raw material potential in local company waste, and salamander awareness, certain truths emerge. The world has changed under our stewardship, Kamin tells us. But her optimism persists: if we are capable of changing the world for the worse, we must also be equipped to transform it for the better. Her art perseveres in the admirable, ineffable pursuit of this overarching goal, asking us to find expansive, transformative beauty in the objects and ourselves.

Chad Alligood

Curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art



Plastic Planet Baby Raccoon, 2016, recycled styrofoam, plastic bags, glass eyes, and wood block, 14” x 24” x 3”, photo by Philip Rogers

CALDER KAMIN

EDUCATION:

- 2009 BFA, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
2003-2005 School of Visual Arts, New York, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2016 Plastic Planet, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
2014 Open A.I.R. Calder Kamin, The Beach Museum of Art, Manhattan, KS
2013-2014 The Art Truck: Calder Kamin, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, UT
2012 New Nature, Co-Lab Projects, Austin, TX
2012 Impact Proof, Window Unit, Kansas City, MO

TWO AND THREE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 Tamed Territory, Gray Duck Gallery, Austin, TX
2011 Calder Kamin and Julie Malen, Kansas City Artist Coalition, Kansas City, MO

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2016 CraftTexas 2016: Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX
State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
2015 From Mountains to Sea, Art.Science.Gallery., Austin, TX
Special Blend: The Contemporary Austin Artist Teen + Mentor Program, Pump Projects, Austin, TX
The Mother Art, Art.Science.Gallery., Austin, TX
2014 State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
2013 Local Earth, City Ice Arts curated by Plug Projects, Kansas City, MO
Half Wild, Stevens Square Center for the Arts, Minneapolis, MN
2012 Observation/Hypothesis/Experiment, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, MO
Proximity, Trap Gallery, Kansas City, MO
XOXO, Spray Booth Gallery, Kansas City, MO
2011 Breaking Boundaries: A Survey of Contemporary Ceramics, Ann Street Gallery, Newburgh, NY
Evolve!, The University of Kansas Natural History Museum, Lawrence, KS
2010 Animal Magnetism, The Barbershop Gallery, Kansas City, MO, 2010
Cumulus, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, MO
From Within the Shadows, New Puppy Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2009 Where the Wild Things Are, Red Star Studios, Kansas City, MO
Object Lesson, Craft in America Study Center, Los Angeles, CA
2008-2012 Kansas City Flat File, H&R Block Artspace, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO

LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS:

- 2016 Out of the Woods and Into Our Trash: How Animals Adapt to the Human World, Nerd Nite, Austin, TX
International Darwin Day, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX
2015 Impact Proof, Art.Science.Gallery., Austin, TX
Seeing Special Things, The Contemporary Austin, Austin, TX
Impact Proof, The 45 Fest, Austin, TX
2014 Discover the Grounds, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
The Bird Kingdom, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
Art Night Out, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
Open A.I.R. artist talk, The Beach Museum of Art at K-State, Manhattan, KS
Articipation, The Kansas City Jewish Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO
2013 Spotlight Artist Presentation: Art on the Road, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO
Impact Proof, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, UT
2011-2014 Professional Practice, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO

AWARDS:

- 2016 The Awesome Foundation Fund
2016 Mid-America Arts Alliance Artistic Innovations Grant
2015 Ashoka Compassionate Grant
2014 Kansas City Art Institute Staff Appreciation Cash Award: Creative Mind
2013 Kansas City Art Institute Staff Development Grant
Arts Through Architecture Missouri Bank
Crossroads Artboard
2012 Metropolitan Arts Council Inspiration Grant
Bread KC Grant
2009 KCAI Magic Sock Grant
2008 McKeown Special Projects Grant
2008 KCAI Magic Sock Grant
2008 Ken Ferguson Award
2006 Kansas City Art Institute Competitive Transfer Scholarship
2003 Silas H. Rhodes Scholarship at the School of Visual Arts

RESIDENCIES:

- 2014 The Beach Museum of Art's Open A.I.R. Residency, Manhattan, KS
2011-2013 Charlotte Street Foundation Urban Culture Project Studio Residency, Kansas City, MO



Plastic Planet Opossum, 2016, recycled styrofoam, plastic bags, glass eyes, and wood block, 17.5" x 32" x 7"

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 38th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,890 artists in 303 visual art exhibitions, 124 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 28 literary readings and 597 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 650

school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and
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1710 Lavaca St.
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 477-1064
info@womenandtheirwork.org
www.womenandtheirwork.org

