

Gahlberg Gallery
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Study for Convergence Performance (ice)
Kelly Kaczynski

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Gahlberg Gallery • Jan. 19 to Feb. 25, 2012



Twinned Stage, 2010, 3/8" to 1" scale model, recycled pine studs, luan, mirror, 3' x 9' x 18'

Opposite: *Study for Convergence Performance (salt)*, 2009, video stills



She grips the chopsticks, crossed to form a Cartesian grid, a few inches in front of her chest with their tips pointed towards the plate. Then, she pulls the X apart with a quick scissoring motion: This is how you cut the tangled noodles. Later, she describes plans for catered meals organized to showcase artist-designed tableware. There is an idea of selling the place settings, but the focus of her discussion is on the relationship between food and dish, dish and table.¹

She is Kelly Kaczynski, but here she will just be she. And if another she appears, she'll be KK. Or: her second initial will be reversed, the two Ks mirroring one another, conjuring the schematic image of a square platform enclosed between two walls. What might be placed, moved or set upon that platform? What might place, move or set *itself* upon the platform? Or: it might be a stage.²

She enjoys demonstrations. Nothing overtly political: wrong kind of platform. Kitchen demonstrations (semiotics of the kitchen). Woodshop demonstrations (continuous project altered daily). Basic how-to: no show business (smoke and mirrors aside).³

¹ *Set and cleared. Begin with mountains and salt.*

² *Blond hair changing color with the seasons. Grain of common lumber straw to gold to ashy gray down timber's length.*

³ *Leg caught in a reflection, head in sky or ground or both. (Apparent apparition.)*





I have a question, "in language, is there an operation equivalent to the pictorial opposition of figure to ground?" My friend – an academic – suggests, "metalepsis?" That's when a narrator steps into the action he's recounting and starts acting along. Fourth wall stuff. According to Wikipedia, it's also transumption: "taking from one place to another; metaphorically." Not exactly what I have in mind, but maybe just right for her work.⁴

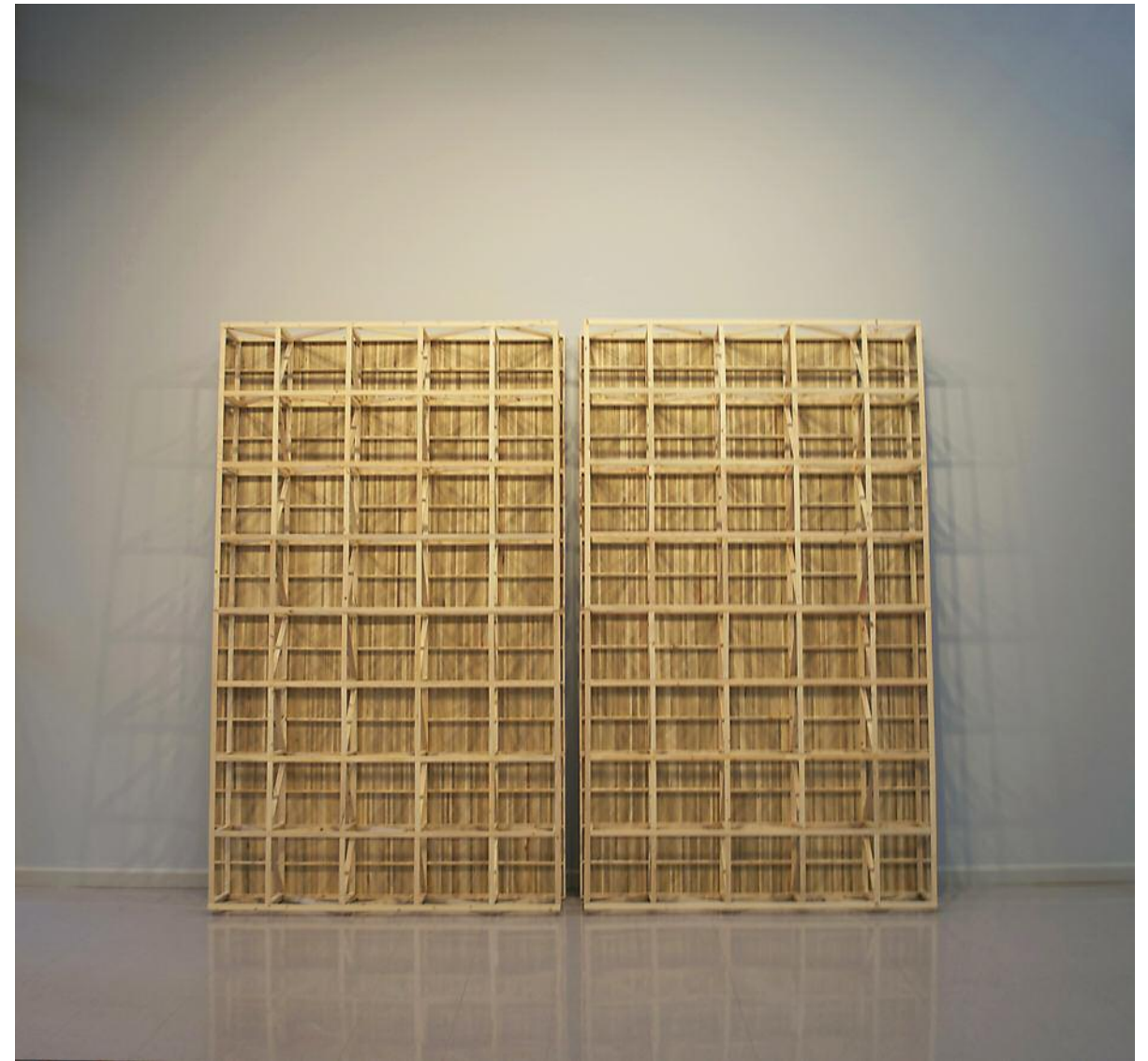
I have in mind the idea of the conventions of a story's genre – that set devices against which a narrative unfolds – becoming its central preoccupation. Realistic characters and details left hanging around the edges of the story, benched, while the text describes the field of play. Inversion where banal events might disrupt formal analysis.⁵

Succumbing to her work's structural clarity and material precision, I find myself stacking observations, theories and asides like the regularly cut planks of her wooden platforms. Wanting to mimic, in language, the orderliness of her objects and arrangements.^{10 x 10.}⁶

⁴ Really now, I should be able to fold time.
I don't know if you've noticed, but you do - regularly.
Space too!
I'm blushing. You're confirming that my secret aspirations are not so secret.

⁵ Thinking never leaves, but it does keep company.

⁶ The body vertically
1. Like this
1. Horizontally bottoms
2. Like this



It Always Falls Around, the Sky, 2009, 1/4" to 1" scale model, recycled pine studs, luan, Mt. Rainier grey, 7' 6" x 10' x 12"

Opposite: *Study for Convergence Performance (salt)*, 2009, video, sculpture (installation view)

Coming to art, or an approach to art, and trying to work within it. The sort of art that Michael Fried, back in the 1960s, deemed “theatrical.” It blurs categorical – even physical – distinctions, making the encounter with the artwork one of awkward, uncertain self-awareness. Originally an expression of nihilistic austerity, critical in its stripping of feeling from form – “hey, let’s stop and think about where we are” – this approach has, over the years, become a category unto itself, a genre. What a strange place for an artist to begin.⁷

Others have written that, both internally and as a consequence of installation, the sculptural components of her work stage basic structural oppositions. In its emphasis on fabrication and demonstration, *stage* here highlights the general sense that her sculpture models – rather than dynamically embodying – the dualisms that preoccupy it. Dualisms that – continuing to paraphrase previous interpreters – are both reinforced and unbalanced by the actual or potential occupation of the constructed forms by performers or viewers. Further, it’s often pointed out that the audience/performer dyad is itself a primary target of conceptual scrambling within her work. Work seen, now, as an experience comprised of assembled material forms, spatial arrangements and active human presences.⁸

Back to theater, back to the ‘60s. What a strange place for an artist to begin? She participates in the development of a tradition, moving forward through a particular history of contemporary art: gradual incorporation of figuration and narrative into an approach grounded in minimalism’s insistent immediacy. The body’s encounter with the work always now a doubling, one half transposed in time: the encounter, and then the reference. Many have achieved this doubling by overlaying image and process on form, or by placing the minimal object in proximity to readymades with clearer significations. But her oldest and newest works (*air is air and thing is thing*, *Study for Convergence Performance*) intervene in minimalist precedents in a bizarre and original way: by surrounding the formal object, always rigorously conceived, with an atmosphere – literally, an air – that holds the energy of a body not our own passing through the work. (Duchamp’s nude coalescing, her own cat rubbing against an invisible two by four.)⁹

⁷ Bolt upright, delivering a monologue to the listening room. The words are gone but the point is clear.

⁸ A severe formalist, a dispassionate Structuralist.

⁹ No subject except for the object ... and the trace of some other across its surface ...



Twinning a thing it is not, a hole (Utah), 2011



Twinning a thing it is not, a hole (Utah), 2011



Twinning a thing it is not, a hole (Utah), 2011

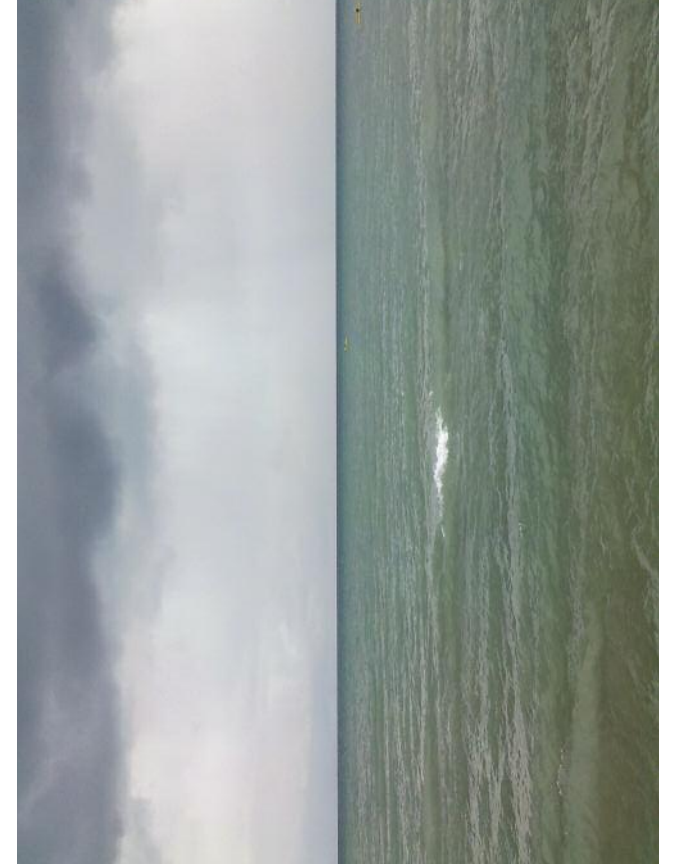


Twinning a thing it is not, a hole (New Mexico), 2011

Opposite: *Again, level (Sept. 11), 2011*

That is, her work's formal self-reflexivity – a strict modeling of and play with structural oppositions – is enacted within an opened space (the field of loose objects, the cluttered home studio) that becomes a place of indirect returns. A product of intention only insofar as it is not filled or foreclosed, this atmosphere holds ghostly figures and simple details like the sky holds weather. It's the medium of an electric affective charge that cannot be captured, easily, in the language of critical interpretation. Not the artist's biography, but her breath: an expansive sense history and daily experience that gives her art life.¹⁰

— John Neff



¹⁰ *Essentialism, recording with flora, observing I's, and - finally - oxtail soup with feelings.*

¹¹ Words borrowed from her mouth and hand.

John Neff produces works of art, organizes exhibitions and practices critical writing. He lives and works in Chicago.

Kelly Kaczynski is an artist residing in Chicago. She has exhibited nationally with venues including threewalls, IL; Hyde Park Art Center, IL; Rowland Contemporary, IL; University at Buffalo Art Gallery, NY; Triple Candie, NY; Islip Art Museum, NY; Josee Bienvenu Gallery, NY; DeCordova Museum, MA; Boston Center for the Arts, MA. Public installations include projects with the Main Line Art Center, Haverford, PA; the Interfaith Center, NY; Institute for Contemporary Art, Boston and the Boston National Historic Parks, MA; and Boston Public Library, MA. Curatorial projects include the exhibition titled *Mouthing (a sentient limb)* at the Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL, and an ongoing project-based entity titled *Unnamed Future Space*. Kaczynski is assistant professor in the Department of Art Theory & Practice at Northwestern University, IL.

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Kelly Kaczynski: *Study for Convergence Performance (ice)*
Thursday, Jan. 19 to Saturday, Feb. 25, 2012

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Barbara Wiesen
Director and Curator
Gahlberg Gallery



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Twinning a thing it is not, a hole (Nevada), 2011

Cover: *Mirror, Salt Flats, 2011*