

M+B

ARTILLERY

JESSE STECKLOW

by Kathryn Poindexter | July 2, 2018



What does it mean for the life of an artwork when it can be experienced in dramatically different contexts, as a constellation rather than a point on a map? What happens when the legibility of a work is radically challenged by a shift in viewing conditions; do those terms become part of the work itself? Such are the questions posed by Jesse Stecklow's exhibition "Staging Grounds," wherein autonomous works take on a double-life and exist independently as well as part of an encompassing installation.

The cultivated discomfort that this project incites stems from a socially-determined practice that challenges notions of singular authorship and the myth of the hermetic work of art; at the same time it retains some of these conventions, albeit entering them into a new visual syntax.

Upon entering the exhibition, which is dimly lit solely by fluctuating lighting elements interwoven throughout, one can feel their sensory organs becoming slowly recalibrated. The dark ambience and minimal visual stimuli heighten perception of the ticking and whirring sounds that punctuate the space.

Polished aluminum sheeting structures awash in and refracting alternating warm and cool lights dominate the exhibition and provide a sort of armature for more intimate spaces and encounters throughout. Outcroppings, perches, stages and

maquettes set within this meandering structure house smaller works. Rounding the corner to the reverse side of the aluminum structure dividing the first room, one is met with a number of misplaced-looking parts and what pass as Minimalist and Dada-inspired assemblages. It takes a moment of orientation to notice the small framed inkjet print, *Untitled (Parents' Photo)* (2015), lying flat on top of the shoulder-height modular ledge protruding from its aluminum armature. Moments such as this that demand that the viewer crane their neck and stoop low to get close to a work, or perambulate among components are frequent.

The composition of *Untitled (Parents' Photo)* is made up of drawings of an ear set against circular marks and the image of wheat on a white background. These and other symbols recur throughout the show—ears, circles, ball bearings, aluminum, clocks, lights and found imagery relating to public transit are recapitulated into new forms. Moving in and out of sculptural, photographic, aural and ephemeral forms, it's nearly impossible to tell where one work begins and another ends, which is very much the point. Kinetic potential, feedback loops, and the politics of public transportation are resounding themes.

The checklist accompanying the show mystifies but also offers clues. The medium information for *Untitled (6:35, 18:35)* (2014) lists "clock parts, packaging, carbograph 5 air samplers," indicating that this sculpture is actively collecting airborne "data" from the exhibition space. The collection and mediation of data, processed both within and outside of art-specific contexts, is a driving property of Stecklow's practice, and one that perpetually provides material for future transmogrifications. The authorial interplay between the artistic auteur and the network ensures that this work will never remain stuck within the confines of an established set of conventions, but also provides the maintenance of vital kernels of humanism along the way.