

MATT HOYT AND JAY SANDERS

JAY: Is all of this your studio?

MATT: Yeah. Mostly the desk.

JAY: What have you been working on?

MATT: I made this the other day.

JAY: With those as part of it?

MATT: No it's drying. There's concrete and tempera paint inside of here. There was this piece of some sort of epoxy or latex paint on the ground and I peeled it up.

JAY: You found it on the street?

MATT: Yeah. The underside had parts of the concrete stuck in it and this dimpled texture. So I was looking at it and started cutting slits in it, like a sewing pattern, and I folded it around and glued them together. It started to become a rounded form, it started to look like something completely different, like a stone with a greenish tint, algae or moss residue. And I poured concrete inside of it so it would hold its form. I don't know what will happen with that.

JAY: With these small pieces, does it start with something you find and then want to modify? Or do you start with raw material that you want to form into something else that it doesn't already look like?

MATT: It usually starts with raw material. Usually something malleable that will harden later on, plaster, glue, etc. It's usually, coaxed or forced to do what I need it to, not necessarily what it's intended to do. I did these—most of them—last night because I couldn't sleep. These are kind of three-dimensional sketches I've been doing just for the sake of exploring forms with less regard for what the material looks like. Because the surfaces are so uniform they seem diagrammatic or cocoon-like to me. As if some information has been deleted.

JAY: Were you happy with the show at Dispatch [a project space on Henry St. in New York] earlier this year? Was it a good experience?

MATT: Completely. Mark [Van Yetter] extended the invitation to do a sort of split show.

JAY: It was so great to walk into that little gallery that doesn't even look like a gallery but more of a storefront office, and see these shelves of your stuff shown in this hospitable way. Did you bring from here the bookshelves that they were on?

MATT: Yeah, those are them. They're the shelves that were already in my room. They were here when I moved in.

JAY: I remember before I saw your work for the first time, you had come to that screening I did with Mike Smith which included a video of a tabletop performance by John Zorn's "Theatre of Musical Optics" and some Stuart Sherman stuff. We talked about it after and you said you felt it resonated with your work, or that it had some synchronicity.

MATT: I was really impressed with both of those videos. Both seemed to deal with relationships between these small objects that were being manipulated. In the Sherman video the relationship seemed to be catalytic... it seemed that there was a notion of some kind of cause and effect relationship between the objects. As though a certain object was set in specific relation to another in order to produce a seemingly intended result. Like some sort of mysterious protocol that involved a confusion between the symbolic and physical. It also had a deadpan humor that I enjoyed, but the whole thing was difficult to get inside of, I felt pretty blocked out. But I think the Zorn video really opened things up for me, for what I was trying to do.

JAY: In that video there's a sequence where he shows these tiny objects in pairs. And you have these two very little things and then there is this pull between being able to tell that they were familiar little scraps of things that maybe he's showing as is, or maybe he had done something to. Some felt familiar, that you knew it was some part of a material or object that you had some general proximity to but it was hard to identify, and then when he puts these things in juxtapositions, it further amplifies this slip between familiarity and abstraction.

MATT: Right. It seems that was part of his criteria for choosing them. They gave the impression of being obscured from some prior intention. They also shared

a common size range. I remember that you could see his fingers coming in and out of the frame, moving them. It gave an obvious indication of their scale and it also helped reveal the distance at which the camera was placed. That point of view felt familiar to me, around the same distance that I like to look at my own work from.

JAY: I remember when you were working toward your show, you didn't quite know how you were going to present them. There's an openness to how you might show these pieces right? Or maybe it's unresolved in some kind of way?

MATT: I think that I've decided to let it remain unresolved, for now. To let it take its shape over time. The individual pieces are more or less finished, although they do get altered sometimes. But when they are first being made I'm pretty oblivious to how they may be presented. It's just not a consideration at that point. Later on they seem to get grouped together and it's hard to discern if the entire grouping is a piece in itself or if the individual units are their own autonomous pieces. It's a distinction that I'm kind of indifferent about making.

JAY: Are you indifferent because it's not such a big issue? Or because it is a big issue that's hard to resolve when showing your work publicly?

MATT: Because it seems important. It's important because it's what I'm dealing with. But I think that making the distinction between a fixed piece or something that has these elements that can be arranged and rearranged in different combinations . . .

JAY: And an individual piece or element can reconstitute itself? Get shown more than once in different ways?

MATT: If possible, if necessary, parts can be shown more than once. And then my attitude towards exhibiting it, at least lately, is that it comes to this arbitrary point in time. At that point in time, the point of the show, what's exhibited is the form that things took at that moment. And that moment, that form, is no more or less important than any other. But I like that there is this formality of shows that can shape something. It's like celebrating a holiday on a specific day as compared to, maybe, a Jehovah's Witness not recognizing one day as being more significant than another.

JAY: For your last show, once the particular arrangement was made, it stayed the same, right? I know you are interested at times in your works being held, too.

MATT: It was a fixed arrangement. I think that, because they're typically quite small and there's no designated top, bottom, front and back to them, it's nice if they can be looked at casually, if you can hold them, turn them, put them down as you wish, but I'm also interested in them being seen in an arrangement of my choosing.

JAY: When you make something and have a thought in mind or a mental trajectory in relation to the material, will what you're thinking then stay with it? Or will the later contexts and presentations change its meaning for you?

MATT: It's difficult to predict. Typically, I tend to see them as standing in front of the succession of thoughts that accompanied their formation. Some thoughts stay with them very strongly and acquire more significance over time. Other times they are pretty unstable. I forget or I become interested in an aspect of it that I hadn't previously considered. Earlier associations can be eclipsed. In still other cases its image might change in my mind's eye and that can lead to it being altered or to the making of another piece.

JAY: They seem able to stay really active as elements within your whole project. Something can go out and then you can bring it back again and it's the same or it's different by how it related to its surrounding elements. There's not such a clear idea what's a new thing or that your work is "progressing" along a single line.

MATT: No, there's a complication of that. It might happen because of how I think of them. Maybe there is a bit of a self-referential aspect to it. Maybe that keeps things circulating in and out.

JAY: Will something you find and pick up inspire something you might make?

MATT: Yeah. There was something I picked up today because I made these things last night. I'm having a hard time articulating this.

JAY: Well, that's a reason to do all of this. If it's something you could easily articulate, maybe you should just say it and not do it. If it's a literary exercise, then it's not so much about the material process. I mean, if you can verbalize something clearly, why bother with all these materials.

MATT: Right. Why play with something.

JAY: Yeah. If you know the outcome you already want.

MATT: Right.

JAY: When you went to art school, was this the sort of work you were making?

MATT: Something near this. Most things I made were more along the lines of this ["animal head" object].

JAY: I've seen this. Did you make others like this?

MATT: Yeah but that's the only one I still like. There are others. Here's one. It's really damaged.

JAY: Oh wow. Is this any kind of real animal that existed?

MATT: You mean is there a reference for it?

JAY: Yeah.

MATT: No, I don't think so. Not directly, not a photo or anything. I started it without knowing what it would be like in the end. Most people tend to immediately ask what it's made out of. I remember thinking of different ways to answer that. A friend suggested it was made out of a rat's head. I really like the mouth on that one. It's strange, because that one is the only one that's really figurative out of all the other pieces.

JAY: I remember when you first showed me your work, just a few of them in an orange bowl; I think that one was there.

MATT: It was. It's usually there. Because I think of most of them as sprouting from that somehow.

JAY: Even though nothing is quite that strong? This animal head is pretty strong. There's such an immediate recognition that nothing else of yours has. But you think this informs a lot of the other ones?

MATT: It set a course. A tendency or an approach to materials, meaning, imagery. Most of these things seem broken or unfinished . . . as if that's the same thing. But most of the other ones, even if they look organic, there's not really a sign of life in them, not as much as there is in this one. It cuts some how. You don't empathize with the others in the same way. Not immediately. But whatever energy you transfer into this, I think, carries into the others.

JAY: Do you like having this around when you show other ones? Does it help direct people into what you're doing?

MATT: Yeah. It does. Lately I've been thinking of trying to work more closely to this again, to see what it would be like now. I think somehow it charges the other ones. And it's also such a one-off from everything else. It's sort of a wrench in the works of how you're thinking all these relate to each other. Then all of a sudden there's this. It's the only one that's that far off.

JAY: I had that feeling, too, both times I saw this. That's interesting in terms of how to . . . because maybe they're a little oblique and it's impossible to anticipate how someone's going to engage. What sort of device you'd use to help direct a way in, to set a tone toward approaching the rest of the work. When you show is that a big concern? Staging a way in or a sense of what.

MATT: It's important. But I think, I hope, it's something that I can do intuitively. I can just, this may be vague, but I can see it, kind of feel it, but I don't know if it's something that I'd like to do in a self-conscious way. I like to shift back and forth between having an intuitive understanding of what I'm doing and a more conscious understanding of it. I mean, that's what people do in general, but in certain instances I think that I have a tendency to sabotage that process. I guess it's a form of defense. I don't want things to become contrived or too calculated. The first time I showed these things, when I saw them in there they started to open up to me and I liked that process and I felt that's how I wanted other people to experience it. I wouldn't want to interfere with that too much. There is so much information that falls to the wayside without being recognized. I wouldn't want to deny anybody from seeing these things in the way that they can recognize. I don't think it's just a lack of commitment on my part. I think it's part of the project I've started to work on without knowing that that's what I was going to be doing.

JAY: There's malleability in your work. It seems like a lot of them are pitched right on this cusp between states: synthetic and organic, recognizable and not. And there's a slightness. I mean if you took all of these and threw them in an empty lot, they'd be hard for someone to find. But that pitch of in-betweenness gives them a lot of intensity. And in a gallery, seeing them sit there for a while on view.

MATT: When it works, I think that for me it opens up a space. I guess that's what you can call it.

JAY: I find the work's particular space very striking. The last thing many artists are thinking about is focused attention on objects in this way. People are interested

in presentation systems, distribution systems, making reference to the history of art presentation. Whereas things like this aren't so imbued with . . .

MATT: A clear intention?

JAY: That most art already knows how it wants to work in the system, to operate as an "art object," and then the work moves out from that. And I feel like that's definitely an interesting way to engage and is indicative of the culture we're in, that you could wobble things at this really outer level of removal from the presence of something with all these imaginary but very real layers encasing it. Economies . . . an art economy, social economy, etc. All of that's quite fascinating.

But I like that these things of yours feel like they struggle, not the practice, but the actual things. I mean, a lot of art is so good at, if anything, it's self-conscious of how to be "art." How to add up to a show, how to look good in magazines and how to go on and be in museum exhibitions as some kind of emblem of something. To enact a narrative of an artwork going through the world, which is a process and a history you can theatericize and let happen without much thinking.

And I feel like this stuff, your work, even when it's on view, they're not there to stand in for some other kind of art experience that's already highly codified. I mean even as simply as how to show them—that's still not totally clear. They don't answer all their own questions and even if they're informed by other art, they don't have their own future history built into them.

MATT: Do you mean that they're not overly preoccupied with determining their outcome?

JAY: In a way. I guess what I'm trying to say is just the simple matter of art happening within the histories of mediums. And your work's eccentric nature kind of makes any strong reference to the history of a medium, like sculpture, somewhat moot. It avoids some of those pressures and instead builds up other pressures of its own. Do you make things all the time?

MATT: No. I quit all the time. Not really, I pretend to or think I do. I must make things all the time, but I like the idea that I could just not do it. That I could just say one day that I'm not doing it. Kind of peeking over the edge to keep things in perspective.

JAY: With your work, there's such an imbued richness and density to these small objects that they become very self-

sufficient. We're here on your bedroom floor and I feel like there's nothing lacking looking at these things here.

MATT: Yeah. In a way I think that this is the ideal way for them to be seen.

JAY: Do you know the composer Luc Ferrari? His most famous piece is called "Presque Rien" or "nearly nothing." It's all found sounds. It's a morning, sunrise, in this fishing village. It's hard to describe what he's doing, but he's interested in the thin line between sound as abstract material and sound as a document of recognizable events. The work goes far to hide its fact of being "composed." It sounds like it could almost just be a real-time recording, but in truth it's very highly constructed, taking countless recordings of the day's activity and manipulating them into a short audio work. And I think for him one question was can you use found sound material and then edit and treat it like you would edit a film, but avoid any signs of the author's fingerprints all over it? It creates this irresolvable tension between artificiality (art) and a heightened and crystallized sense of the "real." ■■