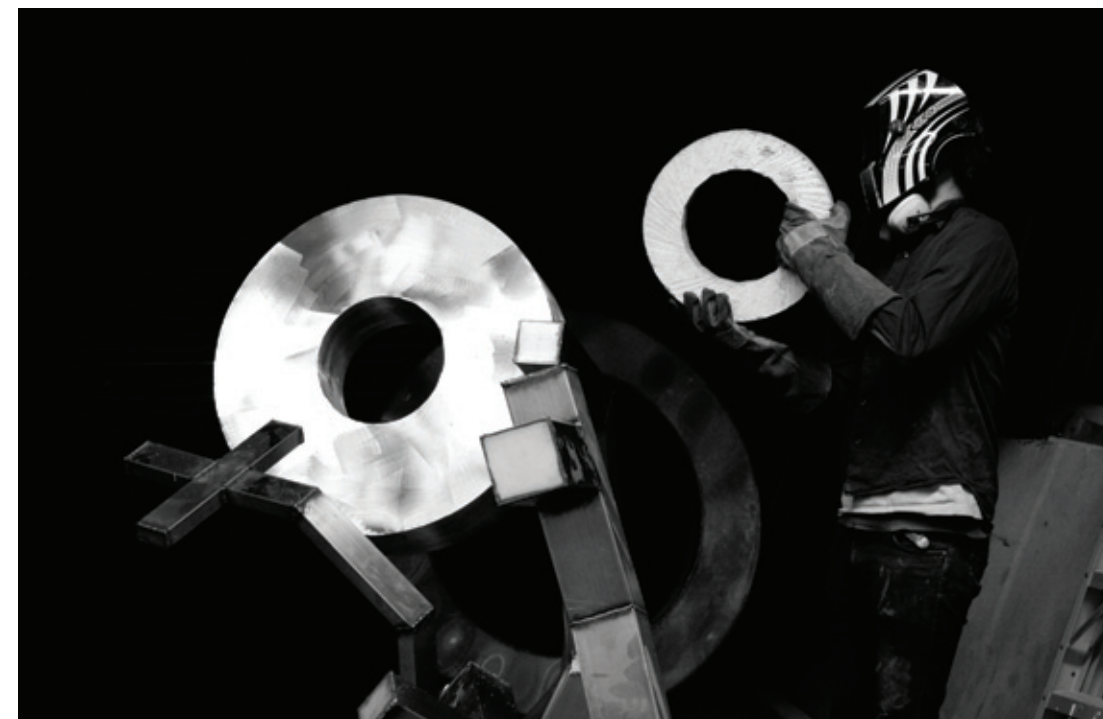


CALEB SHEA: THE PEASANTS ARE REVOLTING





BIOGRAPHY



Shea was born in 1977 in Newcastle, New South Wales, where he studied toward a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the University of Newcastle from 1995 to 1997. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art (Sculpture) at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in 2006 and in 2009 received a Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours), also at RMIT. In 2011 he completed a Master of Visual Arts at Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. Solo exhibitions include *X + Drawing*, with Julia Francis, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, 2012; *Link VI*, with Marco Cher-Gibard, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, 2012; *XTYO*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2012; and *Exercise in Sophistication*, with Thomas Jeppe, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2011. Selected group exhibitions

include *Higher Arc Launch*, Murray White Gallery, Melbourne, 2012; *Insert Coin Here*, Craft Victoria, 2010; *Scale of Mark*, RMIT First Site Gallery, Melbourne, 2009; *Model for Abundant*, Australian Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale, 2008; *Two-Fold Exhibition*, George Paton Gallery, The University of Melbourne, 2007; and the Fourth Baldessin Foundation Travelling Fellowship Exhibition, Faculty Gallery, Monash University, 2004. Shea received the Fourth Baldessin Foundation Travelling Fellowship in 2004 and the National Gallery of Victoria Women's Association Masters Award in 2011.

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Caleb Shea is represented by Utopian Slumps, Melbourne.

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The sculptures of Melbourne artist Caleb Shea have their roots in avant-garde art of the twentieth century—from the emblematic and technological abstractions of Russian Constructivism to the welded stainless-steel sculptures of David Smith—but seek a new trajectory for formalist abstraction.

Line and form are central ‘objects of obsession and attraction’ for Shea, and his stand-alone sculptures can be read through their material and formal qualities. Made of different materials—steel, wood and stone—and with different surface treatments—painted and burnt, matt and shiny—the works in this exhibition share a basic repertoire of forms. These are summarised in the title of one of Shea’s earlier exhibitions, XYTO, the shapes of its letters echoing those of the works—lines and circles, arrows, crosses and forks, which though abstract are the building blocks of various symbolic systems—representing the horizon, tree, sun and moon, or male and female, or noughts and crosses, even hammer and sickle. Though aware of all these associations and the evolution of such forms in modern sculpture, Shea develops his works intuitively with a light and experimental touch. Most of the sculptures are three-legged, and many are built from stainless steel climbing from a base, with the centre of gravity determining their final shape. Animated by this delicate balance, they appear just short of toppling over, and this energy strengthens figurative associations. The works are grounded, yet push up into space, the largest to a not-quite-human height, so despite their totemic shapes they never become monuments. A cross intersecting with a rectangular rod is the basis of several smaller, compressed works with blunt, cut-off ends. Like pieces of Lego they invite linkage or extension, as part of a larger set, and indeed Shea imagines the totality of his oeuvre as an ever-growing accumulation and evolution of forms developed through repetition and variation.

In his playful title Shea suggests a questioning of the modernist tradition to which he is indebted, registering a distance from both from the revolutionary values of Communism in the 1920s and the work of his artist



heroes from the 1960s, like Smith, whose abstract sculptures similarly carry layers of allusion. While inevitably drawing from Minimalism’s legacy—the sculptures have no plinths, and their arrangement cannot help but draw from installation practice—Shea’s work is without the unitary shapes or systematic repetition of minimal art and rejects its focus on the primacy of the viewer, connecting more strongly with less fashionable formalist streams of 1960s abstraction. Shea has described his work as ‘a kind of 3D painting’, as if the different elements were like marks on a canvas. Indeed the rhythmic interrelationship within and between the sculptures is crucial, and the exhibition is a delicate balancing act between the preservation of a strictly formal, abstract tradition and the introduction of theatrical or relational qualities. Shea describes this dynamic as a ‘collision of different directions’, or ‘a collision of possibilities’.

The exhibition is not site-specific, though a kind of narrative is suggested by the arrangement of works in relation to each other. In part, this mimics the casual array of objects in the studio, where different visual elements interact and provide hints into various

LIST OF WORKS

All works are dated 2012. All are courtesy of the artist and Utopian Slumps, Melbourne.

Untitled (fat deep red circle)
stainless steel, polyurethane paint
175 x 100 x 70 cm

Untitled (orange thin hovering X)
stainless steel, polyurethane paint
130 x 110 x 60 cm

Untitled (large bright red circle)
stainless steel, polyurethane paint
150 x 130 x 100 cm

Untitled (small grey arrow)
stainless steel, etch primer
55 x 60 x 47 cm

Untitled (stacked grey intersections)
stainless steel, etch primer
90 x 44 x 45 cm

Untitled (armed irregular grey arc)
stainless steel, etch primer
145 x 75 x 70 cm

Untitled (small burnt wood)
wood
30 x 30 x 30 cm

Untitled (large burnt wood)
wood
65 x 60 x 60

Untitled (bluestone intersection)
bluestone
70 x 70 x 70 cm

Untitled (concrete)
concrete
60 x 77 x 15 cm

Sparks
Portrait of O-X
digital c type archival prints on aluminium
150 x 50 cm

Untitled (moon in light box)
wood, Perspex, duratran print, LED lights
55 x 55 x 19 cm



ways of reading, from registering basic shapes in narrative relationship to attaching romance to the art-making process. Shea’s inclusion of photographs—of the moon, of previous works or of him working in the studio—support the title’s call for a more open-ended reading, shifting the colour palette, and creating slippages of time, space and scale that lend complexity to the overall grouping.

Set into a small, hexagonal lightbox sitting on the floor, a black-and-white NASA photograph of that seemingly autonomous sculptural form, the Moon, watches over the array of sculptures. It has the force of attraction, its familiar luminescent perfection seeming to draw everything towards it, and its shape acts as a reference for circular forms in the sculptures themselves. We might relate this theatrical tableau to the whimsical title as it summons up an image of figures set against authority or perhaps sculptures by a young artist that embrace outmoded traditions only to liberate them.

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LINDA MICHAEL

PROJECT GALLERY #11
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