

Taylor Baldwin
Statement

Does a fossil skull of an ancient human ancestor have anything to say about cycles of economic boom and bust? Does a familiar item like a box fan have a relationship to the transformation of frontier into civilization? In my artistic practice I use sculpture, installation, and drawing as a tool to stitch our messy personal relationships with objects into a web of history and material, civilization and landscape, politics and knowledge. I am interested in creating art that exists through potentially flawed associative logic, based partly on sound research, but also on willful speculation, hunches, and hearsay. I am interested in the fluid nature of how we extract meaning from the physical world, and how we write narratives to knit together disparate points that appear related. In these narratives there is still a role for intuition, and ultimately I'm concerned with finding places in the world, and in the studio, that still feel like they could genuinely contain mystery.

I search for material objects that suggest specific relationships with immaterial constructs in culture and history; a chainsaw to logging and resource usage, a fossil to geology and extinction, a prehistoric cow skull to frontier and empire, a milk crate to commonplace consumerism. The work draws out of familiar objects a materiality that diverges from the conventional metonymic identity, a materiality that disrupts certain expectations: the rusted chainsaw is plastic, the newspaper is hand-drawn, the box fan and milk crate are composed of recovered extinct wood and parts of arsoned houses. I am attracted to the handmade object, a method whose nuanced physical qualities are at odds with the expected clean language of industrial objects. I see my handmade attempts at mimetic representation as a way to work against the grain of the industrial manufacturing model, traveling from the final commercial product back through the mechanized production line in search of a human hand on the other side.

Within the work, constellations of objects triangulate factual information with raw material and representational form to reveal the spectrum of contradictory layers through which they can be read. Meaning shifts as narratives are constructed and dismantled, as relationships between installations of objects, their materials, and their interpretation are forged and doubted. The pieces are not closed circuits, and resolution in the work relies on a viewer's ability to operate in grey areas where conjecture, imagination, and tangential associations are fruitful currency, and where the material world can still contain mystery. The role I see for my work is of creating physical anomalies: finding the point where the physical world oscillates between raw material and known form, familiarity and disorientation.