

## David Kennedy Cutler Wrestles With Images

by Scott Indrisek 22/07/14



David Kennedy Cutler in his Bushwick studio.  
(Photo by Scott Indrisek)

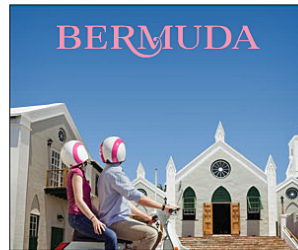


David Kennedy Cutler's "Sustenance (Inside) 1." Courtesy the artist

David Kennedy Cutler's sculpture exists at a point where that medium rubs up against photography and performance. Consider a few of the transparent Plexiglas sculptures, made back in 2009, that are part of Lisa Cooley's current group show, "Eric's Trip." Huddled in the center of the gallery, they seem to warp the very air around them. They were crafted out of simple 4- x 8-foot sheets of Plexi that the artist softened with an industrial heat gun, contorting the flat material in a process that he likened to "doing yoga and wrestling at the same time." Their intensely hands-on production makes the sculptures both physical objects — ghostly, ethereal, but solid — and "documents of a performance, or of their own making," he explained.

The pieces had their public outing at Cutler's first exhibition at [Derek Eller Gallery](#) five years ago. While most young artists treat their solo debut as a chance to loudly trumpet their arrival on the scene, Cutler "wanted to do something the opposite — a quieter, poetic kind of gesture." His aesthetic grew a bit noisier by the time of his second show at the gallery in 2012: a series of totem-like resin-and-mixed-media works that incorporated things like melted compact discs, or photographs of sidewalk oil stains that Cutler would physically mess with before burying them in layers of transparent material. His studio at the time was sited above the underground disaster-remnants of the [Greenpoint oil spill](#), which pushed him towards considerations of such chemical toxicities, as well as "how the body engages with materiality."

Cutler's newest works recall the form of the earlier Plexiglas pieces and continue to push forward the artist's interest in what he terms "images as material." Willful perversions of technology are also at the fore. There's a hand-held scanner, traditionally used by research libraries, that Cutler exploits to capture myriad images — his wife's legs; vegetables his mom ships him from a farm-share in Vermont; the black-and-white pattern of his bathroom floor; plaid shirts — which he then prints, rescans, and recombines into busily disorienting digital collages. "I'm looking for inspiration, but only in the extremely immediate realm," he said. "It's burrowing deeper and deeper into personal archaeology."



Those recontextualized snippets of Cutler's life are then given a unique, three-dimensional existence, thanks to the large-scale Epson printer that he's rigged to print those images on both sides of thin, flexible sheets of aluminum. That pricey piece of equipment was snapped up by Cutler's building-mate [Glen Baldrige](#) — it was being thrown out by Urs Fischer's studio. Since it had landed in his lap gratis, Baldrige was fine with his friend taking some creative liberties with the machinery. "Glen calls it 'hotrodding the printer' — tricking it," Cutler explained. "You have to learn its language. In a way it's a little similar to the Plexiglas. You have this thing meant for one application — it only comes in these sizes and thicknesses, all of these constraints based on industrial needs — and you're engaging with it to see what you can do with it as an artist."

The resulting pieces — with their wild, all-over prints and mangled, almost violent shapes — conjure a variety of references and influences, from the work of Daniel Gordon and Ethan Greenbaum (both friends of Cutler's) to photographic-sculptural experiments by contemporaries like Letha Wilson, or forebearers like Robert Heinecken. There's also something of John Chamberlain's brawny, smashed automobile aesthetic in the way Cutler shapes the aluminum. ("I bend it with my hand, I stab it with a chisel, tear it, twist it," he said, also describing the process as a sort of sculptural version of Abstract Expressionism. "It's pretty bodily. I get cuts all over.")

For Cutler, the sculptures are a way to explore the charged psychology of living in a world flush with images. "I'm grappling with the way my mind is changing, based on how I spend my time," he said. "Think about navigating through screens on a computer all day — that insane layering, and an engagement back and forth between real objects and images of objects. I'm trying to bridge the gap between that very flat, transparent experience, and how that experience uploads back into the real world." Yet as concerned as they are with how he and his contemporaries process and make sense of an overloaded, digitally enhanced world, the works are also resolutely old school: the product of that aforementioned yoga-and-wrestling conception of conjuring an object from scratch. "I think about the sculptures in terms of how they should look, but they're also just artifacts," he said, referring to that ongoing struggle and exertion against the material itself. "It's really in-the-studio navel-gazing, but that's so much of how artists spend all of their time: You and some inanimate stuff, all day long."