

## Notes on process

Bradley Vincent

*One way to make a vase. Study Cage. Mark only the boundary between you and the clay.*

I have read these words many times, wondering at the meaning of them and hoping to understand the implications of them. I wrote them for the first time a decade ago, one night, as I was listening to one of the most impactful pieces of audio I have had the pleasure of stumbling upon on the internet. Recorded in 1965 at the LA County Museum of Art, John Cage reads aloud three of his essays, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist and His Work", "26 Statements Re Duchamp", and "Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas". Archive.org notes in the audio listing, "This lecture is of great historical value."

You bet. The recording is astounding in its insights and compelling in its delivery. Hearing Cage in his gentle, affable American accent is soothing, his warm and encouraging audience, your welcome companions. Most striking to me though is the structure of the text. Written quickly, says Cage, it is based on a musical form called Cartridge Music. You can listen to the audio for a full, not uncomplicated, explanation, but essentially a series of rules, based on intersecting lines and shapes, governs what is written (a story, say) and the number of lines and words used. This is his 'process'. That it lends to the piece a kind of musicality is hardly surprising. What it may give us pause to reflect on is how the parameters an artist sets for themselves ultimately shapes our experience of their work.

*It's only a gift (If you see it as a gift)* presents works by five artists and examines the role of set parameters in their practice and the way that process shapes the physical reality of their work. We see how the means of production, be it fabrication or happenstance or assemblage, imbues any final physical form with welcome complexity. The exhibition title, on the surface, seems to position any object as precious (that is, worthy of gifting) if the inclination of the viewer is right. Looking again, it might suggest that the circumstances of these artworks' making, those processes that become more apparent when we take a longer view, serve to generate some special quality of desirability.

**Megan Cope's** work is the material by-product of one of her public artworks. This detritus is collected as a matter of chance. Acutely aware of the impact of material processes on the environment, concrete cylinders drilled out of a larger structure are re-purposed, recycled, and here are given their own importance. Free from the context of the original artwork, they are liberated

of a former, specific meaning and graced with the chance for new and potentially unexpected readings.

For **Renato Antinao**, his parameters are the streets of Rotterdam. His process is one of walking and observation. In the rich tradition of flaneur-ship, these works foreground time and selection as key elements of process. The resulting non-figurative images are viewed by the artist as gifts from the city, direct to him. And now to us.

For **Georgia Morgan**, ‘what the artwork does’ is prioritized over what the artwork ultimately looks like. This is a practice dictated by materials, where the second step is only known once the first is taken. Objects often seen a ‘rubbish’ are collected. They are then contemplated or ‘read’, seeking from them a sense of what they might become, shaping the work into a felt-for and somehow fated form.

**Shan Turner-Carroll** presents ‘elemental’ illusions: fake rocks and electronic flotsam. They give us reason to wonder at how these elements have come together, at what conceptual process brought these temporally disparate objects – the (faux) ancient and the built-in obsolete – into the one place. As they come (rock)face to face what is unearthed are questions about our relationship to the non-human world.

Finally, **Elliot Bastianon** works with the kind of parameters more often encountered in the laboratory than the studio. The resulting works are welcome exercises in controlled chance, allowing a natural process of crystal growth and surface degradation to change the very physical nature of his materials. The objects become a record of this process, wearing their making in their recognizable crystal form.

Around the same time that John Cage was holding forth in inimitable style, Robert Morris was writing his 1966 essay “Notes on Sculpture”. In it he set out to examine the non-imagistic potential of sculpture and its diversion from the problems of painting. Most relevantly for this exhibition, he suggests that the alleviation from the need to present a ‘climatic moment’ liberates sculpture from the burden of image-based representation. If this is true, then the place in which we locate ‘a meaning’ in these works can be expanded beyond their final form to encompass also what has preceded

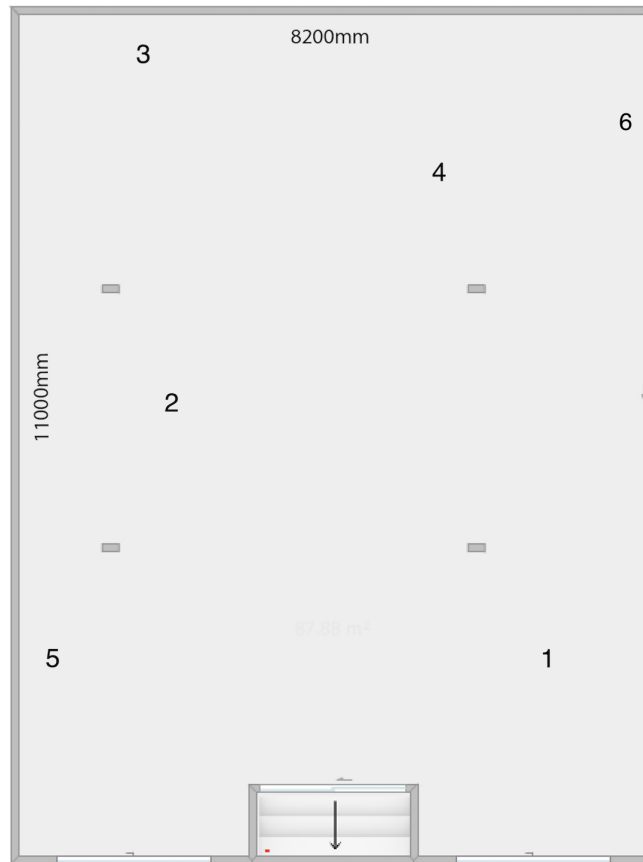
it. With the removal of the requirement for a definitive outcome we can allow, simply, possibility.

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When I was prompted to jot down those three short sentences a decade ago, it was a result of a particular set of stimuli. Chief amongst them, Cage, but also a state of disquiet on a summer night, an inclination for call-and-response writing (even across decades and recognised levels of esteem) and a predilection for short verse. Thinking about them again now, with the benefit of the exercise of writing this essay, and the added voice of Robert Morris, I think that perhaps that set of prompts (and habits) might be considered a process. That I might be able to relieve these lines of the need for definitive meaning; that in their making is a certain ineffable substance that might render them desirable to a reader of the right inclination; and, that the non-definitive line between ourselves and the clay is ever-shifting.

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This essay accompanies *It's only a gift (If you see it as a gift)*, curated by Laurie Oxenford and Grace Dewar at Outer Space 2021.



1. Megan Cope / *Untitled (Extractions I)* 2020 / core drilled cement plug, aggregate, pink acrylic spray paint and beeswax / 70 x 110mm x 214 pieces / courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.
2. Georgia Morgan / *Tropical-Industrial Ritual at The Shell* 2021 / breeze blocks, soft plastic drink bottles, 4 gagri (clay pots), 4 bags of Palakkadan Matta rice, terracotta clay, green scaffolding poles and red sindoor / dimensions variable / courtesy of the artist.
3. Elliot Bastianon / *Pattern* 2021 / copper, PVE pipe, copper sulfate crystals / 1000 x 1000 x 200mm / courtesy of the artist.
4. Shan Turner-Carroll / *Bodies On A Rock* 2020 / styrofoam rock, acrylic paint, projector, tape, cardboard, tripod, video, concrete rock and strap / dimensions variable / courtesy of the artist.
5. Renato Antinao / *Untitled, Rotterdam, The Netherlands* 2020 / photograph inkjet print 1/5 + 1 AP / 600 x 400mm / courtesy of the artist.
6. Renato Antinao / *Untitled, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (triptych)* 2020-21 / photograph inkjet print 1/5 + 1 AP / 600 x 400mm / courtesy of the artist.