



Aaron Aujla

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by Audrey Rose Smith

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RAW MATERIALS: AARON AUJLA ON ART, COMMERCE AND THE ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

I'm meeting artist Aaron Aujla on a chilly Monday afternoon at a coffee shop in TriBeCa. We're meeting here because it's close to where Aaron has been working on his next project, which involves a lot of time spent at Plastic Land. We muse momentarily on our shared love of Plexiglass, and I get a few pointers on how to hang and clean Plexi, after which our interview ensues...

OOO: Has 55 Gansevoort been a unique challenge, being very small, unusually shaped and notoriously 'in-enterable'? (The gallery is viewable from the street; visitors are meant to look through the door windows to access the space.)

Aujla: Yes, it's an atypical space, but my work is usually site or location specific so it doesn't really matter. I like the idea of improving a space, and by the nature of this project, that happened...by cleaning and painting the space, adding track lights. Even though it was not part of the artwork, it was still an important part of the process.

OOO: Can you tell me about the materials you used and the ideas behind the installation?

Aujla: At the time Ellie approached me about 55 Gansevoort, I was making new work in my studio, which involved Cocoa floor mats with aluminum frames. At 55 Gansevoort, I noticed a recessed space with an aluminum casing, which probably held an entrance mat when the space was used as a lobby. At some point the mat had been replaced with three pieces of plywood as a placeholder so people would not trip. These plywood placeholders were hung on the wall, in their original formation, as they had existed on the floor. So, in the recess in the floor, I used materials I had worked with in previous shows and material from my studio that matched the dimensions and thickness of the 3/4-inch plywood, specifically — a comforter, used in a AirBnB project, with glass laid on top.



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OOO: In your recent show with Clearing Gallery in Brussels, you worked with materials that seemed to have more of a finished quality, as if they were completing a space in a decorative/ performative sense (i.e. the recessed shelving and furniture). Part of that show involved advertising the gallery on AirBnB as a livable, rentable space. There is a type of deconstruction/reconstruction assemblage at 55 Gansevoort where the Clearing show seemed more about creating a livable space in a commercial environment. How was your approach to 55 Gansevoort compared with the Clearing show?

Aujla: This project [55 Gansevoort] was similar to both the Clearing/AirBnB project and the project I did with Karma in 2012 called Summer. While each result is different, they all specifically focus on experiencing the existing materials from an environment or situation. These presentations (55 Gansevoort, Clearing, Karma) can be more instantaneous, more immediate.

OOO: Reminds me of Claes Oldenburg's The Store, but tailored to speak to the scale and style of modern day manufacturing. Was everything for sale in the store?

Aujla: Yes, it was a real store. There was no irony in it really. We were experimenting with a different kind of art making. We were remaking mechanically reproduced objects by hand and selling them. It's similar to other projects I've done in the past, presenting things as a store (or as a rentable room, or an entrance lobby). I like having another way to say something and another way to present or display an idea.

OOO: So in creating the store, you've set up an alternative (to the gallery) environment for your artwork to be experienced, as both art and object. Do you differentiate between the two in this sense?

Aujla: I guess not, I think that's what I find interesting about doing projects like these. There isn't absolute responsibility to any one thing; you can answer as many questions as you want.

OOO: Many of your pieces from the Clearing show were dedicated to the interior designers Simone Feldman and Victoria Hagan, known for their "Uncluttered, Not Minimal" design slogan. To what extent have they been an influence in your work?

Aujla: Simone Feldman and Victoria Hagan were partners in a design firm until Feldman's death in '91. My dedication to them started with a specific color that they had used. I was looking for a house paint that was this specific off-white, but I did not want to mix the color. I wanted to buy it. So I had gone through all these paint samples and tests, maybe like 200-300 from Behr or Benjamin Moore or Farrow & Ball, I just kept trying new brands and getting samples of all the off-whites. I actually found the color I liked from a space Victoria Hagan had painted, so the dedication began there. I made these wainscoting panels, which are a kind of pre-fab piece that seems removed from the wall. The first ones I made were painted with that off-white color. At Clearing there was a series of them painted black and dedicated to Feldman.

OOO: So tell me about Neutrogena, another muse of sorts. You've mentioned that the aesthetics of the bottle, it's brand image etc. have been a source of inspiration in your work; how so?

Aujla: The Neutrogena bottle is a good example; it raises questions that I find interesting to think about in the studio, about temporal/emotional relationships we have with objects that we use daily. I find that things we use habitually, but go unnoticed, are usually pretty interesting and have a lot of cultural meaning – it could be anything.

OOO: The Neutrogena bottle, it's not an intentional art piece; it has a less precious aura. Do you find inspiration, relief maybe, in thinking about everyday objects in terms of their relation to your art?

Aujla: Yes. I actually think walking through aisles at a pharmacy when you are in a certain mood can be really influential.

OOO: Better than MoMA? (wink*)

Aujla: Fewer crowds.

Aaron's current show Aluminum Entrance Conscious of Itself is on view at Ellie Rines's project space, 55 Gansevoort, through January 17th.