New Arrangements

Ned Colclough & Michihiro Kosuge

PICA

Portland, Oregon

Using Bauhaus theater, Ikebana and Arte Povera as variant points of departure in his work, Ned Colclough’s sculptural assemblages encompass a visual style where formalism, minimalism, and neo-modernism are repositioned into abstract mediations. Balancing his sculptural elements–a vocabulary that includes found wood, stone, rope, and plaster–into orchestrated compositions, Colclough lends a lyrical and poetic relationship to both material and object.

Michihiro Kosuge echoes both architectural and organic forms in his work, creating sculptures that are at once playful and meditative, but always in conversation with their context. Kosuge emphasizes the surfaces of the different types of stone he uses by contrasting textures: he leaves some areas quarry-rough, others he polishes to glassy smoothness, while sometimes he adds simple and evocative color.

Exhibition:

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Opening Reception:

March 16, 6–8pm

Location:

Portland Institute for Contemporary Art

415 SW 10th Ave., Suite 300

Portland, OR 97205

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# The Melting and Above

Kristan Kennedy

There is art that seeks to complicate the world and there is art which hopes to define it. Then there is the work of these two artists, Michihiro Kosuge and Ned Colclough, which in an anarchistic gesture slices through the tyranny of too muchness in favor of an exchange of energy.

Kosuge was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1946. Colclough was born in Hudson, New York in 1976. Between then and now and there and here they have both found that they could communicate through materials; for that, we can simply call them sculptors. I have placed their work together in one room and titled the exhibition New Arrangements. The title and the pairing come from a desire to see their work together, to create a new relationship. It was that innocent of an impulse. I could also tell you that I had a notion to reassess modernity, or investigate work that presented metaphysical propositions about the “void,” or that I was fascinated by the persistent conversation the work was having in my mind in spite of the artists’ intergenerational distance and regional presence and lack of previous proximity. This would also be true. In the end I think that the exhibition endeavors to materialize the space between things and artists as a way to see the evolution of form.

Kosuge and Colclough’s works emerge from an unconscious place unique to each of them. They share a belief in the pre-disposed nature of their materials. They wait for the stone, the music stand, the bits of wood, scraps of fabric, and metal to speak to them with purposeful intent. That leads to concise actions in the studio, in the gallery, and outdoors: carving, gluing, leaning, balancing, arranging. The tranquility of the final pieces is in contrast to the physical and mental wrestling it took to create them.

Of course, there is also the matter of (perceived) influence. In the months leading up to the exhibition, tip of the tongue references kept arising around Colclough and Kosuge’s work: Noguchi, Brancusi, Boccioni, Nevelson, Arp... and on and on and on. As it was, many of these artists were in direct conversation with each other; in fact, Noguchi found himself apprenticing in Brancusi’s studio. Colclough sees the same coiled and expansive energy in Boccioni’s bronze Unique Forms of Continuity in Space from 1913 as he does in Kosuge’s Morphoric Figure 1 and 2 from 2011 as he does his in own sculpture as he does in 1980s-era BMW M5s. He explains that the cars, “showcase a sort of serene exuberance—something I’m always pleased to arrive at, if possible.

Quiet and fixed but poised to move on in new directions. Finding new imagined spaces. What preceded this featured pause, and what’s to follow?” Kosuge is more interested in the rubble of ancient Greece—“the broken thing,” as he calls it—and the abstraction of impressionism and decomposing leaves, but he can appreciate the “speed and flexibility” proposed by Boccioni or Noguchi. He is trying to pry that same performativity and potential freedom from his stones.

But to move beyond the crushing weight of art history, to convince ourselves of an undulating continuum of practice and not a fixed point of reference (they are called movements after all... let’s all move along!), we must first accept that we are all speaking the same language, carving the same stone. If artists take influence from the smallest speck of dirt on a windowsill or a transcendent song or a cataclysmic event, why wouldn’t they receive transmissions from other art or other artists?

Ideas often stand side by side like twin flames, even if they originated on different sides of the globe, in different bodies, and in different historical contexts. When they are reunited, they stare at each other in disbelief as if to say, “How is this possible? Is there nothing new?” or, perhaps in awe, “We get each other! We need no words!” Surely there is more than modernist homage happening here, and there is more truth than artifice. Colclough offers that, “references to art history are inevitable. I think there is a certain collision between the economy of materials and gesture. I just work with what I have, which often by design is not very much. I’m happiest when a very simple and/or modest move can so succinctly broaden the umbrella under which a discussion may occur.”

One day, while visiting Kosuge’s studio, I asked him if he felt that he was still experimenting, to which he replied, “Not always. Perhaps not as much anymore with the materials. I know them very well, although at times the stone takes me someplace uncomfortable and charged.” He went on to say, “Experimentation is an attitude, one that is lived. One that I live.” In a recent correspondence I asked Colclough for his thoughts and he responded, “I agree with Michi’s notion. I feel as though, and for myself, while wholly intrinsic, said notion of experimentation is largely unconscious.”

Colclough fashions his assemblages from found material; an artwork often does not begin until he comes across something compelling enough to prompt a piece, so he spends a great deal of time waiting. “The thing is simply the trigger, or the thing that allows me to go forward, in its having a bit of life already.” The stuff he is looking for is often found in hardware, fabric stores, lumber yards, or amidst the castoffs from his work in construction and residential interiors. Just as often, the material of his work is found in a litany of photographic snapshots, album cover art, feelings, and thoughts... but this is not the stuff we see, it only pushes at the sides of the work from within the artist’s mind.

The famed modernist sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi is quoted as saying, “Rocks are the bones of the earth.” Quite recently, Kosuge revisited a shape from his very first sculpture: a smooth white bone made of plaster standing nearly five feet tall. He had stumbled across a photo of it in an old newspaper clipping; it was a forgotten moment that seemed to have foreshadowed his trajectory as a sculptor.

While he does not often return to what he calls “old forms,” the silhouette of the piece persisted in his mind. This coincided with Kosuge’s renewed interest in the figurative aspect of his work and a shift from listening to what the stone told him to ask himself, “How do I feel?” In the studio, Kosuge fashioned a new set of bones from an earthy granite: they sit one on top of the other, a knobby column, and beside them lies a white cloud of stone. They both look light, soft, and hollow, but are in fact impossibly heavy. This peaceful resolution of a form years later feels representative of a compression of time, its weight both physical and psychological. The work stands still, but it still moves you.

Colclough believes the symbiotic life of objects is at once perplexing and wholly obvious. His unfixed, rearrangeable, component parts are seeking what mathematicians call “elegant solutions”—a rejection of the fussy and an acceptance of solving problems in the most natural way with what is at hand. On Kosuge’s land in Scappoose, Oregon, sculptures dot the sides of sloping hills, lie together in fields, and sit on stone plinths in small familial arrangements. When I remarked on their perfect placement, Kosuge remarked, “That is accidental.” When I exclaimed, “But, they look so beautiful together!” he replied, “That is no accident.” Now that these artists’ works are together (finally) in the room, my mind can rest and the conversation can begin between objects and viewer, piles of stuff and balanced things, artist and artist, exhibition and intuition. There is beauty in this method; there are no accidents. ###

Kristan Kennedy is an artist, curator, and educator and is PICA’s Artistic Director and Curator of Visual Art. For the last decade, Kennedy has focused on commissioning new work by international emerging artists in the form of large-scale, site-specific installations and solo projects that exist at the borders of genres. Kennedy takes an expansive view of visual art; in addition to presenting the plastic arts, she organizes music, performance art, publications, and new media projects as part of PICA’s year-round programming and for the organization’s annual Time-Based Art Festival. Beyond her curatorial projects, Kennedy oversees the Precipice Fund, a grant for artist-run organizations and collaborative projects in Portland, Oregon, as part of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts’ Regional Regranting Program. With the move to our new facility in 2012, Kennedy initiated PICA’s Resource Room Residency program through the organization’s library and archive.

Outside of PICA, Kennedy currently teaches Contemporary Art History at Portland State University, where she also organizes their MFA Visiting Artist Program and Lecture Series. She sits on the advisory board for the Headlands Center for the Arts and is the former Board President of the Independent Publishing Resource Center. Kennedy represents PICA as a member of several emerging consortiums including the Visual Art Network, a pilot project of the National Performance Network. She has served as a juror, panelist, and advisor to several foundations and granting organizations, including Creative Capital, The Regional Arts and Culture Council, and Southern Exposure’s Alternate Exposure Grants among others. She is represented by Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, Oregon.

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