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K.r.m. Mooney : En, Set @ the Wattis Institute

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Jackie Im

The first thing to do when coming to see *En, Set* is to take a breath, pocket your phone and take a look around. Shift your gaze from the walls and look to the floor and the ceiling. Since Anthony Huberman took the helm in the Fall of 2014, the exhibitions at the Wattis Institute have been an exercise in patient art viewing, in approaching the artwork on its own terms. For their first institutional solo presentation, Oakland-based artist K.r.m. Mooney extends that sensibility with a collection of restrained and thoughtful works.

The title, *En, Set*, is the name of a pneumatic tool used in engraving and stone setting and the act of setting, of placing a material within or around another material runs through the exhibition. Mooney is trained as a jeweler and that craft is evident in the work. There is no obvious flash, nor rare gems or metals, rather the craft lies in fine details of a cast foxtail and the potency of each component. In these works the disparate materials become entwined with each other and, in a way, engrossed with each other. Casts of lavender, citrus skin and foxtail embed and attach themselves to a silver-plated steel can (*Salt Bath, Sulfur Crown I*, 2015) and to fluorescent light fixtures (*Taxis Commons*, 2015), becoming this other thing, not quite of nature, not wholly man-made. The material porousness of Mooney's work creates a sense of possibility that perhaps we are not as self-contained as we'd like to believe ourselves to be.

Spending time with the exhibition, I thought of the works as groupings of materials that have become attracted to each other, that have found kinship with each other. That an electrical conduit and fluorescent bulb might become entangled with vinyl grafting ribbon and compounded with other materials complicates the individual parts, bucking their normative roles, letting themselves ooze out of their prescribed "usefulness" and into something much more unpredictable. It is these points of contact that seem to be the crux of the show. The shared surface areas where materials come in contact with each other—the soldered joints, the hooks, the loops—are not just points of connection, but also allow for a more permeable identity: a conduit no longer is simply a conduit, a light bulb becomes something other than a light bulb.

With these different modes of connection between the objects in the gallery they (the objects) almost seem indifferent to the viewer. Nearly all of the works are placed on the floor or below the knee asking the viewer to come down to them. It requires the viewer to pause and reorient themselves both physically and mentally, to come to them on their own terms. It's a slower kind of looking and in a way, through that act you too may become engrossed and entwined.

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