

TEXTURE AND TRANSFIGURATION

A decade before the zenith of architectural postmodernism, Kenneth Koch's 1977 poem *The Duplications* fancifully envisions a Yugoslav military commander's replica of Venice in the Peruvian Andes. Now – a mere hour from Dubai's Outlet Village, a luxury retail complex simulating the medieval Tuscan hill town of San Gimignano – **Isaac Sullivan** encounters an index of Chicago's urban materials smashed into fragments, melted down and installed at NYUAD's Project Space alongside bronze works cast at a foundry in the Netherlands.



(Left and right) Jonny Farrow. *In and Out*. 2016. Screenprint. 46 x 65 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

In his latest exhibition – *a fine word, galaxy* (which takes its name from a line in the aforementioned *Duplications*) – multi-disciplinary American artist Jonny Farrow, who often works with sound to investigate transmission, liminality and resonance, builds upon his past meditations on temporality, here primarily via sculpture. "It's the first time I've done things that are about the surface... this show is

about looking," he explained as we walked through the Project Space. The screenprints *In and Out* (both 2016), for example, frame an object as a time-based occurrence; they abstract a fragment of sidewalk so that it stands vertically like a column. Only when the viewer solves the work's game of inference (in this case, by recognising what he or she is seeing) can the ground be laid back to rest.



Installation view. Jonny Farrow. *a fine word, galaxy* at NYUAD. 2018. Image courtesy of the artist

Indeed, through visual sleights of hand, semantic play and various configurations of gravitational tension, this exhibition was punctuated with reminders that urban materials and surfaces – as enduring as brass and concrete might seem – are always ongoing transfigurations. "How little of the universe is composed of the stuff we are made of," Farrow marvelled. "Bronze, concrete and all the heavy elements are just two per cent. The rest is mostly hydrogen or helium. Bronze has a history, weight and cultural importance, but it's a tiny sliver of the world we manipulate."

This regard of the minute, semi-arbitrary quality of our human lifeworld as it stands alongside geological time often, of course, lends itself to a spare minimalism. Yet, as in Koch's poem – which wedges its metaphysics between references to tennis, Canada Dry, Minnie Mouse and young women made from the soil of Finland – the upshot of Farrow's phenomenological approach to objects is inherently ranging and playful. "Though I've taken the language out of the show, some pieces are semantic jokes, like the irony of an iron drumstick," he remarked. This useless object, which would tear through a drum before it could keep rhythm, was fashioned from the utilitarian innards of the city. "These are literally old radiators torn out from buildings in Chicago that my mates

and I cracked with sledgehammers," Farrow continued. "You take big hammers in a yard with all kinds of safety gear on so flying metal doesn't hit you, and load the chips into freestanding furnaces to make the iron."

Meanwhile, an array of ropes, motors, bronze globes, light projections and transducers that periodically emit manifold frequencies are variably configured, and the technological seems personified as a participant in an open-ended game created by the artist in which the penultimate player – the viewer – resolves its objects and occurrences by way of cognitive speculation.

Altogether, the installation's action could be said to careen within the em dash that precedes its title. Through this grammatical mark, the work announced itself as a complementary body of interjections in an incipient process, as opposed to a numinously discrete whole. Farrow's exhibition, then, invited us to weigh our existence in a world that has preceded us and will continue in our absence; to walk into *a fine word* is to enter a text that can only be resolved via inference. 📍

Jonny Farrow — a fine word, galaxy ran from 13–30 March at the NYU Abu Dhabi Project Space.