



Parallel #10:
Martín Mele, Lena Amuat & Zoë Meyer, Alice Ronchi
“Les Choses”
April 25–June 6, 2015

It has been 100 years since Marcel Duchamp invented the readymade with legendary works such as *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Bottle Rack* (1914), or *Fountain* (1917), thus officially giving the realm of things entrée into the art world. Today, things are self-evident components of art, but the fascination that Duchamp’s concepts already exuded remains. What is it that interests artists when they work with things? When they remove them from the original context of use, transferring them to the world of art, in this way placing the things themselves, but also their functions, context, and relationships to one another up for debate? The three-artist presentation in the project space combines positions that are marked by a striking affinity for the world of things and objects. In so doing, it is primarily things that are usually ignored, forgotten, lost, or so everyday that they are overseen that are given special attention.

Lena Amuat (b. 1977) and Zoë Meyer (b. 1975) have since 2009 been assembling a collection in which they combine historical, but usually unnoticed objects. They search archives, museums, and estate for historical objects, models from science and architecture, artifacts of natural history. Cultic objects that they stage in photographs, not only appropriating them for their visual archive, but granting them an afterlife beyond the depots where they would otherwise just waste away. In the artists’ stage-like installations, the visual objects begin to interact with one another, as in the current presentation, which circles around the subject of collecting and display. Like a bracket, the colorful wall surfaces define the space in which models from science and teaching on shelves and along the walls are combined with cultic objects, for example the black and white photograph of an ancient female profile. In addition, the artists present a sculptural work of a “real” model of a stairway and a work of photography from the series *Verlorene Sammlung (Lost Collection)*, shown for the first time. With this group of works, the artists place a monument to those objects considered lost, and where even the archives only hold photographic placeholders. In Amuat and Meyer’s interpretation, the documentary illustrations are replaced by black shapes that give form to the absence of the objects, thus emphasizing how strongly the practice of collecting and archiving is always already linked to remembering and forgetting.

In Martín Mele’s (b. 1960) work, forgotten, lost things serve as an important source of material. The material that the artist uses to create his objects or installations comes from flea markets and thrift shops, he finds his material on the roadside, in attics or in cellars: the detritus of our society, things deprived of their primary function that now lead a dusty, forgotten existence—perhaps they still possess a flicker of hope that someone with a sense of the nostalgic might take pity on them. Mele is just such a person: in fact, more than simply collecting these pieces, he grants them new life by making them the protagonists of his art. His approach is intuitive, sometimes performative: things and materials are combined, linked, arranged, riveted and sewn together, stuffed and rearranged. In the objects at the exhibition, the large gold nail on which each of the three works hang or are stuck represents the common denominator. The nail is where the thing finds its place, the artist explains. It is this nail that allows the thing to become an object: revealing the double life of things.

The dual existence of things can also be found in the work of Alice Ronchi (b. 1989), if under a different valence. When is the thing itself, when is it material? And how can materials develop thingness? The artist is interested in the moments of transition and transformation and their link to nature: or more precisely, to the landscape, which she considers her most important playing field. She asks when and in what form we encounter landscapes. Quite consciously, she enters spheres of the artificial and the artistic and applies the principle of landscape, the assemblage of a series of natural elements into a unit, to artificial objects. The floor objects shown in the exhibition represent puddles. Through their colorful, organically shaped Plexiglas forms, Ronchi lends a decidedly fleeting natural phenomenon the character of an object. She elevates it, as it were, to the realm of things. At the same time, we link the forms on the floor to a visual language that we associate with the pictorial imagination of the modernists, with Arp, for example, or Calder. The parallels are not coincidental, since Ronchi is interested precisely in the relationship between landscape and abstraction. It is also the subject of the photo series *Henri's Garden*. Inspired by Henri Rousseau's jungle depictions, the artist has created a surreal garden, with a playground for animals. During a single day, the activities were documented on film and then turned into still photographs of changing situations. Here, we can see geese and deer frolic among the abstract shapes and become the protagonists of this invented landscape. In the best surrealist manner, real and artificial nature meet for a tryst in this absurd, sweet scene.

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