

UNTITLED

David Adamo

May 12 - June 19, 2011

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For Hugo Marie Adamo

ESSAY

David Adamo and The Quixotic Space
by Sarina Basta

David Adamo's vertical beam sculptures exist in fragmented realities, taking full effect when activated by their viewer's perception. They are obtained by compulsive chopping, aggressive digging and wrestling with wood. Performative actions, taking place behind closed doors, are documented by traces left on the final sculptures or particles of matter lying around them. Chopping, the artist explains, relieves frustration and the fear of failure.

The small canes, baseball bats, and large beams composing Adamo's sculptures are all carved almost to their breaking points. They become representations of forms that have witnessed an uncanny amount of expenditure, and are now precariously balanced between their former selves and entropic oblivion.

Like many artists of his generation, Adamo's practice employs a quixotic physicality – similar to the anomalies and epic realities authored by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616). Within this space Adamo's resulting works become records of lyrical actions of various scale and proportions, often existing within fictional spaces of fantasy, linguistic games, humor and sometimes the grotesque.

The comparison between the sculptures and epic moments in the life of Cervantes' Don Quixote (from the novel fully titled *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* first published in 1605) come from the strange effect of their presence, rather than any form of human representation. Within her essay "Ecce Homo"¹, Isabelle Graw makes the case for sculpture that reconciles the abstract and a sense of subjecthood, pointing to the work of Rachel Harrison, Isa Genzken and Tom Burr. Adamo masters that subject-like presence even within his abstract sculptures. He absorbs the theatricality of minimalism as described by Michael Fried² replacing ground with stage.

Reliant on the conditions of reception of the viewer, the work is often dialogical, much like performance, dependent on this added mediated space of the viewer to gain an added dimension.

An example of this mediation can be found in Adamo's piece *MUSEUM MUSEUM: XX* that took place without a live audience in 2007 by staring at the portrait of a Madame X (1884) by John Singer Sargent for over six hours, David Adamo himself becomes sculpture-like by way of the stillness of his pose. The lady in the work stares behind her in the 19th century painting (metaphorically, the first stage). She looms over Adamo, within the grand proportions of the Metropolitan Museum (the second stage). In comparison, Adamo's body is scaled down to almost child-like proportions, his gaze candidly persisting. The psychological and physical gap between the two gazes, Madame X turning away into the background, Adamo turning away from the viewer into the fictional space of the portrait can be perceived simultaneously by the viewer on the other side of the photograph. Mediated through an image, these irreconcilable realities are fully perceivable from the perspective of this Third Stage.

Don Quixote, Miguel de Cervantes' protagonist, invented a universe parallel to his own. He gave himself a series of impossible tasks and heroically pursued them with complete fervor despite encountering scores of obstacles bestowed upon him. The psychological landscape where he attempted to fulfill his desire for chivalry is Stage One: it informs the logic of his actions. Stage Two is the reality of Quixote's social environment, that sees the giants Quixote combats as windmills. Stage Three is the space of the novel, the one accessible to the reader where the coexistence of heterogeneous perspectives takes on its full scope. This third stage is where the humorous, the grotesque, the gaps between differing physical and psychological perceptions jump out to the viewer in the realm of the quixotic.



David Adamo
Museum Museum XX
Metropolitan Museum of Art
American Wing Mezzanine
Thursday, November 15 2007, 9:30 a.m. - 5:15 p.m.
Image courtesy: Dispatch

Observing the work of Adamo, a photograph, a tiny door, a dwindled cane - like a theater prop, a shadow of its existence - or a beam, devoured at the hand of some Tasmanian devil, the viewer will understand that she is in a third space, where the epic resides in the anomaly, the disparity and the gap in scale and in subjectivities.

Adamo works with a canonical distortion, disrupting the canon of free-standing sculpture while contributing to it. He often refers to Carl Andre's beam sculptures developed around 1958 when Andre himself sought to emulate Constantin Brancusi's (1876-1957) Endless Column (1938) based on carving and cutting rather than modeling and sculpting. Andre focused particularly on the cut of vertical beams of wood, creating a form of sculpture based on removal, which he termed "negative sculptures." Andre remained affected by the tendencies in sculpture to be vertical, priapic or "analogous to the male organ"³ and chose to negate these positions by making floor pieces, turning the work on its side. Adamo's sculptures also negate the masculinity of vertical sculpture by carving the sculptures to the point of fragility. He like Andre makes negative space as dominant as that of positive space. Yet Adamo's sculptures are most tangibly a record of an action than a place.

The extraordinary amount of expenditure marking Adamo's sculpture defies the concept of stillness and immanence so many sculptors have chosen as an accepted parameter of their work's aesthetic. Instead, Adamo's sculptures contain the idea of an immanent action, of being in a suspended moment, preceded by a period of intensity bearing its mark on the integrity of the sculpture which threatens to collapse at any moment as soon as the rules of cartoon gravity no longer apply. Bearing the marks of this intensity, they are not just the site of a measured cut, of an exercise in formality, of a projection of desire. They refer to a landscape, subject to heavy erosion, a prop or an extension of the artist's body a mirror or an adversary, much like a potential wrestling companion, similar in size and weight, within the same category.

Adamo, who trained as a child wrestler before studying art, was accustomed to losing weight periodically and to the idea of training with an intense sustained activity, followed by moments of rest. Choreographed, improvised moves and gestures reminiscent of wrestling or dancing are projected onto his sculptures, executed with that psychological distance that is necessary for humor to intervene. Violent traces on the surface are reminders of the darker content of Goya's paintings such as the figures in Disasters of War (1810-12) or the devouring energy and chiaroscuro of Chronos Eating his Children, (c. 1820-1823). The lighter side of Adamo's work reflects Andre's fascination with materiality and concrete spatial poetry, (and sentimentality towards the blue collar lumber industry) as well as aesthetics of the American landscape. Adamo cites these influences when saying that his beam sculptures are "looking at Andre, thinking of Goya." He also acknowledges that the physical engagement with matter and its intimate understanding is endless. It would take a lifetime, he points out, to master the material of wood, its varieties, nature, and essence.

In between these two states, the sculptures lie in a relative landscape-like stillness. The activity necessary to their making is present in a recent past, the shifting of the weights are future possibilities. This idea of an action prior or post the moment of viewing is what makes Adamo's practice so distanced from usual sculptural abstraction or Minimalism's state of resolve and permanence. Even still, the work of Adamo lies within a temporality of immanent action.

A space in a space, a tool modifying another tool, and several psyches and time zones cohabit to form Adamo's territory of the quixotic space. Adamo's works, his sculptures and his performances are as much placed within a gap and a void as they are within the author's psyche and a material reality. The gaze of the viewer, like the reader of Cervantes, acts as a measure of the gap between these two levels. It is arguably within this gap - also translatable as the epic and the concrete - that the works fully take their form. Within this third stage, the quixotic space, action and survival are not always easy but unfold with humor and a timeless grace.

The idea of sculpture being a site of action adds to the visual aesthetics of much of post-minimalist work of the 1960s and 70s. The imprints on Adamo's sculptures also act as annotations, and arabesques; on the ceiling, on the ground, hidden transmissions and footnotes capture and point to different types of gestures. The idea of action and annotation come together in the words of anthropologist Michael Taussig. He describes traces or notes recorded in a fieldwork notebook as "ultimately a record of an action rather than a place."⁴

Referring to the fruit that an audience would throw at a performer, Adamo's casts of tomatoes and half-eaten fruit form a type of hyper-real sculpture. The rotten tomatoes cast in bronze bring in the theatricality of the moment of exhibiting, acknowledging the context of the work's reception and its dialogical space. The half-eaten fruit looks as though it has just been discarded, announcing that the state prior to the opening of the exhibition is one of halted action, frozen in a Pompeii like state – "people" were, anthropologically or archeologically speaking, "here" before. Their traces are ornamentally fossilized in the discarded food - the props of their existence took place within another space-time continuum where the theatricality of existence, exteriorized, can only be mulled over.

¹ "Ecce Homo, Isabelle Graw on Art and Subjecthood", Artforum, Vol 50, No.3, November 2011, p.242

² Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" in Art and Objecthood: Essay and Reviews, University of Chicago Press, 1998

³ Enno Develing, Carl Andre 1969, Haags Gementemuseum, 1975

⁴ Documenta Notebooks: Michael Taussig, Fieldwork Notebooks, Hatje Cantz and Documenta, Kassel, 2011

INSTALLATION























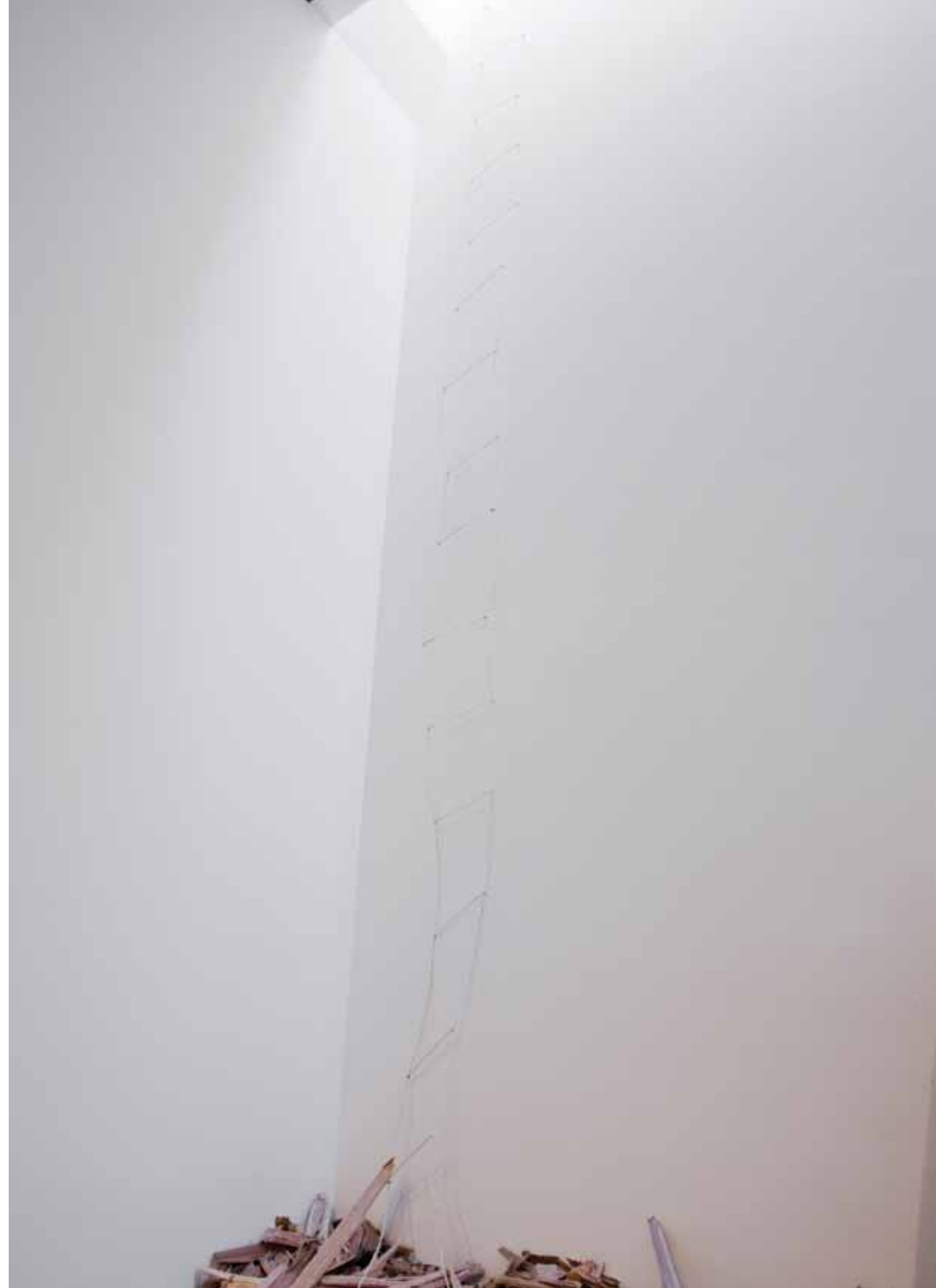


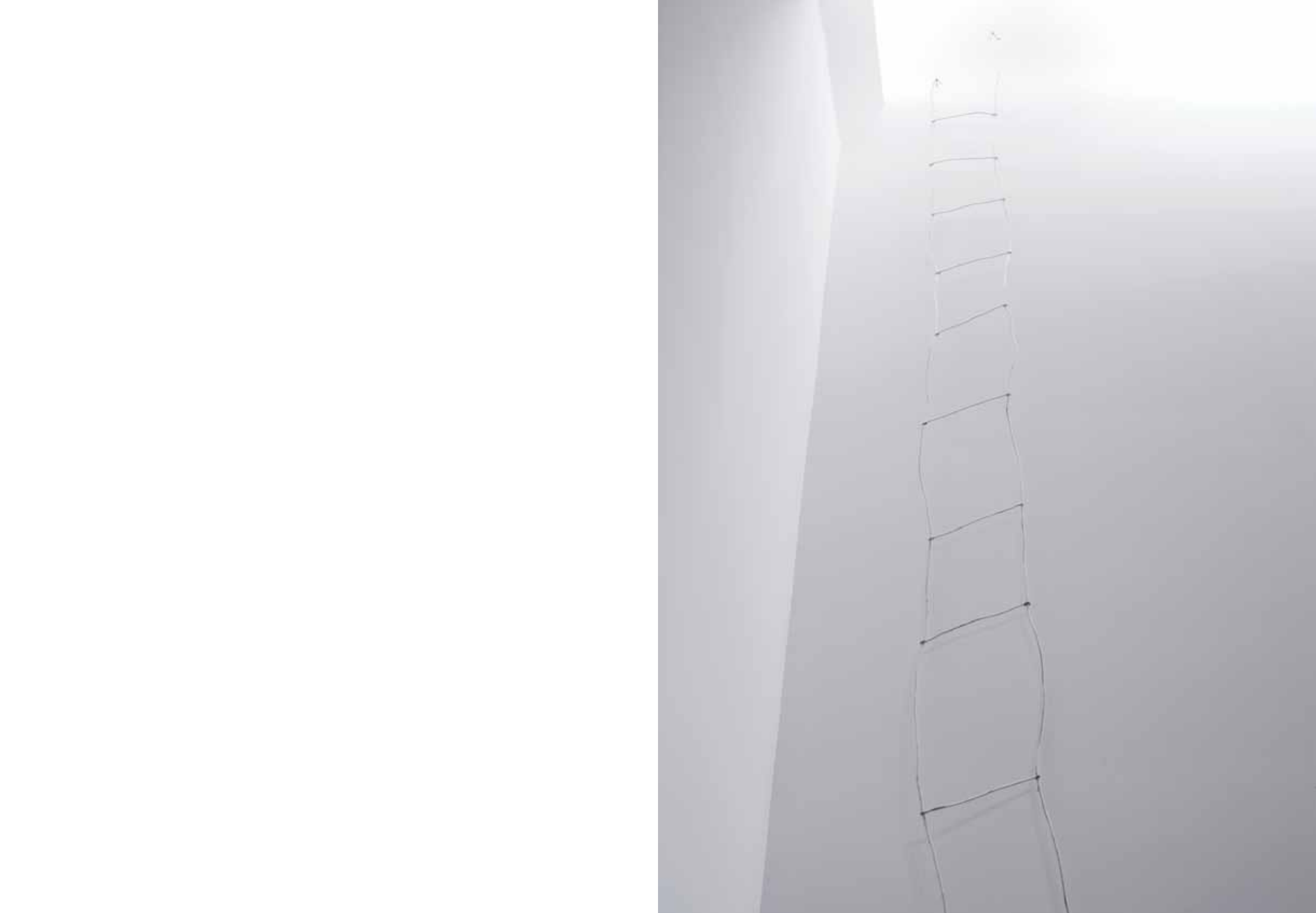


WORKS

Untitled 2011

Wire wrapped in wool yarn 240 x 12 inches 609.6 x 30.5 cm





Untitled 2011
Cedar wood 72.5 x 19.75 x 12 inches 184.2 x 50.2 x 30.5 cm





Untitled 2011
Cedar wood 120 x 12 x 12 inches 304.8 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm









Untitled 2011

Oil on canvas 80 x 45 inches 203.2 x 114.3 cm

(previous spread)

Untitled 2011

Cedar wood 81.75 x 12 x 12 inches 207.6 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Untitled 2011
Wood, paint, brass 34 x 25.75 inches 86.4 x 65.4 cm





Untitled 2011
Cedar wood, pine wood, taps 109 x 12 x 12 inches 276.9 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm

(following spread)

Untitled 2011
Cedar wood 144 x 19.75 x 12 inches 365.8 x 50.2 x 30.5 cm





Untitled 2011
Cedar wood 72.5 x 12 x 12 inches 184.2 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm



(following spread)
Untitled 2011
Cedar wood 92 x 12 x 12 inches 233.7 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm





Untitled 2011
Cedar wood, plastic birdie 10 x 12 x 12 inches 25.4 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm







Untitled 2011
Cedar wood, pine wood Dimensions variable











C.V.

DAVID ADAMO

Born 1979, Rochester, NY
Lives and works in Berlin

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2012 *Bielefeld Kunstverein*, Germany (forthcoming)
- 2011 *All in Good Time, Chapter III: David Adamo and Ettore Favini*, Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, Bergamo, Italy
UNTITLED, New York, NY
Fruit and Flower Deli, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2010 Kuntshalle Fribourg, Switzerland
IBID PROJECTS, London, UK
Galerie Nelson-Freeman, Paris, France
- 2009 N.O. Gallery, Milan, Italy
Hoet Bekaert Gallery, Belgium
On se bat toujours quelque part (w/ Michael Portnoy), Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers, France
- 2008 Fruit and Flower Deli, Berlin, Germany
Untitled (The Rite of Spring), IBID PROJECTS, London, UK
Untitled (Louli), Fruit and Flower Deli, New York, NY
Untitled (Valeria), Dispatch for Les Urbaines, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 2007 Museum Museum, Dispatch, Part of Performa 07, New York, NY

Selected group exhibitions

- 2011 No Sense of Place: *David Adamo, Einat Amir, Keren Cytter, Brendan Fernandes, Carole Douillard, Dora Garcia*, Bergen Kunsthalle, Bergen, Norway
Dublin Contemporary 2011, Dublin, Ireland
Against The Way Things Go, Gasser & Grunert, New York, NY
Based in Berlin, Kunst Werke, Berlin, Germany
My Beautiful Mongo, Thomas Brambilla Contemporary, Bergamo, Italy
The Confidence Man, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Text/Werke, Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg, Germany
- 2010 *Pyscho Painting*, Carlson Gallery, London UK
David Adamo, Heather Cook, Brendan Fowler, Rashid Johnson, Phil Wagner, UNTITLED, New York, NY
Psychosculptures, curated by Lorenzo Benedetti, Vleeshal, Middelburg, Netherlands
Greater New York, PS.1 Contemporary Art Center, Queens, NY
Tussen Taal en Beeld/Verzamelde Verhalen #02, curated by Joost De Clerck, Kustfestival, Watou, Belgium
Whitney Biennial 2010, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
A Basic Human Impulse, curated by Andrea Bruciati, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Contemporanea, Monfalcone, Italy
- 2009 *The Perpetual Dialogue*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY
This place you see has no size at all..., curated by Jennifer Teets, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France
Broken Tales, curated by Rainer Ganahl, Shanghai Theatre Academy, Shanghai, China
Thessaloniki Biennale 2, Thessaloniki, Greece
Art in the City, Egmont Parc, Brussels, Belgium
- 2008 IBID PROJECTS (Hoxton Sq), London, UK
Fair Market, curated by Haley Mellin, Rental, New York, NY
The Fruit & The Flower Deli Berlin Show, Fruit & Flower Deli, Berlin, Germany
Something Else, Peter Blum, New York, NY
Object Salon, curated by Bob Nickas, Honey Space, New York, NY
- 2007 *INTERCLUB*, Miami Beach Cinematheque, Miami, FL
Snofrid, Freight and Flower Deli, New York, NY
Beyond the Zero, Peres Projects, Athens, Greece
Grow Your Own, curated by Peter Coffin, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR

Reports, The Explorers Club Research Collection Department, New York, NY
2006 *Eternity Awaits Part 1: The Spy Who Loved Me*, Art in General, New York, NY
My Own Private Marathon, Museum of Natural History, New York, NY
Invasionistas, Kling & Bang Gallery, Reykjavik, Iceland
Everything beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation, Elizabeth Foundation,
New York, NY
Lovely Shanghai Music, curated by John Armleder, Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art,
Shanghai, China
Lisa Kirks Greatest Hits, Wayward Cannon, London, UK
Re-Make/Re-Model, D'Amelio Terras Gallery, New York, NY
Affair, TART Contemporary, San Francisco, CA
2005 *Washington Project for the Arts/Corcoran*, Corcoran Museum, Washington DC
Do You Like Stuff? Swiss Institute, New York, NY
Red White Blue, Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York, NY
My Own Private Marathon, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
On The Beach, Printer Matter, New York, NY

INSIDE THE ADAMO STUDIO

by Michael Portnoy

The following are excerpts from interviews with David's Berlin studio assistants, taken in the summer of 2011.

Wilson, 25 years old

Working for D Mo is the best job I've had. He's a great guy and doesn't breathe down your neck. It feels like what I used to do as a kid with my Dad in Wyoming out in the shed, but bigger, and now I'm getting paid for it! The hours are great and there's fucking meerkats in the studio which is hilarious. The habitat takes up like half the place and they're always stealing my tools, but it's a huge improvement over my last job with [name omitted] where I got beat up for not having a tattoo!

Silke, 28 years old

I'm in charge of the digital prototyping. I take the drawings from David's red notebook and make a 3D digital sketch which goes through several revisions and then I rapid prototype a scale model. From that we lay a full scale pulp-based lignan negative which gets filled with concrete and the guys in the wood shop take it from there. The work ends up looking very authentic.

Malik, 32 years old

I've done the performances for David for like 5 years now. We met in South Africa when he went down there the first time to work with the meerkats. I was working in the reservation but David liked how I moved and we kind of look alike so he asked me to come to Berlin. The first year, I just followed David around and tried to learn his manners. The second year, we started the kickboxing tournaments that you saw last night and I developed the Aggro-Yoga program too that David thinks came from You Tube but I actually put it on You Tube. I lead the whole studio in that every morning. The third year, I started appearing as him in public, and that's when the whole iris scandal was with immigration when he tried to get me back to Turkey for the Biennial. The fourth year, as you know, that was the prison project. I really have no hard feelings to David for that time - I knew the risk I was taking and he continued to support my family and Nadja through that time. I still can't believe we were able to get that many wood shavings out of Gümü hane. We had the whole prison working on it! The past year, my eye finally healed, so I went out in public again, although I'm much thinner than David now and everybody recognizes me from the news.

Knut, 45 years old

I was just brought in because David wants to develop a more thorough understanding of subtractive operations involved in the studio. My work, up until recently, was in the field of statistical engineering, specifically for the military and focusing mostly on the analysis of sub-industrial decrement. I have a great appreciation for the arts and agreed to work here part-time in exchange for David coaching my son on the shot put. My son says David is a very tough teacher. When I've finished collecting data, I hope to provide David a precise mathematical portrait of the customary ways he approaches materials and to chart this on a fragility spectrum with natural or environmental forms of erasure. During my work at Rheinmetall Defence, I was on the team with the people who developed grey plasma erosion, the loss pattern of which appears to be following a related algorithm to that in middle stages of David's fabrication, so we are discussing a possible partnership.

Nadja, 24 years old

I take care of the meerkats which is probably the worst job in the place! I really have no idea what most people are doing here, I don't have time to care, but it looks to me that they are just emailing all day. But no, I know there are torches in the back room and stuff so I'm sure it's harder than it looks. Malik and I met David, you talked to Malik right? He's my boyfriend. Anyway, Malik and I were brought from South Africa to train the meerkats which is like fucking impossible, as anyone knows! And, well, even if you do, once, they're not gonna remember how to do it the next day. David wants us to speed up the whole thing, but you'd have better luck working with shrews or something. But right now, they can carve two of the big axes a day, and that's like the entire ten of them scratching and biting away for seven hours! I don't see how we're gonna improve on that.

STUDIO







































Thanks to :

Elina Kellermann, Carol Cohen,
Joel Mesler, Graham Collins,
Siobhan Bradley, Jess Segall,
Joanna Zawodzinska, Michael
Trischberger, Michael Portnoy,
Marianne Vitale, Sarina Basta,
George the mover and crew,
Chris Lammer and James
Bykowski

Published by

UNTITLED

Photos by Adam Reich

Design by PLaAD

Print Management by Kris Latocha

ISBN 978-0-9831578-6-1

Edition of 500

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Printed November 2011

UNT/TLED

30 Orchard St, NY, NY 10002 nyuntitled.com