

**REAL
ART WAYS**

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Step Up 09 is a series of six solo exhibitions open to emerging artists living in New England, New Jersey or New York. The *Step Up* open call series seeks to provide emerging artists in our region with an exhibition and publication at a critical moment in their careers. The *Step Up 09* jurors were Susan Cross (Curator, MASS MoCA); Andrea Grover (Founding Director, Aurora Picture Show); and Deborah Willis (Professor and Chair of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University).

Step Up 09 was made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign, Travelers, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Sandy and Howard Fromson, the Wallace Foundation, Lincoln Financial Group, Alexander A. Goldfarb Memorial Trust, Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation, the Nimoy Foundation and Real Art Ways members.



Real Art Ways is an alternative multidisciplinary arts organization that presents and supports contemporary artists and their work, facilitates the creation of new work and creatively engages, builds and informs audiences and communities. As Real Art Ways grows, our commitment to supporting young and emerging artists remains a touchstone of the organization.

Founded in 1975, Real Art Ways celebrates its 35th Anniversary with events in 2010 and 2011.

On the cover: *One Thousand Words: Ruminations of the Cataclysm of Knowledge*, multi-channel spatial projection, approximately 10 minutes, 2010.

All images courtesy of Real Art Ways. Staff photographer John Groo.

Wade Aaron



Installation view from left to right of *One Thousand Words: Ruminations of the Cataclysm of Knowledge* (multi-channel spatial projection, approximately 10 minutes, 2010), *Broken Stowage ("Gold")* (graphite and brass leaf on stonehenge, 15"x22.5", 2010), *Broken Stowage ("Copper")* (graphite and copper leaf on stonehenge, 15"x22.5", 2010) and *Broken Stowage ("Silver")* (graphite and aluminum leaf on stonehenge, 15"x22.5", 2010).

Wade Aaron

By Harper Montgomery

Wade Aaron mines the gap between perception and thought. He does this by staging scenarios in which objects come in and out of focus, their contours alternately blurring and hardening in a slowly paced loop. One effect is that the desire to understand the mechanics of Aaron's installations makes the strongest and most immediate claim on us as viewers. This initial compulsion, however, opens up onto the activity of self-conscious observation as we watch ourselves gathering the knowledge we need in order to orient ourselves in front of his works. On the most literal level, what we are trying to piece together is the status of his objects—which could just as accurately be called non-objects—in the space of the gallery, and our bodies' relationships with them. But the everyday objects that fill his installations and drawings—folding chairs, children's building blocks, shipping pallets and light bulbs—also point to a world outside the gallery and suggest that even the most mundane objects are animated with ontological presences as they inhabit the everyday spaces of our world writ large.

His interest in objects, bodies and their modes of inhabiting space makes Aaron a sculptor. Indeed he is a sculptor whose works can feel historical and old-fashioned, despite the fact that he uses new media to construct them. This is actually high praise, because it means that he grapples with an order of questions that have preoccupied critics since the eighteenth century,

Wade Aaron received a BS from Cornell University and an MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He has participated in several group and solo exhibitions, most recently including *Sensed, Unseen*, 2010 curated by Ashley Billingsley at GASP Arts in Boston, and *A Condition of One's Making*, 2010 at the Nesto Gallery in Milton, MA. Additionally, Wade has assisted artists with various projects such as Andrea Zittel's *High Desert Test Sites*, 2007, and he continues to collaborate regularly with Krzysztof Wodiczko on projects such as *Guests*, 2009 in the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, *...OUT OF HERE: The Veterans Project*, 2009 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and an upcoming exhibition at Galerie Lelong, New York in 2011. Wade lives and works in New York.

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when J. J. Winckelmann argued that classical Greek sculpture was so compelling to look at because its perfect bodies modeled ideals for modern viewers.¹ It is sculpture's engagement with the body and its activity of staging encounters with it, be they empathetic, hostile or something in between, which arguably became even more central to sculpture after it abandoned the pedestal and devoted itself, as minimalism did, to staging what Michael Fried accurately, if derisively, called "theatrical" encounters with the viewer.² In other words, as is well known, the minimalists relegated the body to a space outside sculpture, but continued to remain utterly dependent on its presence by making works of art whose very existence depended on enlisting viewers as participants.

Among the many ways Aaron makes this historical problem a contemporary one is by exploring it in new media. To make his works Aaron sculpts in the virtual realm by constructing digital models of the objects he projects onto walls and prints onto paper. It is important to emphasize that he does not use digital media to make animations or video art, per se. Instead, he uses this technology as designers and architects do, as a means with which to make objects and to place them within space.

Visitors to the galleries at Real Art Ways are not, of course, granted this peek behind the curtain. And although knowing Aaron's process is mostly irrelevant to the experience of viewing his installations, this knowledge does, however, begin to help explain why our initial encounter with his three-channel video projection entitled "One Thousand Words" compels us to ask ourselves such fundamental questions as, "How can this exist?" and, "What

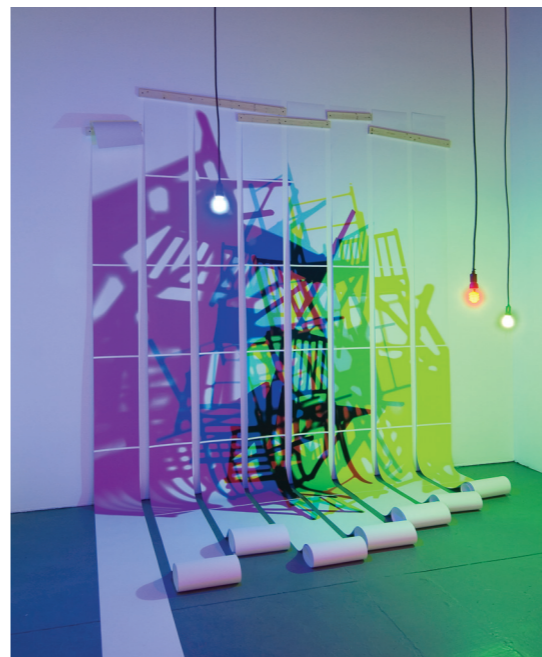
Broken Stowage ("Copper"), graphite and copper leaf on stonehenge, 15"x22.5", 2010.



is it?" (With a nod and wink, Aaron alludes to the vastness of these kinds of ontological questions with his titles. For instance, the installations for his show at Real Art Ways are entitled, *One Thousand Words: Ruminations on the Cataclysm of Knowledge* and *A Loose Cognition in Ten Parts*.)

These questions are only ever partly answered by Aaron, and the explanations change depending on the locations of our bodies in the space, our way of moving, and the length of time we spend there. When viewing the projections of *One Thousand Words* we see multiple towers of blocks that look like they are building themselves on two walls of a corner of the gallery. Soon the towers multiply and take on the appearance of a vertical screen or a curtain of vines or thicket of trees backlit by the sun. What we are actually looking at are shadows of children's blocks. We figure this out when we recognize the formation of the arch-shape of one block or the rectangular outline of another. The "real" shipping pallet Aaron places several feet in front of the corner with the projections—the platform where the virtual blocks are stacked—also helps us firm up our association of these shadowy images with the physical world. We can even imagine that this activity of block-building is occurring somewhere nearby. This tangibility, however, is undercut by the impossibly slow pace at which the blocks—in a loop that repeats itself every ten-minutes—pile atop each other to form towers that are then knocked down, again by an invisible hand.

In this installation, Aaron uses his materials in willfully literal ways, a relationship to media he has in much of his work. Shadows are shadows and wood is wood—most often appearing in its most ubiquitous form, the raw two-by-four plank. In the second installation at Real Art Ways, Aaron allows paper to curl and drape, and he utilizes color in its narrowest form by restricting himself to primary colors as they are deployed in reproductive processes, as in three-color projections (red, green, and blue) or in four-color printing (cyan, magenta, yellow and black). In *A Loose Cognition in Ten Parts*, color appears as ghost images of the central motif, an emphatically ordinary folding chair. But Aaron's use of color also set these ghost images to tumbling and floating, resembling, at turns, shadow and reflection



A Loose Cognition in Ten Parts, archival inkjet on paper and colored compact fluorescent lamps, edition of 3, dimensions variable, 2010.

and presence and absence, as well as receding and projecting ghosts of the chair.

It is important to stress that in both of these installations Aaron presents images of chairs and blocks as indexical—shadows and reflections—rather than representational. His reluctance to represent objects and things is among a number of restrictions Aaron imposes upon himself. Others are his use of a restricted palette and limited materials. Considering this, making drawings presents a challenge to his preferred way of working. Drawing, after all, usually requires that an artist represent something. Furthermore, drawings are often conventionally seen as instances when an aspect of an artist's subjectivity is revealed. Aaron denies this tradition by working as a draftsman. His series of drawings at Real Art Ways—*Broken Stowage*, *Gold*, *Copper*, and *Silver*—are explicitly *not* studies for his installations. Rather, they constitute mysterious objects in themselves. Technical drawings of shipping pallets are rendered un-seeable by the metal leaf he overlays onto an irregular grid that floats both above the pallet and beyond the surface of the paper.

With these drawings, Aaron stages yet another encounter in which the experience of beholding a group of strange objects compels us to reflect on our own process of perceiving and thinking. As in all of Aaron's work, in this encounter the physical presence of our bodies is of central importance. Our bodies are the hinges that simultaneously enable and frustrate our efforts to comprehend the components of his works. Or, put another way, standing in front of *One Thousand Words* and *A Loose Cognition in Ten Parts*, we become exceedingly self-aware of the short-circuits that occur between our eyes and bodies—perception and sensation—and of our brains' incomplete and unsatisfactory efforts to reconcile such discontinuities. Aaron shows us that these spaces of discontinuity enacted by bodies and their movement through his installations, can open up wonderfully productive territories where we can see how meaning and cognition come into being outside of systems of significance, or beyond the grid.³

In the end, Aaron sets up his rigorously defined systems—be they drawings, video projections, scrolls of ink-jet prints illuminated by bare red, green, and blue bulbs—which he enlists his viewers to knock down. Aaron responds to Judd's mandate to be merely "interesting,"⁴ by showing us how our bodies—as thinking, perceiving, and sensing organisms—come into a level of meaning through the process of relating to objects that cannot be accounted for through existing paradigms of knowledge.

Harper Montgomery is an independent curator and critic in New York. She was assistant curator in the Print Department at The Museum of Modern Art between 1998 and 2003, co-curator of the San Juan Poly/graphic Triennial in 2004, and is writing a dissertation on avant-garde exhibitions in Buenos Aires and Mexico City during the 1920s at the University of Chicago.

¹ J. J. Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (London, 1765).

² Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³ Brian Massumi, "Introduction," *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002).

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