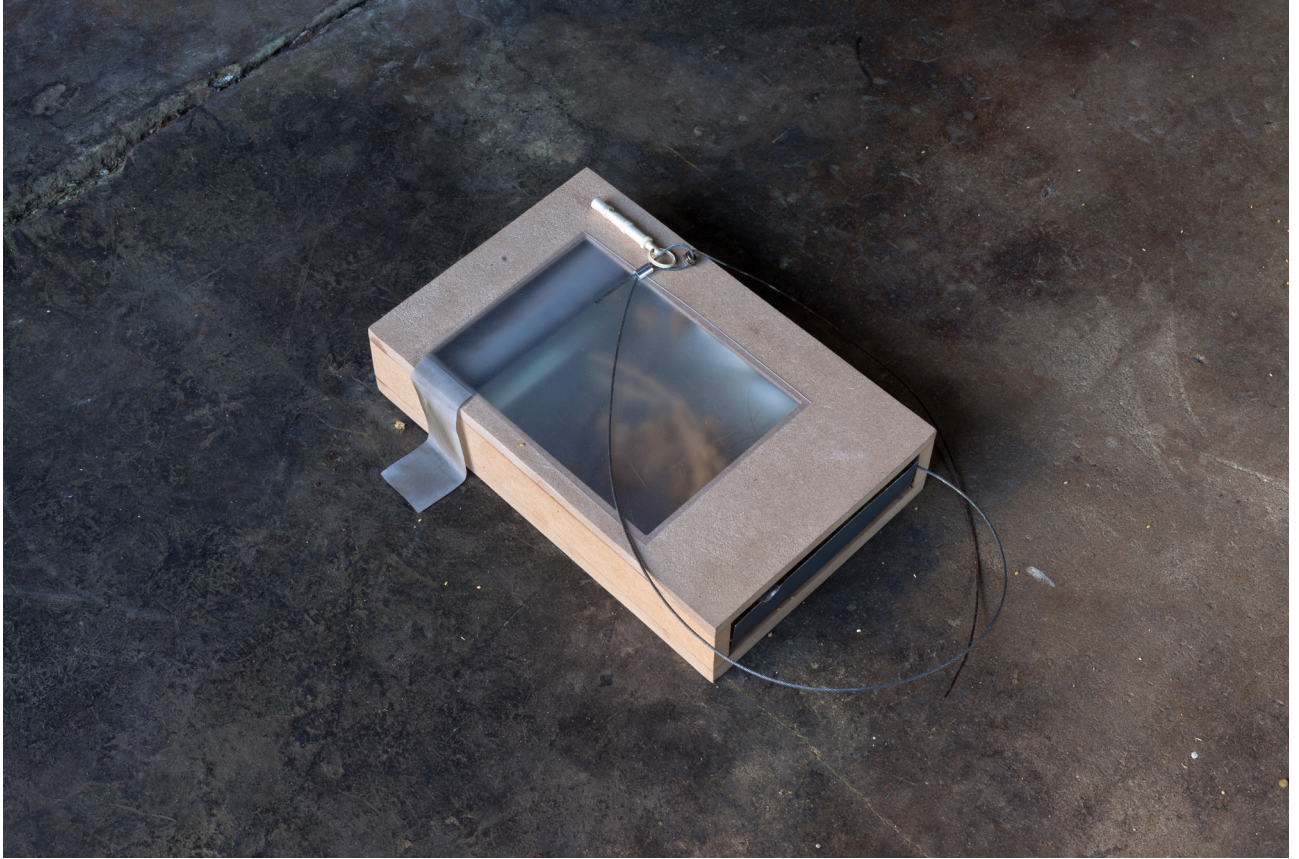


K.R.M. MOONEY



01 — K.r.m. Mooney, *Accord, A Chord I*, 2016.
Wood composite, vinyl, boiled-steel cable, aluminum, spray millet, steel fabric, silver-plated whistle, China poplar medium-density fiberboard, cast-silver chanterelle, silver solder, and milled steel rod, two parts: 18 x 14 x 3 in. (45.7 x 35.6 x 7.7 cm) and 21 x 18 x 3 in. (53.3 x 45.7 x 7.7 cm).
Courtesy Altman Siegel, San Francisco

02 (opposite) — K.r.m. Mooney,
Pose-Bin for Still Action, 2014.
Polyurethane vessel, water, mild acid compound, cast silver, steel, molasses, chrome-plated grate, bronze, and silk, 24 x 44 x 5 in. (61 x 111.8 x 12.7 cm).
Courtesy Altman Siegel, San Francisco



K.r.m. Mooney pursues a distinct form of abstraction that focuses on the interactions of objects, bodies, and space. Often diminutive in scale, their sculptures distill observable and imperceptible properties of organic and industrial materials, investigating structural capacities and potentials as well as the effects of time, temperature, and adjacency. Mooney shifts proximity and perspective and alters our understanding of how art and bodies relate to one another and their surroundings by installing works directly on the floor, overhead, or in passageways. Grounded in cultural theory and foundational metalsmithing techniques, they examine physical and sensory states as a way to address issues of difference, embodiment, and care.

Mooney's sculptures and installations are variously informed by material studies, trans biology, and craft theory. For the past few years they have considered sound both as it relates to space and as it relates to bioacoustics, the study of how sound is physically emitted and how acoustic signals shape behavioral responses. They are particularly interested in the way air circulates through a cavity, space, or object to create movement or a vocalized pitch or rhythm. Woodwind and percussion instruments appear in their work, such as clarinet parts, silver-plated whistles (see fig. 01), or the cast components of bells used in *5.1.6.1, I-II* and *5.1.6.1, III-IV*, both featured in their installation at SFMOMA. The titles and proportions of *5.1.6.1, I-II* and *5.1.6.1, III-IV* further explore the properties and

interrelations of sound with references to audio speakers. These containers also allude to the way sound self-organizes within a space—its scalable and fugitive qualities, dependent on the objects and bodies that coproduce and absorb it.

Related to this interest is materialist philosopher Christoph Cox's proposition that "an attention to sound will provoke us to modify our everyday ontology and common conceptions of matter."¹ His expansive understanding of the invisible yet highly physical fluidity of sound resonates with the polyvalence that is embraced and embodied in Mooney's sculptures. This polyvalence sometimes emerges in their titles. The artist created three works called *Carrier*, two of which are in their SFMOMA presentation. A

carrier has associations biological (a carrier of genes or disease) or industrial (a carrier of people, goods, or machinery). It can refer to a person who transports materials or to a container. Mooney also points to Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," a feminist revisionist text that proposes that a carrier bag for food was the first tool.

Mooney's materials also manifest polyvalence, often having generative qualities or structures that shift with environmental factors. They frequently include seeds and plants—some living, others dried—that are used by humans and animals alike, normalizing alliances between materials with multiple associations. Mooney casts them, preserving their contours while suppressing their other natural qualities. Casting itself—subjecting metals to changes in temperature that turn them into molten liquids before they harden into new forms—reveals the mutability of each metal's elemental interior logic, which reformulates along with its surface. Molds allow Mooney to explore adjacencies and how objects are altered depending on what is affixed (through plating), incorporated (through setting), or fused (through soldering). Alongside visible transformations, there is a focus on the invisible by-products of their processes, including the gases that are emitted and exhausted, which seem to link to the passages of air that generate sound.

They sometimes integrate imperfections such as oxidation and incomplete casts, as seen in works such as *Carrier II*. To capture the transfer of energetic states that are sensed but not seen, they use materials that allow a flow of electrical current or that organize wires, such as the steel cables and electrical hangers in 5.1.6.1, I–II and 5.1.6.1, III–IV. Acknowledging the unseen and the polyvalent, Mooney's works make visible otherwise abstracted bodies, and make tangible forms that are not defined.

Elements such as plants and electrical or lighting fixtures are frequently sourced near Mooney's studio.² They explain, "I don't consider these materials coordinated to site, but a consequence of what is near. By allowing proximity and the particular settings I encounter to play out, I arrive at some materials over others. This proximity . . . situates me, it gives me a position."³ Their attunement to place extends to installation, as they frequently make adjustments that shift the physical conditions of exhibition spaces, particularly the infrastructure that produces light. At SFMOMA their works are illuminated by open skylights and fluorescents that impart an even, cold wash, instead of the spot-directed bulbs typically used in the galleries. Mooney's *Second Affordance I* is derived from their thinking about "light as a material consequence."⁴ The work comprises an awning—a structure that

1

Christoph Cox, "Sonic Philosophy," in *Realism Materialism Art*, ed. Christoph Cox, Jenny Jaskey, and Suhail Malik (Annandale-on-Hudson, New York/Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 124.

2

Since 2013 Mooney's studio has been at Real Time and Space, a cooperatively run nonprofit space one block from the Oakland Museum of California.

3

K.r.m. Mooney, notes for SECA studio visit, October 22, 2016. Exhibition files for 2017 SECA Art Award: Alicia McCarthy, Lindsey White, Liam Everett, K.r.m. Mooney, Sean McFarland, SFMOMA Department of Painting and Sculpture and Department of Photography.

4

K.r.m. Mooney, interview by the author, May 15, 2017. Exhibition files for 2017 SECA Art Award: Alicia McCarthy, Lindsey White, Liam Everett, K.r.m. Mooney, Sean McFarland, SFMOMA Department of Painting and Sculpture and Department of Photography.

5

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, "Thinking with Care," in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 74.

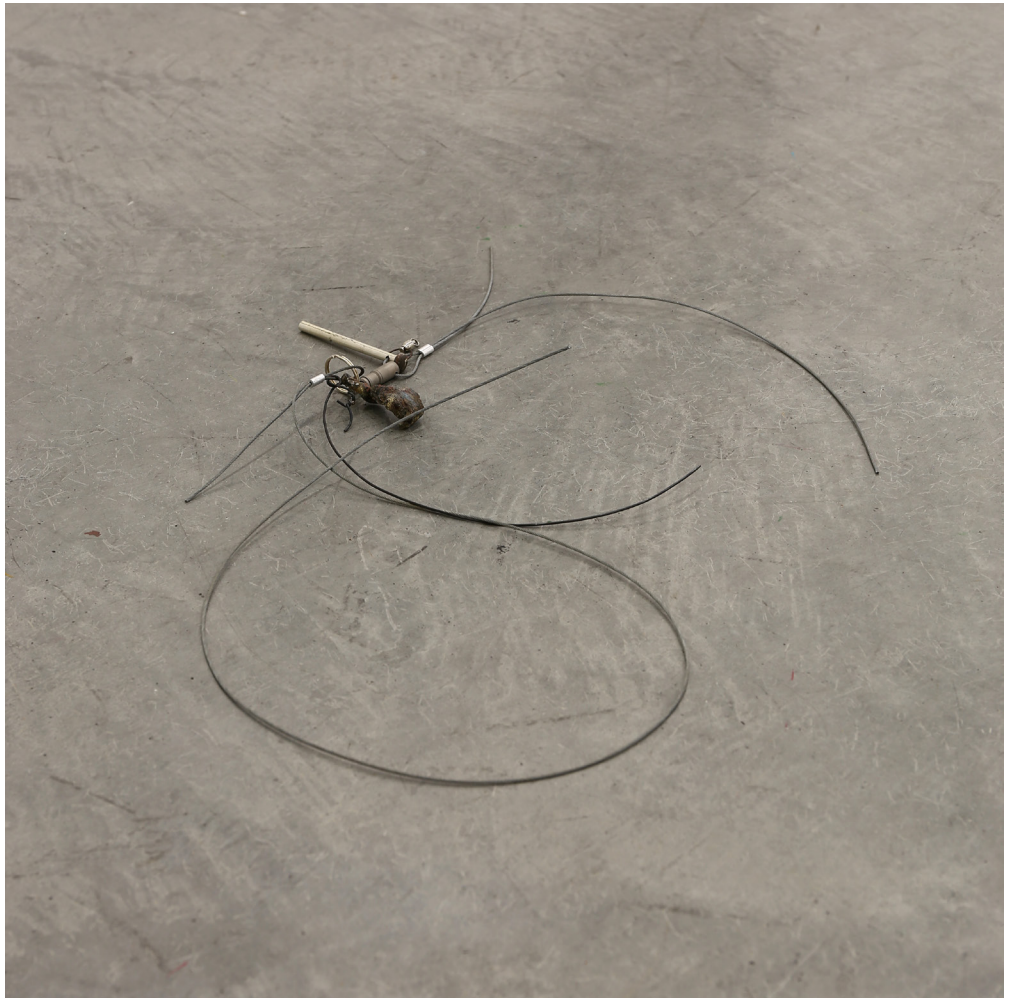
reconfigures the possible relationships of a building to the public—that runs the length of a gallery wall. Folded up alongside it is a pneumatic mechanism, a machine that translates compressed air into linear motion, though it is never activated. Its strong linear quality and horizontal position on the floor recur in many of Mooney's installations (see fig. 04).

When not on the floor, Mooney's sculptures frequently occupy passage-ways or cling to fixtures overhead. *Carrier III* is installed in a threshold, a place where bodies pass alongside it; the handcrafted glass vessel embodies the fundamental requirements of care,

evoking both fragility and stability as it holds and is held by a support. Establishing bonds between the "active participants" in the artist's work is part of their ongoing process of world making, described by scholar María Puig de la Bellacasa as a practice in which "all of the various actors literally and physically are the world, as well as being actively involved in the process and negotiations in which the world takes the specific form that it does."⁵

—**Jenny Gheith**

03 — K.r.m. Mooney, *Circadian Tackle VI*, 2015. Boiled-steel cable, cast-silver ingot, cast-silver chanterelles, liver of sulfur, steel wire, silver solder, and aluminum, 27 x 22 x 2 in. (68.6 x 55.9 x 5.1 cm).
Collection of Sebastian Peyret



In Conversation with K.r.m. Mooney

Excerpted from an interview
conducted at Mooney's
studio in Oakland on
February 21, 2017.

Erin O'Toole: You are trained as a jeweler. How did you become interested in jewelry making?

K.r.m. Mooney: I consider ornamentation a generative tool—one that comes with a great amount of agency to code oneself and to be encoded by others. We are all implicated in this process. I was always interested in textiles and in constructing garments, but before I learned metal-smithing I didn't have an object-based practice. Through jewelry I arrived at a curiosity about the body as an unstable site—both in terms of our materiality as biological beings and in terms of the ways bodies act as sites where political structures that influence the social formation of identity play out.

What instigated your move away from work designed to ornament the body, in favor of a more sculptural practice?

I think learning to work intertextually has shifted the way I approach producing and exhibiting objects. While learning to make

jewelry was very productive and requires a committed interest in materiality as a form, it is quite limited in terms of scale, display, its canon, and how it interacts with the body. I wanted to make objects and put my work in a context of ideas, to be engaged with art history and aware of what came before, while also having permission to work spatially.

You've called exhibition sites "contact zones" and "animated spaces." Are you aiming, through your work and your presentation of it, to alter the ways that bodies and objects typically interact in these spaces?

Using those terms helps me understand the range of contexts and conditions possible within exhibition spaces. In a general sense, I'm interested in an object's ability to act as a political agent, to have a voice and participate in public life. Creating the conditions that situate my work within a given exhibition site means understanding how objects, bodies, and space persist together as physical entities that are always contingent on one another. For me an exhibition is a way to position these concerns and bring them together—and to hold open a space for this understanding to occur in others.

04—K.r.m. Mooney, *Joan Green, Bimetal III*, 2015. Conduit, light, grafting ribbon, silver-plated organic compound casts, aquatic heater, polyurethane fittings, steel union fitting, copper union fitting and liver of sulfur. 10 x 58 x 3 in. (25.4 x 147.3 x 7.6 cm). The Aldala Collection of Diamond-Newman Fine Arts



You often present your work on the floor. Is the low horizontality of such installations a way of shifting perception?

Horizontality plays a meaningful role. On a very basic level and an art historical level, it's a spatial orientation that I believe prioritizes the body. I was also very influenced by the late scholar José Esteban Muñoz, whose work often includes the phrase "on the horizon." How can we actively speculate a future that may be more empathetic, more survivable for those who move through the world while embodying and engaging in difference? It's through this speculation and relationship to ongoingness that one maintains a set of tactics for surviving the ethical and political structures at play within one's present world.

It has been important for me to internalize the politics around the horizontal field to a point where I'm not always in the position of using speech to vocalize my intent. For me, horizontality engages both spatial and subjective histories. I want to move on to learn and work through other strategies while valuing the lineage of thinking that Muñoz provides and that continues to inform the positions my works take on.

Do you find that viewers engage differently with works installed directly on the floor than they do with works displayed on pedestals or mounted on the wall?

Verticality seems like the primary viewing position in art history, and it sets one up to prioritize sight over other senses. At eye level, the work isn't necessarily asking you to change or move in order to engage with it. But if a work is on the floor, there's a shift in positions that a viewer might partake in. You have to come close, to kneel down, to literally change your physicality in order to engage with it. I experience works that are placed on the floor in various ways, but always through an attention to the physicality of the artwork, to its affective volume and the space in which it's situated.

Materiality is clearly central to your work, and you seem to be particularly attracted to materials or substances that are mutable. What does the potential for reconfiguration or reorientation offer you?

I'm interested in the idea that there is far more multiplicity in the way we are structured than we give language to. This is an ontology that connects back to post-humanism and the act of ornamentation, which I've always considered a form of prosthesis. I don't use the term *cyborg*, as it is coded in a specific set of visual references about technology, but the idea of the cyborg insofar as it derives from a trans-biological context has been an important part of my thinking.

What about the concept of cyborgs interests you, setting aside the problems with the term? Does it relate back to the potential to become something else?

Yes. I think there's a kind of folding and unfolding that is specific to prostheses or bodies that are reconfigurable in various ways. As someone involved in trans politics, I consider rearrangement to be a tactic of survival. There is something truly at stake in this potential.

A focus on materiality is often linked to a reaction against the virtual, to a desire to make objects that you can touch and hold. Is that a concern for you?

Multiplicity can play out in important ways in a virtual context, and I feel like there have been productive conversations about how subjects are formed through new technologies. But there's something about the physicality of form and matter that I feel aligned with; it provides a process and a way of learning I want to pursue.