

The Green Gallery, Milwaukee
March 20, 2022 (TBC)

Alex Kwartler + Margaret Lee
you may make your pile, here

Irregardless of the conditions that may have resulted in the formation of a pile, the accumulation has sway. Here or there, weight and volume are not always commensurable. Commitment takes more than an allotment of space and maybe shouldn't be confused with holding one's ground.

How one views a pile might depend on one's hand or lack thereof, in its creation. Generally understood to mean a heap of things, the connotations shift widely. The difficulty of committing to a specific reading might have something to do with a resistance to surface assessments. *You may build your pile, here*, brings together work by two artists for whom varied readings of specific accumulations build towards an interiority that is constitutive if not always easily decipherable.

The rhythms and habits developed within an artist's studio are often overlooked. Inspiration, we are led to believe, should be actively pursued somewhere else, somewhere more interesting. However, a turn inwards should not be seen as a withdrawal or rejection. For Kwartler and Lee, who's works have, for over a decade, circled one another in their commitment to the quotidian, forms and relations are irrevocably attached to a "shared condition"¹ marked not by novelty but commonness². The studio provides time for these shared affinities to emerge and becomes a refuge for those "things" whose value or meaning is not immediately recognized. Piles allowed to accumulate allow for active looking and when viewed in opposition to stagnation, value becomes apparent.

Can lids and miscellaneous nails and screws break the surfaces of the paintings and sculptures installed in the front gallery. While much care and effort was made in the surface preparation of these works, the artists allow often overlooked bits and bobs to set material precedent where "discard" is reimagined and assigned use-value in determining scale and palate. Taking cues from the rubbish pile can result in wild manifestations but in this case the result is restraint. The modest scale and constrained palette focus the viewer's attention on the subtle impressions, layers, gestures and shifting forms.

In the side gallery, scale shifts are more dramatic. A 16 x 20" double-sided painting rotates atop a pedestal around which three 48 x 60" paintings are installed. The rotating paintings' polished surface reflects the room and surrounding paintings providing a third plane for viewing the two artists' works as inseparable. Though the rotating painting is a humorous send up of sculptural painting in space, the surface is created using plaster rather than traditional oil paint, aligning it more closely to the sculptural forms in the front gallery. The three larger surrounding paintings provide visual clues as to where said forms may have emerged.

you make your pile, here is Kwartler and Lee's first two-person exhibition together and a physical manifestation of their ongoing conversations around how time spent mulling over the shit of lived experience allows form to absorb and carry a multitude of meanings. Committing to this shared world view requires discipline. Pushing willfulness to the wayside makes the seemingly endless task of putting one foot in front of another endurable.

¹ Vivian Gornick, "Approaching Eye Level," Beacon Press, 1996, as referenced in Alex Kwartler's solo exhibition *Pain Quotidien* press release, Magenta Plains November 6 - December 18, 2016.

² One of Margaret Lee's earliest works was a series of plaster cast hand painted "potatoes". These small sculptures were used as vehicles for collaboration and were in one installation, stacked in a pile.