



How to Live with Stones

Justin Sorensen

05/29/18 - 08/17/18

Artist Talk & Reception
07/10/18, 4:00 - 5:00pm



Curator's Statement

An orange bucket on muslin cloth sits on the floor of the Dadian Gallery with 16 grape juice bottles clustered nearby. White painted boots hang from the ceiling, and gold cardboard letters on the wall spell out the words 'Religion in Shoes' – is this religious art?

In *How to Live with Stones*, Justin Sorensen's drawings and installations offer an expanded definition of what religious art can look like. Not confined to traditional church imagery and sacred references, his work incorporates ordinary materials and objects from daily life.

"Walmart is not the first place you would expect to find God; it is full of crowds and everyday materials. But what if we pay attention to manufactured objects, not dismiss them, and ask how could God's presence be manifest here?"

For Sorensen the art comes in the action of paying attention to these objects and questioning all that is being presented. Looking with this expanded awareness can transform the perception of a space and what is held within it.

The title piece was inspired by the life of Rev. James A. Bryan from Alabama, better known as Brother Bryan. He preached the gospel to everyone he met, moving from behind the pulpit to out in the streets and so earned his nickname 'Religion in Shoes'.

"I wanted to make a piece about him and the idea of religion being this thing that is meant to be embodied, not detached."

The artist built three-dimensional letter forms out of cardboard and "dignified a material that we don't associate with fine art by covering it with gold paint."

By combining common materials with religious allusions, Justin "want[ed] to give them a presence to help people view them differently."

In our daily lives and in the gallery we are surrounded by utilitarian and aesthetic objects. Sorensen asks us to look at them through an Ignatian lens; to find God's presence in all things.

Kiki McGrath
Curator

About the Artist

Justin Sorensen is Assistant Professor of Art at Mount Vernon Nazarene University in Mount Vernon, Ohio. Originally from Northwestern Pennsylvania, Sorensen received his BFA from Kutztown University. He did graduate work at Bucknell University before completing his MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design. His work has been shown in exhibitions throughout the United States, as well as internationally in Canada and Japan. His expanded studio practice explores perceptions of time, religion, history, and nature at the intersection and overlap of performance, sculpture, photography, and drawing.

Artist Statement

It is not enough to know a set of relations existing at a given moment as if they were a given system, one also needs to know them genetically – that's to say the story of their formation...

– John Berger
How to Live with Stones

I believe in speaking simply. I was born in 1986. The work on display was made over the past three years using found objects, words, images, and ideas.¹ Some of my materials were pulled from scrap piles and recycling bins. A few pieces of paper were purchased from Pat Catan's. I was not familiar with Pat Catan's until I moved to Ohio.

In 2011, a man from Richmond asked me if I was religious. When the question was posed, I figured that I was not speaking clearly enough. I quickly realized that the question came out of what I was fixing my words to, that if anything I needed to be seeking clarity in my gestures. It wasn't enough to just say Yes. I think about this a lot.

Last summer, I visited Los Angeles, traveled to Chicago twice, and spent a week in North Dakota. In all these places I tried to recall a form that first appeared to me in Pennsylvania. I've only ever seen it in glimpses, and it's always when I'm not looking. Truthfully, I'm not even sure if I have seen it, or if I'm remembering it correctly. But I mention it because all of my work has been made around it. I see each piece as a mark in space, mapping out my proximity to what I first saw in Pennsylvania. More importantly though, I've gotten the sense that I'm not the one who is making these marks, so much as I'm retracing a trajectory of decisions that came before me.

Works in the Exhibition

Religion in Shoes, gold enamel on cardboard, 2017

Untitled, found wood, 2017

Untitled (Inch), wood, 2017

October Sky, newsprint broadsheet, 2017

Five Empty Outlines, graphite on tracing paper, 2016

Untitled (Hole), found photograph/tape/wall, 2017

Bucket of Juice, bucket/grape juice/muslin, 2018

Untitled, micron pen on paper, 2018

Corner Piece (The Souls of My Shoes), mixed media, 2013

Untitled, micron pen on paper, 2018

Untitled, found wood, 2018



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