



Sisyphus Americana (.n)

Carl Giffney + Andreas Kindler von Knobloch, 2013.

exhibition at Hoffman LeChance Gallery, St. Louis, USA.

residency at PaulArtspace, St. Louis, USA.

Sisyphus Americana (.n) is a project made while on a three month residency at Paul ArtSpace, St. Louis. The project involved transporting a 268 KG quartz crystal that was excavated on site to many locations in Missouri, Illinois and Arkansas.

Locations included sites that were former methamphetamine labs, bars and meeting places. The crystal was transported by crate in a modified 1993 Ford Ranger pick up truck. On attracting attention, people were enlisted to carry the heavy rock en masse into positions where it was photographed. The outcome is a body of 10 photographs.

The photographs serve as individual frames, as if taken from a moving film. Together they mark out an oblique narrative that has been exhibited alongside sculptural work and video work in Hoffman LeChance Gallery to mark the end of their residency at PaulArtspace.

Sisyphus Americana (.n) is a collaborative work made between Carl Giffney and Andreas Kindler von Knobloch. Both professional Irish artists studied at the National College of Art and Design before founding and directing separate artist led initiatives in Ireland: The Good Hatchery and Exchange Gallery.

Full biographies, CV, and documentation of their work can be seen at:

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What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
Ecclesiastes

Quartz is piezoelectric, which means that it creates a voltage when deformed. The higher the altitude, the less likely a lighter with piezo-electric ignition is to work.
Wikipedia

Ford divides the day. He allots 8 hours for work, 8 for consumption and 8 to rest for the next days' work and consumption. He sets the cycle, regulates the days of the American worker. He is an idealist. He believes in a better society. Brilliant men fail. It happens all the time. There are no masters of change.
If you are unfamiliar with Sisyphus, he was a wise man on earth. He was also a journeyman. He was cursed for loving the earth too much. He defied the gods and was exiled to an older, even more contingent and unforgiving world. It was his fate to roll an impossible stone up mountains. Well, it was one mountain, but the rock never stayed put, so the numbers grew. The stone always returned to the bottom of the mountain—always back to that unholy plain.
Piezoelectric ignition is used in common lighters. It is also the element used to power most quartz based wristwatches. The small stone ignites. It also perpetuates. The process was discovered in 1880. Just in time for the new century.
A common tension with fordist/ postfordist economies are conflicts between market demands and the means of production- that's what the theory says. But even the theories don't give much credit to the men at the bottom of the market (hegemony). I mean, workerism? The laborer is a hero, they say. He is a faceless hero, even to his champions. He is a martyr working in isolation. He is an ideal, almost never a man, really. I'm generalizing. How do you make sense of particulars in these terms?
Sisyphus seems damned. He seems cursed. We are left to imagine the wisest of men, a great lover, pressed against a stone, defying a constant pull backward and down. His hands are wasted, muddy and raw. His back is wasted too. He presses up. There is a moment of failure. The rock can't climb. It hangs suspended in a instant when all invested hope is diffused. Because it won't rise, it won't stay. We only coast in one direction, right? So it falls, retracing the path of its incremental ascent, but faster. This is S. seeing his curse released and falling. What are his thoughts during its descent? What are his thoughts as he follows it down?
How do you construct a vision of American ethos? How do you create a concise vision of such an unruly experiment- one that seems so ecstatic and terrifying? Can you see its promise? Do you recognize all of its innovation as facile groping in the dark? Can you understand its means to forming up substantial futures? How do you make sense of the values of a courageous and lost child? How can you not be enamored with the brilliant and eccentric residue of its pursuits? We hang its textures on our walls and transmit them through the air. We project them on screens. We drive them around. We feel excited and mobilized by it all. We also get a little soft about what we feel, and recognize this in certain moments. We question ourselves for such flimsy indulgence. We're torn by this place. We celebrate it full stop, and we hope for better.
On the unholy plane S. faces the stone again. In this moment he knows who he is. He knows where he's been and recognizes all the virtues of life on earth. His wisdom is sealed by death. S. will roll the stone and make it rise. He will perpetuate an awe inspiring and meaningless task, but he will do so with all the knowledge that casts gods and heroes aside. His recognition is seated in a moment. Right here, right now he is a locus-- he is the vector and he its realization. He sets the stone and he makes it rise.

essay by Michael Woody 2013

















