

Garrett Lockhart, *Mudflat Pavilion*

PS311

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Text by Elora Crawford

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Mudflat Pavilion is the first solo exhibition of work from Garrett Lockhart, Vancouver Island-born artist and co-director of the project space, Calaboose in Montreal. The contents of the show are as follows: a door, four walls, a window shuttered with salvaged wood, an overhead projector turned on, a bench, scattered bricolages, memorabilia, found objects, felted steel wool, a ladder, and found images transferred to stretched cotton.

Garrett Lockhart works as an intuitive bricoleur. On our walks leading up to the exhibition he spies a renovation site and his eyes track along the thrown-out plywood without missing a word. In the St. Henri neighbourhood in Montreal where he lives, he haunts the changing piles of discarded things left on the sidewalk or plastered to the streets, like wet paper in a puddle, to bring back to his attic studio for later use. He is an image maker, with a background in street still life photography, he uses the vernacular scraps found on commutes to work and back like snapshots; compiled into albums collecting and collapsing time.

It always starts with objects—a thrifted trove of stickers from a graphic design studio named after a burned-down squatter shack, an open-access database link. Recently, Lockhart's research practice has led him to Vancouver artists like Carole Itter and Al Neil, who built detritus into bricolage, writing, photography and performances beginning in the 1950s. During their most artistically productive years, they shared a squat on the mudflats of Dollarton, in Vancouver's upper harbour, where a community of artists and writers lived amongst the fisherman pile houses and along the Burrard Inlet, before it was burned to the ground by civic authorities in 1971. Their home, affectionally called the Blue Cabin, was recently restored. It acts like a monument, or a synthetic pavilion, of a time now past. An artist residency in its name was announced by Grunt Gallery, Vancouver, this past June.

What follows is an essay-bricolage built from the conversations I had with Garrett, our shared, tangential research into the mudflats, Reggio Emilia pedagogy, soft architecture, and related theories.

Flat on my back I crane to plot my steps along the ceiling floor. I follow the line of the mouldings, which follow that of the ceiling. There's a curve where the staircase ceiling inclines into another floor. I slide down and into an empty pool. I spin the slats of the ceiling fans with my feet. Then everything breathes again, and the carpet is white.

There exists for each one of us an oneiric house, a French philosopher wrote, a house of dream-memory that is lost in the shadow beyond the real past. I know this is true because every time I dream of my house it appears differently. Once in a dream I flew into the front door and my house was a log cabin of perfectly rectangular proportions. In another it was a rococo labyrinth of small rooms. I never sense that it's not my true house until I have woken up.

There must be something nascent in being carried (by ground, understood) and covered (collected under a roof) compelling us to dream of houses; that compelled Laugier, the French architectural theorist writing in 1753, to pose "the shack is an idea from which all architectural theory extends." All theory extends from the shack. The shack is foundational—oneiric—if only because it's the first common denominator of buildings. It's also the first line of temperance from exterior spaces, and entrance into interior space. When we are on the inside we feel carried to a surrender, we exhale, we begin to build abstractions.

There is a degree of difference between a shack and a civic pavilion. We could presume the most felt contrast to be their demeanour—that one designs private social life and one sets the stage for public social life. And yet, is it not also true that we can encounter either place with such a sense of peace or awe that the contrast collapses? It is, as if among an aesthetic harmony, we are carried to our own private harmony.

Civic planners know one thing certainly: the vision of half-built or demolished building is more exciting. That's why there are windows into the scaffolding, plastic sheets in the painted plywood that see inwards to the steel beams crossed over steel beams in a big earthy hole in the ground wet and stinking.

Wedged between monumentality and the wet-and-stinking, the ethos of shack building is improvisational and temporary. A shack may be constructed by anyone with found materials, such that it maintains the base theory of the shack; of planes and right angles like lined paper, or blank sheet music. The shack is built using simple collaging techniques of construction. There's intimacy in democracy. The act of building is a kind of bricolage.

In whatever space we are, we are surrounded by objects and people from different places. In that momentary still we are all in one place, many lifetimes swept to a surface. A photograph does this. It flattens the things between you and as far as your lens can see onto a filmy shadow, a negative beyond the real. In both mediums there remains an indexical relationship to the history of things, the way things were, and also the new thing entirely composed. Narrative organizing, like a still, is what thoughts do to words. The grammar of old and new work together at once: colliding the maximum of a

spent thing with the forceful minimalism of a new idea.

The tradition of bricolage used by Vancouver artists like Carole Itter in the '60s intentionally sublimated spent things into relevant currency. Collaging found material was an effect that both reimagined the values of trash and of money. To monumentalize anything so humble as a lantern, or a wooden spoon, was a protest against the luxury object of art. Like many of her peers, Itter's work was often ephemeral and resistant to commodification, and yet so many of these works remain forever on internet surfaces.

Contemporary art tells us that what is inside a room and how it feels—the psychic space it ushers us to—is vitally important. Theories of phenomenology and soft architecture teach that the way we feel in a space is influenced by our relationship to objects in that space. Imagining that to be *inside* a house is always to be *among* a house and its objects, we ask: “Was the room a large one? Was the garret cluttered up? Was the nook warm? How was it lighted? How, too, in these fragments of space, did the human being achieve silence?”¹

We imagine and construct abstractions in silence. But if things exist constantly in relation to all other things, logically, silence is never really silence. There never is a natural absence of sound—only a harmony between sounds—like a flickering antennae reaching a speed of visible stillness, or a humming brown noise which drones and drowns all distraction from the perceivably silent centre of sound. It is the phenomenon of silence, like that of the minimum and the maximum colliding—like that of the experience of achieving peace at home or harmony among sweeping pavilions—that is wherefrom all construction begins.

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Five days after the Second World War ended in a town called Reggio Emilia, Italy, a group of women on the outskirts built a school from the rubble retreating Germans left behind. The women wanted to give the next generation a foundation that was intolerant of injustice and inequality, a way of being that respected all beings. They sold an abandoned tank, nine horses, and two abandoned military trucks and began to build a school for children. They called the school Reggio Emilia, after their community.

The teachings of Reggio Emilia follow a child-lead, constructivist pedagogy that advantages the natural curiosity of children to build knowledge through play. At the centre of each Reggio Emilia school building there is an *atelier*, an art studio, which is considered by the educators to be “a centre for the construction of the culture of the school.” The situations built by the children in the studio lead to a multidisciplinary classroom conversation that draws from math, science, language, and social politics to describe the logic of things. The Reggio Emilia atelier, Like the shack and like the attic studio, is the place wherefrom all theory extends.

It's not just the minimalism that is important, but *what* minimalism from *what* spirit.

Where does the harmony come from? Modernity is often thought of as aesthetic obliteration; a clearing to invent from nothing, against the flourish of the superfluously decorative before it. Canonical male modernist painters, like the abstract expressionists, for instance, created in this mode. Modernity, like the shack, could also be thought of as having an improvisatory ethos—“*proportioned by the utopia of improvised necessity rather than by tradition—that collects from detritus to build from ground up*”²—rather than an ethos of obliteration. There exists a constructivist rather than deconstructionist, utopian rather than nihilist, ethical minimalism.

Reggio Emilia adheres to a pedagogy of relation, “a network of obligation” in which “the condition of pedagogical practice is an infinite attention to the other.”³ Pedagogy is building of knowledge relationally through multiple attentions, forces, in a community—an environment of participation and shared values, creating spaces for encounters—like a bricoleur whose attentions are many. The intuitive bricoleur keeps aware of their surroundings, taking notice of the relationships and groupings between objects. A bricoleur collects them in place to make things sing, like a snapshot photographer captures the perfect moment. The act of compiling the scatters of things, bricolage is an effort in multiple listening.

When artist Garrett Lockhart has collected enough objects in his attic studio, the arranging begins. One thing completes another, the edge of a found text leads into a transferred cotton stem. Felted wool becomes a spritely weed. Then everything breathes again, and the room is white. The oneiric house is such a potent idea that even the thought of a shack or a schoolhouse or a gallery can enliven new utopias, as the squats at Dollarton enlivened a minimalist utopia. Then here we are, dreaming alongside objects inside pavilions.

Endnotes

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (New York, Beacon, 1994), 9.

² Lisa Robertson, “Spatial Synthetics: A Theory,” *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Toronto, Coach House, 2011), 178.

³ Carlina Rinaldi, *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. (New York, Routledge, 2006), 59.

Elora Crawford (b. 1993, Toronto, Canada) is a writer and textile artist. Her work has appeared in *C Magazine*, *The Trinity Review*, and in catalogue exhibition essays. She is the co-editor of a publication of ekphrastic art writing, *Rich Container*. She holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Visual Studies from the University of Toronto, Canada.

Garrett Lockhart (b. 1994, Nanaimo, B.C., Canada) received his Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies and Computation Arts at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Recent exhibitions include *Planet of Weeds* at Crutch CAC, Toronto; *envoi* at Sibling, Toronto; and *Bending Towards the Sun* at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto. He is a co-director of Calaboose, an independent project space located in a converted carriage house in Montreal. Recent curatorial projects include *Red Sky at Morning* at Interstate Projects, NYC; *After the rain*, Montreal; and Bruno Sport Bar Biennale, Montreal. Lockhart currently lives in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.