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Rodrigo Valenzuela: 'Journeyman'
Labor Intensive Artistic Practices
Klowden Mann
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by Jody Zellen



Upon entering Klowden Mann's gallery space, it is impossible not to be immediately taken by its transformation. For his exhibition *Journeyman*, Rodrigo Valenzuela has fabricated a raised plywood floor that extends across the entire gallery and into which he has inset ceramic sculptures. These holes are illuminated troughs, scattered across the space as if floor-based skylights. Carefully centered in each cubby-hole is a dark gray three-dimensional work entitled *Airstrip* (all works 2020) that resembles machine parts disconnected from their source and rendered useless. They are presented as preserved relics. Each *Airstrip* (numbered 1- 6) has a geometric grace and balance with ample protrusions and holes that reference unknown functionality. *Airstrip 1* could be a partial model of a battleship seen from above, whereas *Airstrip 4* evokes a totem. These pieces are ghost-like and haunting in their stoic beauty.

On the walls are large-scale (31 x 36 inch) photogravures from Valenzuela's *Stature* series. These images also exhibit sculptural qualities and are constructions and performances for the camera, set up to be photographed from a fixed perspective. In this series, Valenzuela made clay and concrete casts from discarded consumer electronics packaging and arranged the materials into monumental forms that are carefully lit and delicately balanced within a peg-board walled set. Though clearly models, the pieces have the presence of Brutalist sculpture and architecture.

The sepia toned prints, though subdued, are still lush and textured. Valenzuela's choice of making photogravures gives the works a historic and scholarly aura. In a time of photographic immediacy, it is an ironic gesture to labor over casting parts to be assembled as sculptures that are photographed, then dismantled and printed using an antique process. In *Stature No 8*, a horizontal form comprised of seven rectangular sections akin to an abstracted model train or boat extends across the space perched on top of what could be a circular base. The sculpture is lit from above to cast a dark shadow below. *Stature No 4* fills the space and is a Rube Goldberg construction of precariously balanced, machine-like parts.

In the back room, Valenzuela presents two older video works, *Prole* (2015) and *Tertiary* (2018). These short pieces are more directly about the experience of minorities in terms of class, work and institutional power. Valenzuela makes reference to labor and a day's work through the title of the exhibition, *Journeyman*. He states, *I originally wanted to name my show "Jornada." This translates to "a day's work" in Spanish. I kept thinking about a single word to describe one full day of intense labor. I thought about what a journeyman does—what journey a person goes through when she or he is off to work.*

Valenzuela engages with artistic processes that are labor intensive. In this exhibition, he even transforms the space by creating an elevated plywood floor that suggests both a stage set and a construction site. Although the photographs and sculptures take cues from brutalist forms, they are in fact, more playful and enigmatic than weighty. While Valenzuela draws from history and consumer culture and combines personal and cultural references, his works have an ad hoc immediacy and ambiguity. Not knowing exactly what they are or how they were made adds to their appeal.

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