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Marianne Vitale: 'Blowing Robots'
Changes Wrought By Advancing Technologies
The Journal Gallery
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by Jody Zellen



At first glance, Marianne Vitale's *Cubes* (2025) resemble enlarged and dilapidated children's alphabet blocks, casually arranged in clusters across the gallery floor. While each surface may not contain letters or their fragments, the blocks suggest something dismantled and reconstructed. Vitale works with decommissioned locomotives and the materiality of distressed steel, and the essence of defunct machines holds forth. Each sculpture includes between twelve to thirty-eight cubes (13 x 13 x 13 inches each) cut from colorful, but rusty, locomotive bodies that once protected diesel engines. Squares with various letter fragments and designs have been cut from the metal skin and welded together into cubes. The welding is crude, the seams rough and haphazard, suggesting disrepair ... but from the ruins come new life. It is as if the entropic process was thwarted allowing myriad pieces to form industrial quasi-readymades shown in new configurations.

The largest assemblage contains 38 cubes stacked to become a cityscape with buildings of varying heights. Another includes a tower of red and white colored blocks. A square base formed by eight discrete cubes supports another pair and this configuration is topped by three more individual cubes. The red and white graphics within the squares feature fragmented rectangles, triangles and ovals. The burnt welded edges surrounding these graphics bleeds into their surface framing them in black with bits of shiny metal. The mostly green *Cubes* recall the shape of Carl Andre's sculpture *Merrymount* (1980) as well as works by Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris. Here, Vitale creates a sculpture where five cubes with mostly green backgrounds extend horizontally across the floor. On top of the five are four more, then three, then two, forming a stair-like structure.

One way to think about Vitale's sculptures is to imagine Soma Cubes, where each square has a unique pattern or decoration and each sculpture has a different configuration of blocks. A black-and-white piece with fifteen cubes extends both vertically and horizontally as if ready to spin, suggesting a dysfunctional top. A work of thirty-two black and orange units contains some that juxtapose letter fragments and others that have horizontal and vertical bands of the different colors. Although sturdy

and architectural, these pieces have a quirky imprecision that creates an intriguing awkwardness.

In addition to the five *Cubes*, the exhibition also includes wall-based sculptures: *Skull* and *Junk*. These large-scale readymades are “created” from locomotive cylinder heads that Vitale has installed anthropomorphically. Seen out of context, the machine parts resemble gigantic, abstracted skulls or heads with strange orifices and varying degrees of rust and decay. They suggest sci-fi monsters that are somehow both threatening and benign.

Vitale is a versatile artist who paints and draws, as well as fabricated sculpture. A notable past work includes *Bottles and Bridges: Advances in Collective Obliteration* (2021). This series of outdoor sculptures was exhibited in the 2022 Venice Biennale. Vitale is interested in the ways industrial and utilitarian objects — both large and small — can be transformed into iconic forms that function as minimalist sculptures. They also comment on the changes wrought by advancing technologies and what they leave behind.

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