

BOMB – Artists in Conversation

Art : Essay

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On the Clock with Amanda Ross-Ho by John Yau

The gallery as studio.



Amanda Ross-Ho at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY, 2017. © Amanda Ross-Ho. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.

In the weeks leading up to her current exhibition, MY PEN IS HUGE, at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, Amanda Ross-Ho prepared for the show in the gallery space in which her work would be on display. Poet and art writer John Yau visited her during this process.

1.

After spending the morning talking with Amanda Ross-Ho, who during the month of August worked in the spacious gallery at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in Chelsea in preparation for her upcoming exhibition, *MY PEN IS HUGE*, I go home and begin searching the internet for things I might use in this article. I come across an

interview with Steel Stillman that appeared in *Art in America* back in 2010. In it Ross-Ho says: “an exhibition is a time and place where objects and images can perform together like characters in a drama.”

2.

MY PEN IS HUGE will bring together paintings and objects. Some of the objects will be placed on two long tables in the center of the gallery, where the artist has been working. Others will be on the floor, by the gallery walls.

A collection of large clock hands, which she had fabricated, will hang on the wall between the front desk and the gallery; there will be six sets, each consisting of three hands (second, minute, hour) stacked together—time stood still.

3.

There are twelve large paintings, all of which have a clockface silkscreened onto them—a numbered circle centered in a square format.

In the digital age, is a clockface becoming obsolete, like the pay phone?

The paintings are based on vintage paper clockface dials, which Ross-Ho found on eBay. There is a large stack of sheets on one of the tables, but I do not ask to look at them. She used the sheets in different ways—as a placemat, as a scratch pad, and as an absorbent surface.

Each sheet of vintage paper is a surface where residue of one kind or another was deposited—notes of things to pack, phrases heard or read, names, phone numbers. Much of the meaning is cryptic, something meaningful to the artist, but not necessarily to the viewer.



Amanda Ross-Ho, *MY PEN IS HUGE*. Installation view. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.

4.

In the paintings, Ross-Ho simultaneously magnifies and replicates a particular sheet, but not perfectly. By copying what's on the clockface paper, she enlarges a scrap from her life. Some of the scraps are completely covered with marks, while others are not. They are repositories recording all kinds of marks—writing, scribbling, drawing, sketching, crossing out, circular stains left by a wine glass or coffee cup. Employing an assortment of instruments, which convey the effects of a paintbrush, marker, pencil, or a ballpoint pen, the artist turns twelve of the disposable repositories into something permanent.

The paintings are repositories of repositories. They are paintings, in that they are made with paint, and they are not paintings.

5.

Like the hands of a clock, Ross-Ho has circled back to something she did earlier, in another time and place. In the interview with Stillman, she states: “My process is often less about initiating actions than about paying attention to something that is already going on, and then responding.”

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Each painting has its own character. While certain motifs recur, she seems to have no signature mark. In addition to the silkscreen, she uses a variety of materials, including acrylic, gouache, coffee, wine, and graphite to make the oversized copies.

The paintings compress a clockface that does not tell time with the residue of Ross-Ho's life. By bringing these two things together, the artist asks us to consider the ways we live in time.

6.

Clocks mark time. Their faces are otherwise empty, as if the hands keep wiping them clean, as they methodically count the hours, minutes, and seconds without keeping track. Clocks have no memory: they are amnesiacs.

The clockface paper is a record of different moments where the artist found it necessary to write, draw, make a note, add numbers, or put down a cup.

One motif she draws is the two masks for tragedy joined together. Might we see this motif as an analog for the joining of the clockface painting and the clockface paper?



Amanda Ross-Ho, *Untitled Timepiece (A CLEARLY ERRONEOUS HOLDING)*, 2017. Silkscreen, acrylic, gouache, coffee, wine, and graphite on canvas. 52 x 52 in. (132.1 x 132.1 cm.)

7.

There are other objects on the two long tables, which are covered with white paper. Do tables actually come in this length, or were they made especially for this space? I suspect the latter.

8.

The objects, which vary in scale from tiny, to normal, to huge, include clean and

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dirty, long-stemmed wine glasses (their interiors stained purple); X-Acto knife blades; pencils, eating utensils (fork, spoon, and knife); coins (real and fake); and bobby pins. There are very large and regular-sized black scrunchies and neat piles of dirty paint rags.

9.

I feel like Gulliver and that I have wandered into an artist's studio or the aftermath of an opening.

The inhabitants and or partygoers have gone, leaving their stuff behind. Is the artist a Lilliputian or a Brobdingnagian or a shape shifter?

The installation mixes the fantastic with the ordinary—huge wine glasses, normal-sized paint rags, and tiny forks. I feel disoriented, aware that I am too big and too small and just right. This dizzying feeling is compounded by the paintings where the writing is sometimes oriented to the clock's circle or is put down every which way. This denies the clock, whose purpose is to help locate you within the day's sequence of hours: it tells you how much time you have before your next appointment.



Amanda Ross-Ho, *Untitled Set #1 (AUGUST 1–SEPTEMBER 7)*, 2017. Tables, latex paint, acrylic paint, gouache, coffee, wine, tea, kombucha, salad dressing, graphite, enamel, acrylic paint pen, pen, novelty wine glasses, wine glass, novelty coffee mugs, rags, novelty pencils, nitrile gloves, forks, paperclips, novelty paperclips, paintbrushes, miniature cutlery, miniature beer bottle, bobby pin, novelty rubber bands, novelty cutlery spoon, vintage goldtone chains, eyemasks, black scrunchie, plastic coffee cups, timepiece numbers, giant buttons, aluminum cnc tests, miniature volvic bottle, screenprinted taffeta ribbon, novelty coins, coins,

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natural sponge, paper coffee cup, wine glass filled with goldfish, Hourglass quilt test, plastic paintmixing saucers, BINARY bobby pin, teabag, novelty pencil sharpener, DEAD BLADES, rubber band, quarters, nickels, pennies, and dimes. 56 7/8 x 120 x 72 in. (144.5 x 304.8 x 182.9 cm.)

10.

The title of the exhibition, *MY PEN IS HUGE*, can be read literally and metaphorically, as purely descriptive as well as mocking the masculine idea of the artist as heroic.

11.

During our conversation, I asked Ross-Ho, who is bi-racial, if the fact that her paintings were not paintings in a traditional sense had anything to do with her identity. My reason for asking was not purely objective, as I am also biracial and attracted to hybrid forms. I was interested in the fact that she brought together two things that should not go together—a clockface and the residue of her life. And yet, the work did not seem biographical, about identity. The notes on the paintings are personal and not personal—so many paradoxes to consider.

12.

Perhaps art is an enhanced form of the residue of one's life, as well as one way to shape our passage in time. Tragedy joined to tragedy. Undeterred by this realization, Ross-Ho memorializes time's passing, even as she lays bare the ordinariness of its particulars.

Amanda Ross-Ho's MY PEN IS HUGE is on view at Mitchell-Innes & Nash (534 West 26th Street) until October 14, 2017.

*John Yau is a poet, art critic, curator, and publisher of Black Square Editions. He has two books out this year, *The Wild Children of William Blake* (Autonomedia) and *Thomas Nozkowski* (Lund Humphries). Letter Machine Editions will publish his book of poems, *Bijoux in the Dark*, in 2018. He lives in New York.*