

The Installation, "Wedge", 2011 by Maya Lujan is like walking into a painting, and invites a participatory experience in that the physical structure and shape of the work is intended to be observed like a painting. In this installation, there are many views specific to being physically involved with the theatricality of this act. Walking into the gallery becomes a bit of a quirky whimsical narrative, as if one could walk through Cezanne's "Red Room" or into the well-loved storybook, "Goodnight Moon".

At the same time, there is a solid and weighty physical presence to the work, as well as an aura of the muscular activity involved in installing the exhibition. The sculpture is cleanly executed, asymmetrical and follows Lujan's mode of seizing the entirety of the gallery's architectural space, including incorporating the other works by other artists in the show to become part of her installation. The Wedge obstinately acts as the conductor for all of the other scripted space of the gallery, including the bright orange light from the front of the flats bouncing around the room. It may be that the orange light and its function is perhaps the impetus for the entire installation.

If one takes the subtle cues located in the nooks and crannies of the sculpture, there is also an embedded contemporary conversation regarding painting. For example, the breakdown from the clean, finished veneer or what might be considered the "front" to the "back" of the set-flats, wherein there are footprints, raw wood and traces of graffiti. Like Krasner and Johns, the vital and enduring inquiry remains as to where exactly the delineation between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional occurs, and where the illusion is located. It's as if one could fulfill the wish to have x-ray vision and have the ability to look at the back and the front of a painting at the same time, as there is a real consideration of the essential structure of the substrate in itself. The window in the sculpture offers a view out to a small black square painted on the corner of the gallery walls. This move revisits the classic idea of a painting being a window and allows the black square to serve as a reference point that completes the perspectival model in the gallery space. Lujan is able to insert and insist upon her own abstract metanarrative and defines the gallery "space" based on her ideals and constructed universe. The actual shape of "Wedge" verges on the surreal and as a structure is tilted with an open corner on the floor and an open angle on the corner towards the ceiling. It physically leans back on support poles, yet maintains stability, and seems to give a wink to such artists as Matta-Clark and Whiteread. Furthermore, and appropriate to the title, the accordion-like folding of "Wedge" includes the cut-out shape the lean creates, therefore, it further takes up the gallery space in that trapezoids are exponentially spread throughout the room.

"Wedge" also calls to mind the current pop-up nature of art: the pop-up, one-day galleries, performances and artwork somewhat reflexive of the economy. Although there is a history of pop-up in art, (one can easily think of Oldenburg or Kaprow), a reconsideration of the definition of pop-up seems to occur if one is able to factor in the methodology of how Lujan makes art. One of Maya's studio's (she has two studios) is located in a production warehouse in the Chinatown district of Los Angeles. Her studio is located in a space where whole rooms, backdrops and props are executed in a manner of precision and high craftsmanship in an extremely fast-paced environment. In other words, large things are built rapidly, moved out, stored and likely broken down just as quickly.

Lujan's work is very much influenced by the Hollywood set design industry and addresses the barriers between what is considered lowbrow and high art. In fact, the artist had the materials stored for "Wedge" in component parts, ready to execute, apparently for a year before the timing and circumstances of the show, hence the natural patina on the back of the readymade set-flats. Lujan considers this to be a utilitarian manner of making art and refers to this ability to quickly fill a space as "Artistic fitness". "Wedge", then, is not necessarily site-specific, but site-adaptive, and ultimately fulfills this intention; the proof or result being, that during the opening, people were taking photographs in front of the sculpture as a backdrop.

I am certain the artist was cognizant that this would occur, and displaying a strong interest in fashion, Maya wore a striking emerald green vintage Commes Des Garcons dress that was the exact compliment in hue to the arresting orange of her sculpture. Again, the view from the front was significantly different than the back- the front of the dress was all about framing and color, the back of the dress was very low cut and revealed the sexy, feminine shape of her waist and back.

"Wedge" is part of a larger show
"Now Not Never"

Rob Brander, Kyle De Lotto, Daniel Desure, Gregor Gaida, Simon Haas, Maya Lujan,
Lisa Solberg at Carmichael Gallery in Culver City

By Keenon Stone