

Some notes on Lewis Stein's recent exhibition at Essex Street, New York and the 'object as is'  
by Mitchell Anderson

Essex Street's exhibition of Lewis Stein last autumn was altering. Each work, made between 1968 and 1980 looked new, had never been shown where I was looking, and fit perfectly in line with my interests concerning my own work and that of other artists around my age. That is, objects presented as is and the limits of artistic medium utility and narrative they possess. I didn't believe it, assuming that the show and accompanying book from 1980, reprinted for the exhibition, was a project or work by Maxwell Graham, the owner of the gallery. Even after receiving information that airtightens the storyline of the work I refused for days to believe it. This was completely related to ingrained ideas I have regarding time based hierarchies and trajectories of art. To scrutinize these storylines I have begun putting together a timeline of the, so called, pure readymade. It's subjective to my research completed so far, the works within an artist's practice I've decided are crucial and, basically, my generalized awareness. At points it is opinion blind and at others it is stacked with many pieces by artists I adore. All of Lewis Stein's works included in the exhibition at Essex Street are listed. Duchamp's *En prévision du brad cassé* and *Fountain* are included despite having assisted painted text on the objects.

- 1914: Marcel Duchamp purchases an iron bottle rack as an 'already made'.
- 1915: Marcel Duchamp's *En prévision du brad cassé*, the first work he calls a readymade.
- 1917: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*
- 1938: Pablo Picasso's *Tête*
- 1961: Daniel Spoerri's *Grocery Store*  
Ben Vautier's *Le Temps*
- 1962: George Brecht's *Exit*
- 1963: George Brecht's *Barrel Bolt*
- 1964: George Brecht's *No Smoking*
- 1968: Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, a commercially purchased police billy club
- 1971: Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, garbage can in an edition of 5  
Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, four stanchions with velvet rope
- 1972: Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, a chrome plated rail
- 1976: Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, a working door buzzer  
Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, a siren
- 1977: Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, a chrome door handle
- 1979: Jeff Koons' *Inflatables* series
- 1980: Lewis Stein's *Untitled*, a street lamp
- 1982: Isa Genzken's *Weltempfänger*
- 1985: Cady Noland's *Dirt Corral*
- 1990: Sylvie Fleury's *The Art of Surviving*  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (USA Today)*  
Mike Kelley's *Arena* series  
Cady Noland's *Awning Blanks*
- 1991: Cady Noland's *Industrial Park*  
Fred Wilson's *Guarded View*
- 1992: Tom Friedman's *Hot Balls*

- 1993: Gabriel Orozco's *Empty Shoe Box*
- 1996: Maurizio Cattelan's *Another Fucking Readymade*
- 1998: Tracey Emin's *My Bed*
- 2002: Wade Guyton's *Inverted Woodpile*
- 2004: Valentin Carron's *Colors*
- 2005: Latifa Echakhch's *Principe d'Economie II*  
Nate Lowman's *Young America 1995*
- 2006: Dahn Vo's *If You Were to Climb the Himalayas Tomorrow*
- 2007: Wade Guyton's *Untitled Action Sculpture, (5 Enron Chairs)*  
Richard Prince's *Pure Thoughts*
- 2008: Gedi Sibony's *The Middle of the World*  
Dahn Vo's *Grave Marker for Maria Ngo Thi Ha*
- 2010: Fayçal Baghriche's *Envelopments*  
Latifa Echakhch's *Skins*  
Klara Liden first exhibits trash cans stolen from public spaces at the Bonner Kunstverein.
- 2011: Lutz Bacher's *Baseballs II*  
Darren Bader's *my aunt's car*  
Dahn Vo's *Theodore Kaczynski's Smith Corona Portable Typewriter*
- 2012: Kevin Beasley's *Untitled*, a cotton gin motor
- 2014: Park McArthur's exhibits *Ramps* at Essex Street, NY  
Park McArthur's *Passive Vibration Isolation* series  
Cameron Rowland's *Loot*
- 2015: Ramaya Tegegne's *Tetris*
- 2016: Anna-Sophie Berger's *Parabolic Reflectors*  
Bunny Rogers' *Cafeteria Set*  
Cameron Rowland's *91020000* at Artists Space and *Indirect Benefit* at Fri-Art  
Luke Willis Thompson's *Suca Mate/ Born Dead*
- 2017: Prem Sahib's *Do you care? We do*

In the context of the past century, my original reading of the work exhibited by me and my peers since about 2014, relating to objects that are presented without change, appeared like we were reaching a goal. In that narrative the 'rediscovery' of these works by Lewis Stein acts as a shock into a now institutionally established contemporary artistic process, where power dynamics, narrative and the political are exposed in inanimate entities. The timeline, as I've constructed it, allows me to see what the Lewis Stein exhibition has the ability, separate from the work, to illustrate. His works, regardless of the sheer force of quality, are not the outliers in time they seem to be. Viewing works within a progressive timeline of succession must not be default, and while it may be helpful sometimes it is as dangerous as the similar failing of favoring great artists over great artworks. The academic research concerning the pure readymade is a totally open field. The changes in the use and understanding of the readymade varies widely, but seems to progress from a choice meaning practically nothing to near everything. The possibilities of the readymade are not exhausted. This is very initial and many issues remain to be taken up. For example, what about this process attracts many women, queer and non-white artists? That an exhibition has the power to bring up this many reverberating questions, revelations, concerns and, perhaps, solutions can not be taken as usual. It sticks around with me.