



Andy Coolquitt, Installation view, 2012. Courtesy of Lisa Cooley, New York.

## ANDY COOLQUITT: CHAIR W/PAINTINGS

LISA COOLEY (107 NORFOLK STREET)  
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**STEPHANIE BUHMANN**

Marking the first solo exhibition at Lisa Cooley’s new space on Norfolk Street, *Andy Coolquitt: chair w/paintings* resembles a secret chamber filled with stashed-away treasures. Thirty-five sculptures comprise the stunning installation, each distinct in its unique contemplation of color, material, and formal relationships. Rhythmically distributed, the constructs on walls and floor evoke a mysterious landscape, in which individual details call for our attention as much as the group at large.

Upon close inspection, it becomes evident that the Austin-based Coolquitt harvests the urban wealth of discarded products for his materials. In this particular body of work, he incorporates a vast array of found items, ranging from lighters and plastic straws to pieces of fabric, beer cans, and metal pipes. Stripped of their functional context and assembled into structures that focus primarily on visual cohesion, everyday objects are transformed into ingredients rich in poetic potential. Once owned and contemplated, before being used up, lost, or dumped, Coolquitt’s crops find meaning primarily through re-organization. Combined and fused into larger constructions, these objects are reincarnated.

Coolquitt’s work addresses both aesthetic and social concerns. The sculptures on display especially reveal his increasing interest in questions of community and interrelation. Each found object and gleaned element marks a reference to society. More metaphorically, each sculpture also pays homage to stable unions between unlike elements. Coolquitt takes his concept even further in several examples here, namely in works that invite audience participation. One such work involves a wall-mounted cushion that entices the viewer to press against it, thus adding the possibility of a physical experience to the visual encounter. A centrally placed sculpture, “counter” (2012), resembles a large wooden store counter, protective Plexiglas sides included. While this work suggests a meeting point where business transactions could take place, it also serves as a grounding structure in the context of the overall installation.

In 1990, Coolquitt temporarily abandoned his studio practice to work at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This experience left him with an increased desire to create sculptures that could initiate social exchange or support human relationships. In *Andy Coolquitt: chair w/paintings* the artist offers a body of work that, despite stylistic nuances, reads cohesively in its approachability. His assemblages range from elegantly constrained to more complex, from more finished to somewhat raw, but they always seem consciously inviting. This is largely due to their overt handmade quality and to an inherent sense of human warmth and humor. Coolquitt’s sculptures, including those that incorporate working light bulbs, are certainly not functional, but they do translate as extensions of our familiar environment.

In the case of “devin and randy” (2012), an elegant concoction of metal, welded steel, fabric, and grease manifests as an abstract portrait. Here, the fragments of two pairs of ripped denim pants, tied to a patched steel rod structure, succeed in dissociating themselves from human waste and instead suggest a human relationship. Interestingly, the nature of the latter seems to be of little importance to the artist, as he provides no hints of underlying sexual or aggressive tension. The crucial realization that Coolquitt does initiate in this almost minimal display is that it does not take much for us to find humanity reflected in things.