



Cell Series
LILY COX-RICHARD
Sculptures the Size of Hailstones

17 February - 12 May 2018

Patrick Kelly, Old Jail Art Center Executive Director and Curator,
email interview with Lily Cox-Richard. (December 2017 - January 2018)

PK: For those unfamiliar with your previous work, can you give a brief description of the type of subjects you have investigated and the resulting objects or projects?

LCR: I'm drawn to everyday objects and forms that tend to blend into the noise of the built environment; but with attention, they become strange and magical. Things like lightning rods, woven baskets, and concrete rubble. I'm also interested in the larger systems and webs of meaning that these objects are part of, like material histories, cultural values, and questions of value and labor. For example: I started thinking about scrap copper a few years ago, drawn to the ways this infinitely recyclable material wears the patina and form of its most recent incarnation, and also the resources required for mining and the labor involved in reclamation. My investigation led to *Old Copper Futures* which is an ongoing project that takes the form of hydraulically compacted bales made of scrap copper from different American cities. Each one weighs about 1000 lbs. and sits on a custom plinth that also functions as a pallet to move the sculpture.

*PK: I think it is worth noting that most viewers are unaware of what goes into creating a work like *Old Copper Futures* beyond the conceptualization. Research into "how to make this" has to occur prior to the actual fabrication; and it has to be within one's financial means. Have you ever conceived of a project where one or both of these obstacles have prevented the execution?*

LCR: For a long time, it felt like *Old Copper Futures* might not happen for those very reasons. I started thinking about copper and doing research in the summer of 2014. It took six months to get enough copper and find a scrapyard with a baler who was willing to help me make the first bale. It was a 3,000 lb. mess, but a necessary mess. It helped me figure out what kind of baler would not work, and I realized that I couldn't manage bales that heavy. Moving them is a logistical nightmare, and I couldn't afford to make more than one. From there, I hit a long series of brick walls. Frustrated, I drove to Destin, Florida to attend a recycling tradeshow and conference so that I could ask baler manufacturers questions and they wouldn't be able to ignore me or hang up on me. I honed my questions and started to understand the specifics of what I needed to make it work. Still, it wasn't until summer of 2016, with the support of an Artadia grant and a residency at RAIR (Recycled Artist in Residency) in Philadelphia, that the first successful bale was made. I made the most recent bale with a scrapyard in Corsicana, Texas, during a residency at 100 W. When I discovered that the local scrapyard had a logger baler, I just kept bringing donuts and cookies until I convinced them to sell me copper and let me be involved in baling it. Luckily, I could sell that first 3,000 lb. monster



for scrap to continue funding the project. I can't think of any instances of not making a project because it was too difficult or expensive, although I have a running list of projects for which I'm still looking for opportunities to support their realization. In the midst of the saga, it feels like my efforts are being thwarted, but I have found that big projects evolve and gain depth because of all of the obstacles involved in their making. The process can be exasperating, so I have to have other things in the works or it would be too disheartening.



While trying to make the bales happen, I was working on *Cistern and Wattle and Daub*. These projects are conceptually related, but made out of plaster and concrete using tools I have in my studio. I also made a series of rubbings of bales, and smaller hammered lead drawings—these works on paper relate to *Old Copper Futures* and allowed me to think through the content in a more feasible way, while informing the larger project.

PK: *I am reading an interview with Marcel Duchamp where he mentions artworks should take a long period of time to develop and be created (paraphrased). Maybe these forced, and often frustrating, logistics make the work better in the long run. Shifting gears a bit. The work that I first saw of yours was created in plaster. Can you tell about that material decision vs. another, such as stone?*

LCR: I'm interested in how materials can hold meaning and history. While I think of copper as charged with the electricity or water that has coursed through it, materials can also hold meaning in the form of cultural associations and historical baggage. When I was working on *The Stand (Possessing Powers)*, I was thinking about sculpture (and sculptors) traveling through time, and plaster seemed like a good material for this—plaster is not precious, and it is often used as the model for a sculpture, or to cast a copy of an existing sculpture. As a traditional material for the before-sculpture and after-sculpture, I hoped that in my project, it could also bridge time. In *The Stand*, I was also trying to critique the way neoclassical sculptors used sparkling white marble as a trope to purify female bodies and mitigate depictions of race. I didn't want to perpetuate this strategy. Plaster is cheap, malleable, and kind of dingy, so there is a complicated kind of irony in carving it with such care.



PK: *This may not be an issue for you, but as an artist myself I sometimes discovered that a work might lose something outside the context or references of the original installation or the accompaniment of works created in conjunction with an installation. Is this something you've discovered or is it not an issue or concern?*



LCR: This is something I think about a lot! Some of my projects are conceived of for a specific site, and it's hard to think of another context that could work as well as the initial one. I made *Fruiting Bodies* for The Poor Farm in Wisconsin. I cast hundreds of mushrooms and installed them in fairy circles around unmarked graves in the cemetery behind a 19th century Poor Farm. I keep coming back to mushrooms and monuments in different ways, but this project feels specific to the Poor Farm context and I have yet to find another site that I feel it would work in and maintain its depth. Some curators have found me to be frustratingly willful about this, but I would rather not show it again than risk diluting the content.

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In other cases, I've found the opposite to be true—a work created for one specific context is reinstalled elsewhere and gains something from this new context. *Old Copper Futures* recently showed in old rice silos in Houston, and in addition to the space being formally striking, the copper also became easier to read as a commodity, which I thought was really interesting. It's likely that I won't ever show these bales in a silo again, but images of that installation become an important layer in the project's history, adding a facet of meaning. As I'm writing this to you, I'm taking a break from trying to wrangle a group of old lightning rods in my studio. These have served as inspirational objects for me, charging my studio with the wisdom of knowing lightning. I've also used them in two very different installations. At the OJAC, I'll use them in a new way. The context of the old jail cell, the politics of 2018, and the lightning rods all conspire to make new meaning.

Of course when a work goes into a collection, I don't necessarily get to be deliberate (or stubborn) about issues of context and placement. So, I try to learn as much as I can and be as thoughtful as possible whenever I do have that control.

PK: I know at this time in the interview your installation concept is still evolving, but can you describe the overall theme and any visual elements you think will be utilized?



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LCR: In this show, I'm using found objects and sculptures I've made and trying to put them in positions where they can slip between multiple systems. In addition to lightning rods and scrap copper, I'm working on new sculptures that could fit in your hand. The "hail scale" is used to measure the size of hailstones by comparing them to common objects like a walnut, golf ball, or teacup: hailstones the size of _____. Your earlier questions about context are really important here—what might be enormous for a hailstone might be a very modest size for a sculpture. Talking about the weather is often considered banal, but lately, the weather has been urgently claiming a lot more space for discussion. What happens when we ignore an important conversation or dismiss small talk (or small sculptures)? I'm interested in zooming in on details and giving them a lot of space and attention.

The sculptures the size of hailstones will sit on a large plaster plinth that has woven basket forms embedded in it, forming niches and craters. Often pedestals and plinths are made to blend into their surroundings; but of course, they can never disappear. Rather than pretend they are invisible, or try to ignore them, I'm interested in calling attention to the extensive volume of space that plinths take up. Focusing on these kinds of supporting roles is an opportunity to engage other kinds of making, and recognize other systems of labor, like the way the letters carved into the limestone blocks of the Old Jail remind us of the labor (and precarious wages) of the stonemasons who cut them.



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Past *Cell Series* artists:

DENNY PICKETT - 2008 | JEFFREY BROSK - 2009 | RANDY BACON - 2009
JOHN FROST - 2009 | NANCY LAMB - 2010 | JOHN ROBERT CRAFT - 2010
TERRI THORNTON - 2010 | ANNE ALLEN - 2011 | WILL HENRY - 2011
ERIC ZIMMERMAN - 2011 | BILL DAVENPORT - 2012 | JUSTIN BOYD - 2012
CAROL BENSON - 2012 | KANA HARADA - 2013 | BRAD TUCKER - 2013
ANTHONY SONNENBERG - 2013 | CHRIS SAUTER - 2014
CAMP BOSWORTH - 2014 | RACHEL HECKER - 2014
NATASHA BOWDOIN - 2015 | JOE BARRINGTON - 2015 | LINDA RIDGWAY - 2015
HECTOR BENAVIDES/ROBERT DAVIS/HELEN MAYFIELD/
IKE MORGAN/ROYAL ROBERTSON/REV. LT THOMAS - 2016
MARGARET MEEHAN - 2016 | DAN PHILLIPS - 2016 | TED LARSEN - 2017
JOEL SAMPSON - 2017 | KELLY O'CONNOR - 2017

Cover: *Grapefruit I*, 2017 (from the series *Sculptures the Size of Hailstones*), concrete, Texas Moss Rock, 7 x 5 x 7 in.

1. *Old Copper Futures*, 2016, 951 lbs. of #2 scrap copper (from Revolution Recovery, New Castle, DE), concrete, blanket, 42 x 26 x 39 in. Originally commissioned and produced by Artpace San Antonio, in collaboration with Recycled Artist in Residency (Philadelphia) for Lily Cox-Richard's exhibit *Salv* at Artpace, San Antonio, TX.
2. *Cistern 1*, 2016, polymer concrete, epoxy putty, polystyrene, jack stands, 109 x 15 x 15 in.
3. *Wattle and Daub: desk* (detail), 2016, gypsum cement, 42 x 96 x 45 in.
4. *The Stand: Greek Slave*, 2013, carved plaster, 66 x 33 x 33 in.
5. *Fruiting Bodies*, 2011 (shown in detail & storage) cast aqua resin, dimensions variable.
6. *Strike*, 2012, installation with found objects, fulgurites, custom light boxes, ephemera, radio play-style audio of Herman Melville's *The Lightning-rod Man*.

- All works courtesy of the artists

Interviews and additional images can be viewed on the museum's website theojac.org.

