

FLAUNT

HUGH SCOTT-DOUGLAS: "I Just Want to Manufacture Some Waste"

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WE USED TO LAUNCH SHIPS, says the sign at the gate. NOW WE LAUNCH BUSINESSES.

I am in the Brooklyn Navy Yard for two reasons: One, I am here to interview the 25-year-old conceptual artist Hugh Scott-Douglas, a guy I could profile off the top of my head (I've known and liked him since 2010, when we both lived in Toronto and he had just graduated with a BFA in sculpture from Ontario College of Art & Design). Two, I'm in love with edges, and in this recently industrial landscape you can watch the last scraps of American manufacturing turn to flotsam under the bridge.

Today in his studio, Hugh is making editions of a work comprising: a wooden plank; an opened cardboard box; and a bundle of newsprint, each page of which is printed in recycled ink from newspaper images that Hugh moved slightly on the scanner to re-blend the discrete units of color and "forge a new liquid value—in that it's interacted with the hand of the author. There's a

fracture between body and paint."

He picks up a piece of Letraset "screentone" paper—which is used by manga artists to give a dot-matrix look to the page—and applies it sticky-side-down to the concrete floor. It comes up scratched and flecked with debris. Later, he will scan it and blow it up to produce a flat, inky "negation." It's like that Asger Jorn quote: "There are more things on the earth of a picture than in the heaven of aesthetic theory." Hugh knows this—and is also one to quote Jorn—but he cannot resist the heaven.

For a new sculpture, Hugh wrapped a pedestal in silk, which he first printed with images of cancelled stamps, then baked in epoxy so the colors won't bleed. "Death," he explains, "is hand in hand with heat." In another series, he alters images of foreign currency until Photoshop can no longer recognize and ban them as counterfeit, and then prints them on plywood sheets. "Everything I do pushes materiality until the form collapses the whole," he says.

In the age of digital reproduction, it is too easy to make “perfect.” Instead, to create *sui generis* value, an artist must hold a zoom lens to human error. He must also hold it himself. “I stopped having assistants,” says Hugh, when I ask who does the heavy lifting. “When you have assistants, there always has to be work for them to do, and so the time spent on work becomes neither useful nor valuable.”

Somewhere in Miami there is a painting by Nate Lowman of a check made out to Nate Lowman. The amount is \$3,000, payable in 2004. It is signed by Donald Rubell. In 2011, the year Lowman sold his “Trash Landing Marilyn #12” for \$725,000 at auction, Donald Rubell bought “First Check.” The painting hangs in the Rubell Family Collection, where it looks—to me—more like a .gif of the art market, looping from status to value and back to status without ever acquiring worth.

Work like Hugh’s wants to find a glitch in the loop. While many young or “downtown” artists at the turn of the millennium became flâneurs in love with their reflections, and did not make but rather “found” art, turning garbage from the street into expensive garbage in galleries, others reacted by becoming drifters, or ragpickers, hoping—through a process-heavy praxis—to salvage some meaning from disuse. “The project,” says Hugh, “becomes for a work to take up all its material in making itself.” Which, as the sign at the gates would suggest, is a business-like and comforting aim: To manufacture want without waste.