

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Artist Interview: Weston Teruya

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Weston Teruya, [APAture 2008's](#) Featured Visual Artist, is back at KSW's space180 Gallery for [SHIFTED FOCUS: The 10th Anniversary APAture Retrospective](#).

Weston has returned with his unique imagery of inflatable rafts, black-and-white striped road barriers, and decapitated lawn ornaments. It's controlled chaos, and to make sense of it, read on for Weston's interview.



Weston's piece installed in KSW's space180 Gallery

KSW: What can you tell us about the title of this installation, On the Way Up (lub 300)?

The "lub 300" is a direct reference to the lettering on the raft itself which is "club 300." (Depending on how the piece is installed, the "c" will sometimes be tucked into the fold of the raft.) There's something about that implied attempt at elitism from this everyday mass manufactured object that I find interesting. The "On the Way Up" is both a literal reference to the vertical thrust of the installation itself and a suggestion of a kind of social mobility.

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KSW: With a work as complex as this, with so many pieces, where did you begin? How was this idea first born?

An earlier version of this installation was created for an installation at Patricia Sweetow Gallery when she first moved to her new space. The gallery has this great pillar and crossbeam smack in the center of the main exhibition space, along with a number of old rings and metal bits embedded randomly through the ceiling. So I wanted to play with those exposed support structures. In KSW's space, I really liked the exposed pipes and the way the ceiling tips down to meet the wall at that corner of the room.

I knew that because of the structures in the gallery space, I wanted to deal with a sense of tension, objects physically pushing up against one another. Because I was also so drawn to the ceiling and the sense it gave of both elevation and weight pressing down on these pillars, I knew I wanted the installation to be weighted toward the top.

From there I basically mined the imagery that I've been working with in my drawings. The raft and barriers are such interesting objects but are easy to find or make. They also form a great relationship—an object that is about control of movement and one that is a mode of transport, yet barriers must also lift to grant access and the essential function of the raft is to float, which to the naked eye is not a dynamic movement.

Developing the piece was a learning experience since I typically work on paper and that process forms the core of my practice. With my drawings I have a much clearer sense of



Harnessing of abandoned markers turned to signs (slippery mechanism)

an overarching narrative—even if that's not always apparent in the end result. The sculptural process forced me to think about the objects and space in different ways—but important ways given my interest in the qualities of these elements.

KSW: Comparing your pieces in APAture (cut-paper collage above) and SHIFTED FOCUS, On the Way Up combines objects, kind of like your collage. What do you think?

The sculptures emerge from ideas that I develop through the drawings so there's definitely a direct relationship there. One of the reasons I work with collaged images in the works on paper—even if I draw each element myself—is because of that sculptural quality. It serves as a very tactile reminder that each of the images I work with references not only an idea and social/practical function, but an actual object in the world.

KSW: Can we talk about the bizarre elements? What's the deal with the headless statue?

Like the rafts, I find the shisa interesting because of the multiple roles it plays in social space. On one hand it is a cultural and spiritual marker, a guardian figure found on the outside of temples. But I most often run into them in more secular settings, outside of homes or businesses. The intention may still be to act as guardians, but because of the relative affluence of where they can be found, they also have this suggestion of marking social status or private property. The one found in this installation is a small, mass produced version—so it draws on all of those associations but offers it to a larger market. The defacing of the statue—the removal of the head—suggests both a loss of protection and a kind of implied cultural violence.

While the shisa in a broader sense fits in with many of the other elements because of its role as a spatial marker, I also like it because it has a sense of cultural history, which isn't as apparent in this installation, but is something that comes into the newer work like the drawings that were in APAture. In those drawings I've started working with specific historical markers, objects from a particular time period that persist in the current built environment (as opposed to objects built to memorialize an era) that actively shape the narrative of the physical space in which they exist through their social and historical weight. But that's a bit of a different discussion.

Since I brought it up, I'm interested in the rafts because they suggest escape, rescue and movement, as well as leisure, play and recreation. Because most of the other elements I work with tend to be objects which are more static in their everyday incarnations—barriers, fences, building materials, truncated trees—the rafts bring in an important suggestion of movement—both physical and social.

KSW: Privilege, access, control, leisure and protection are common themes in your work. How do they play out in this piece?

Those themes are most clear in the objects themselves. I've already talked about the rafts. The barriers are drawn from security gates—which are inherently about controlling the flow of (vehicular) traffic, restriction and access to spaces. There is also the

suggestion of safety and security tied up in that as well. So each of the sculptural elements, even if painted on, exaggerated in size or decontextualized, still carries some sense of their purpose. I'm just interested in what happens when these new arrangements are created.

KSW: Seeing the raft upside down, help up by road blockers, my first impression was of a disaster scene, like Hurricane Katrina. What do you think when you see your piece installed in the gallery?

While the Katrina reference wasn't a direct intention, I know some people draw that from the work and it was definitely part of the larger context of when I was creating my work. I've always been drawn to post-apocalyptic fictions, so it isn't a surprise that there's that sense of creation from destruction or the way those moments of rebuilding reveal something about our society. That interest in speculative fiction is a very clear underpinning for all my work.

When I look at the piece, I think about the elements themselves—barriers, rafts—and their social functions as I mentioned earlier. I also think about the formal relationships between the installation and the surrounding structure of the building—walls, pipes and ceiling. Despite the complexity you mentioned earlier, it's also a very simple installation, there are no mounts keeping the structure up other than a couple of dowels between the joints of the primary wood beam. The sculpture is essentially kept up by the weight and force of the beam pushing against the air pressure in the raft. So the sculpture is visibly static, but a collection of unseen tensions. Which is essentially how an architecture professor explained all buildings to me—that buildings are dynamic objects. That seems to sum up a lot of what I find exciting about the elements I draw from the built environment. Despite the fact that they seem to be mundane and lack dynamism, they have this physical and social force and the continuing potential to be readapted and arranged in new ways.