



NATHANIEL ROBINSON

MAGENTA PLAINS

Nathaniel Robinson (b. 1980, RI) mounted a solo exhibition, *No One's Things*, at Magenta Plains in 2018. He has held solo exhibitions at Launch F18, New York, NY; Feature, Inc., New York, NY; Devening Projects, Chicago, IL; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL. Robinson has also been included in group exhibitions at On Stellar Rays, 33 Orchard and White Columns in New York, as well as in Brussels, Leipzig, Dusseldorf and Melbourne. Robinson's work has been written about in publications such as *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, *Artforum*, and *Art in America*. He lives and works in Brewster, NY.

94 Allen St.

New York, NY 10002

www.magentaplains.com

917-388-2464

The New York Times

June 2018

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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By Will Heinrich and Jillian Steinhauer

June 13, 2018

Nathaniel Robinson and Alex Kwartler

Through Sunday. Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street, Manhattan; 917-388-2464, magentaplains.com.



Installation view of Nathaniel Robinson's solo show "No One's Things," featuring fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement sculptures. Magenta Plains

What's so fascinating about virtuosic reproductions of everyday objects we don't care much about in the first place? The seven fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement sculptures composing Nathaniel Robinson's "[No One's Things](#)," one of two excellent solo shows running concurrently at Magenta Plains, capture the minute buckles and crinkles of crushed paper cups, an umbrella canopy, and a miniature blue tent with astonishing fidelity. But their fun house scale — cups, umbrella, and all are each about the size of an ottoman — and slightly abstracted color are

enough to put them into a strange virtual territory somewhere between trompe l'oeil and the uncanny valley. They're like demonstration models of synthetic American abundance.



Installation view of Alex Kwartler's "Snowflake" paintings at Magenta Plains. Magenta Plains

Downstairs, the diffident, intensely self-conscious paintings of Alex Kwartler's "[Snowflake](#)" are named after poems by Frank O'Hara and Emily Dickinson, among others, but the poet they made me think of was A.R. Ammons. Whether he's painting wavering vortexes of nauseous nocturnal rainbows, grayscale pennies falling through nothingness, or a gritty, soot-colored snowflake, textured with crushed pumice, that fills its little canvas, Mr. Kwartler rigorously strips away every extraneous mark and gesture until he's left with only a naked, nearly colorless thought. But what this reveals, particularly in the snowflake paintings, is an evanescent beauty very much like the delicate shapes that pass through ocean foam.

WILL HEINRICH

Hyperallergic

May 27 2018

HYPERALLERGIC

Nathaniel Robinson Questions America's Feckless Policies

Robinson picks subjects for his sculptures that are disposable and forlorn, belonging to no one.



John Yau May 27, 2018



"Nathaniel Robinson: No One's Things" at Magenta Plains, installation view (all photos courtesy Magenta Plains)

In the wake of Donald Judd's perfectly fabricated stacks, Jeff Koons's flawless, steroidal appropriations, and Richard Serra's towering walls of

sheet metal coiling, stretching, and cutting across our physical space, a sculptor might wonder about what direction he or she might take. The works of Koons and Serra seem particularly attuned to the antennae of those comfortably residing in fashionable neighborhoods, who are used to making big carbon footprints as they flit about in private planes to every art fair.

You can either try to appease these people, and become their latest servant, or you can find ways to mock their ideals, which does not fully relieve you of being their latest scullion. It is not difficult to understand why artists can become cynical and gloomy.



Nathaniel Robinson, "Umbrella" (2017-18), fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, paint, 14.50 x 37 x 37 inches

These associations surfaced while I was reflecting upon the work in the exhibition *Nathaniel Robinson: No One's Things* at Magenta Plains (May 16 – June 17, 2018). Six monochrome objects sit on the floor. While they are related in size, with none being noticeably larger or smaller than the others, their counterparts in real life vary in scale: a disposable plastic cup; a plastic detergent jug; the canopy of an umbrella sans shaft and handle; a portable tent, a tubeless car tire; a metal industrial casing unit. None of the objects are branded and the design is what you might call generic. In this regard, they share something with Jasper Johns's

“flashlight” and “light bulb” sculptures from 1958-61.

The difference is in scale and use of materials. Johns’s sculptures maintain a one-to-one relationship to its real-life counterpart, while Robinson’s use of a single scale, which does not seem to correspond to any of the sources, shifts the work into another perceptual domain. The things Robinson has picked are — as the show’s title makes explicit — disposable and belong to no one: they are integral to a consumer society’s reliance on throwaway items, such as plastic cups, plastic containers, and cheap umbrellas. One could say his subjects exist on the opposite end of the spectrum from sculpture, which is considered on some level a precious and permanent object.



Nathaniel Robinson, “Unit (introvert, dented)” (2017-2018), fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, paint, 11 x 24 x 12 inches

Titled “Unit (introvert, dented)” (2017-18), Robinson’s sculpture of a pale green industrial casing unit, is what inspired the initial connection to Judd. A louvered green metal box with a large dent on one side sits on the floor, presumably waiting to be disposed of. On one hand, it can be seen as a sardonic response to Minimalism’s purity and faultless execution, but I think that is too limited a view. The imperfection serves to remind us how quickly we jettison the blemishes in our

material life. It also underscores the realization that nothing lasts forever, not even art.

One of the many things I like about Robinson's works is that they evoke the garbage bin outside whatever room they are placed in, which is funny if you think about it. I mean we do not ordinarily think of art's ultimate destination as being the waste heap. Without a shaft and handle, "Umbrella" (2017-2018) needs to be carried to the nearest trash receptacle. Its slightly wrinkled surface suggests that its better days are now a memory, at best.

By picking things that we have no attachment to — a plastic cup, which has been partially crushed, as in "Cup (1)" (2018) — Robinson also implicates himself: he knows he wants the objects he is making to be taken care of and preserved. The enlarged scale of "Cup (1)" and "Cup (2)" (2018) emphasizes their fate as objects that have been used up, crushed, and tossed away, implying that perfection is impossible to maintain, that it perpetuates the illusion that we can stop time. Meanwhile, the cups are not identical: one seems to have been crushed more than the other.



Nathaniel Robinson, "Cup (2)" (2018), fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, paint, 20 x 30 x 27 inches

What about the “Tire” (2018), an imperfect, sagging, donut-like shape, that will never physically transport us anywhere? The humor of a tent too small to protect anything but a tiny animal, and the fact that it has no opening, shifts the work into a mysterious and engaging domain. Is the shape of an object what determines Robinson’s choices? While this is unlikely, it cannot be completely discounted. What about the huge laundry “Jug” (2017-2018)? Is there something ironic about cleaning clothes with liquid from a plastic vessel that contributes to the pollution of the earth? Does Robinson want us to think about the material contents of a plastic cup, nylon umbrella or tent, a rubber tire or polyethylene jug — things that cannot be turned to compost and are not necessarily recycled?

One reason underlying Robinson’s choice of these five objects might be his awareness that one of their ingredients is petroleum. America’s collective blindness to the consequences of its energy policies has been exacerbated by the current administration’s feckless decisions. While Robinson never directly addresses this in his work, it is hard not to discern his awareness of the likely cost if we continue down this economic path. And yet, to his credit, Robinson never takes a didactic stance in his work. He lets viewers find their own way to its meaning.



Nathaniel Robinson, “Tent” (2017), fiberglass-reinforced gypsum cement, paint, 21 x 34 x 25 inches

I feel there is something profound, smart, ironic, and astute about making sculpture based on things no one owns and routinely throws away. A collector who would never keep a crushed, white plastic cup acquires a sculpture whose scale is several times larger than the actual object. One could also say that both “Cup” works looks crushed Minimalist sculptures. The fact that, in this exhibition, Robinson’s works always acknowledge the existence of the trashcan seems to me to be an essential part of our experience of them.

Nathaniel Robinson: No One’s Things *continues at Magenta Plains (94 Allen Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through June 17.*

Artnet news

May 14 2018

artnet news

Art World

Editors' Picks: 15 Art-World Attractions to Seek Out in New York This Week

Here's what's on our schedule this week.

Sarah Cascone, May 14, 2018

Thursday, May 17–Sunday, June 17



Nathaniel Robinson, *Cup 2* (2018). Photo courtesy of Magenta Plains.

8. "Nathaniel Robinson: No One's Things" at Magenta Plains

The obscure inspiration for Nathaniel Robinson's new show is a bit of legal jargon: *res nulls*, the concept of property without an owner, that can be claimed by anyone. He's created sculptures of everyday objects that fit this designation, such as a milk carton or a bent paper cup.

Location: Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street

Price: Free

Time: Opening reception, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.; Wednesday–Saturday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

—*Sarah Cascone*

The New York Times

December 2015

The New York Times

Review: Nathaniel Robinson's Sculptures Tease Perceptions



"Fence," a 2015 piece with scrambled silhouettes of deer, is by the sculptor Nathaniel Robinson, at Launch F18.

Courtesy of the artist and Sara Maria Salamone, Launch F18

By Ken Johnson

Dec. 31, 2015

The remarkably inventive sculptor Nathaniel Robinson makes technically impressive, philosophically provocative works that play in the gap between perception and cognition — between what you see and what you understand.

Among [this exhibition's](#) beautifully made works is a life-size representation of a sidewalk mailbox lying on its side. Stripped of all extraneous details and colored entirely powder blue, it has an almost immaterial quality; it's a Platonic ideal of the standard mailbox. In a similar vein are large, sculptural reliefs representing old walls made of stone and brick, measuring about 6½ feet by 7½ feet. Although realistically textured, they're also colored pale blue, so that they seem to exist between realms of earthly, material reality and archetypal, immaterial form.

Relating to those walls is a rustic wooden fence 6 feet high and 16 feet wide made of palings stained barn-red and painted with black, fragmentary silhouettes of deer. It seems that at a prior time the fence displayed coherent deer shadows but that it was dismantled and then rebuilt with the imagery scrambled. Seen thus, there's a curious, flickering effect, as if you were glimpsing a herd running past your car's headlights.

In an opposite direction, Mr. Robinson has created two blocky objects, both called "Freeze/Thaw," with smooth sides and tops super-realistically representing sections of weathered pavement. They look as if they've been surgically excised from city streets. One of these has a bright-green, rubber flip-flop — actually carved from wood — hovering over a pothole. The sandal looks as if it's floating on water, but there's no water in the hole. It's magical.

Nathaniel Robinson

'Discrete Pieces'

Launch F18

94 Allen Street, Lower East Side

Through Jan. 31

A version of this article appears in print on January 1, 2016, on Page C24 of the New York edition with the headline: Review: Nathaniel Robinson's Sculptures Tease Perceptions. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

The New York Times

January 2013

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | ART IN REVIEW

Nathaniel Robinson: 'Outer Air'

By KEN JOHNSON JAN. 17, 2013



"Absorber" (2012), pigmented polyurethane resin, in Nathaniel Robinson's installation "Outer Air," at Feature Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York.

*Feature**131 Allen Street,**Lower East Side**Through Feb. 9*

Nathaniel Robinson's "[Outer Air](#)" is a transporting walk-in poem of an installation. Its themes regarding nature, culture and consciousness may be heavy, but Mr. Robinson's deft way with metaphor, which calls to mind the early [Robert Gober](#), keeps things light and fresh.

The gallery floor is covered by asphalt paper, like the material on the flat tops of many old buildings in New York. It is blanketed in the middle by a square, sand-colored rug, which has in its center a shallow, circular depression filled with water. Scattered around are little models of the feces of different kinds of animals.

In a corner of this indoor-outdoor rooftop stands an L-shaped section of a white kitchen countertop resting on wooden cabinetry painted powder blue. Objects on this countertop include a pot of alphabet soup, cast in resin and painted pale violet, and a white plastic dish drainer, which, it turns out, was carved from wood by Mr. Robinson.

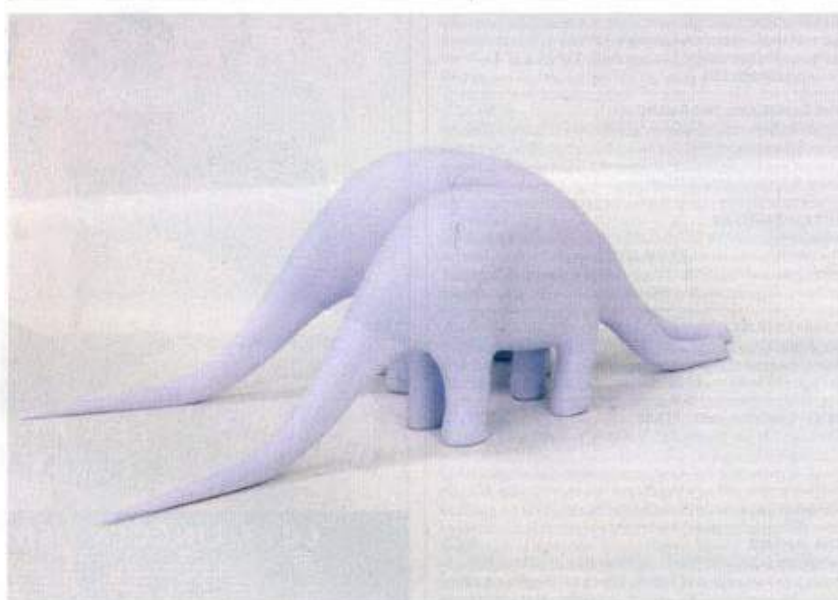
Making sense of this oddly disparate array of things involves some poetic connecting of dots. For example, as a human watering place, the kitchen counter echoes the watering hole of the animals. Also, its colors suggest fair-weather clouds in a blue sky, which is something you would hope to see if you were actually outdoors on a rooftop.

Meanwhile, a sculpture in another corner of the gallery, a full-size all-white representation of a bed standing on end, suggests that all this could be a dream. Or, better yet, a waking dream.

A version of this review appears in print on January 18, 2013, on Page C31 of the New York edition with the headline: Nathaniel Robinson: 'Outer Air.' Order Reprints: Today's Paper | [Subscribe](#)

New York Magazine

February 2013

NEW YORK

WATCH THIS SPACE If they haven't already, curators need to take notice of artist Nathaniel Robinson. His brilliantly phenomenological room-filling gallery installation includes casts of various animals' droppings, an expansive platform covered in roofing tar paper, and a rug with a large circular pool of water. The gestalt clicks into a sophisticated abstract narrative, touching on how lions might lie down with lambs, the means by which space is shared, and the ways consciousness is continually mapping itself in connection with our environment. This artist is equipped to turn heads, delight eyes, and tantalize minds. Set him loose (at Feature Inc. through February 9). **JERRY SALTZ**

80 NEW YORK | FEBRUARY 11, 2013

Art In America

May 2013

Art in America

NATHANIEL ROBINSON

Feature

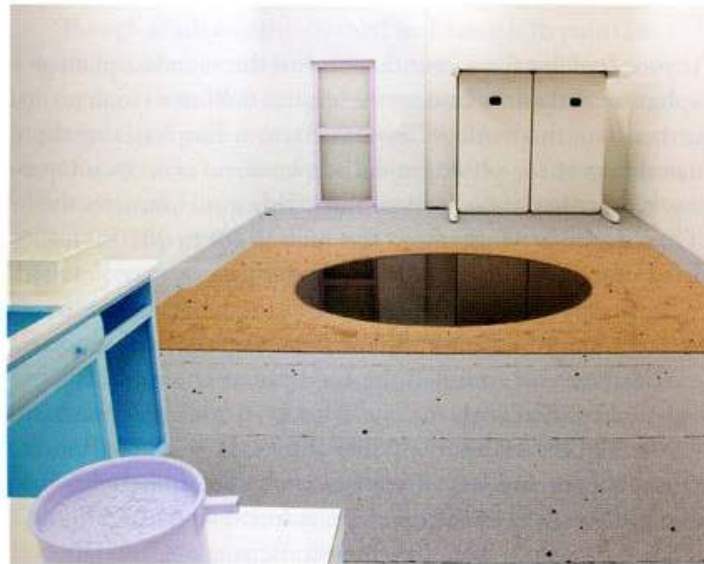
In past years, Nathaniel Robinson created stand-alone sculptural objects such as an untitled polyurethane-resin version of a Styrofoam cup (2009) that was a dead ringer for the original, down to the teeth marks bitten into its rim. In his last solo show at Feature, “Civil Twilight” (2009), he incorporated these “real”-looking objects into larger mise-en-scènes, in which viewers encountered, among other things, the basin of a massive fountain (138 inches in diameter) hung upside down from the ceiling, and thousands of delicate maple-seed pods (made of cast green-pigmented resin) scattered about the floor. More recently, “Outer Air,” his most ambitious show to date, engaged the entire space of the gallery, transforming it through elements both found and fabricated that were at once familiar and disconcertingly out of place. Part stage set, part ontological exercise, the show begged us to ask such basic questions as “How did I get here?” and, perhaps more compellingly, “Just who am I in relation to what I see before me?”

The whole floor of the gallery was taken up by a 2-inch-high wooden platform covered with gray roofing panels. In one corner of the platform sat a large formica-and-wood kitchen sink unit that the artist found, open where its cabinetry ought to be and painted blue. At the room’s other end was a kind of bed structure, placed on its side, and a new screen door was installed nearby in a specially built wall, sealing off the office area. In the middle of the room, a rectangular swath of tan carpeting was laid on top of the roofing material, and at its center was a shallow, circular depression filled with water. Slowly, inexorably, the water seeped into the carpet over the course of the show. You were welcome to wander all about: inspect the cabinetry, “test” the water with your toe; but chances are you would want to step lightly. Scattered everywhere about the room was faux shit that the artist painstakingly cast from the droppings of four different species of animal—deer, wildcat, coyote and mouse.

Robinson, 32, is, according to the gallery, something of a philosophical autodidact—in phenomenology, and the nature of perception in particular. But someone ought to add esthetics—especially the investigation of beauty and harmony—to the list. After one looked for a while at the scene, many lovely formal rhythms and tactile surfaces revealed themselves. There was a pleasing palette formed by the sky blue color of the cabinetry, the pastel lavender of the screen-door frame, the tan of the carpet and the gray of the roofing. Marked by an irregular notch, the carpeting echoed a subtle, similar element in the gallery—an empty spot where the wall meets the radiator. The roofing gravel “crunched” pleasantly and somewhat transgressively underfoot. (How often do you get to walk on a roof?) The extra door muffled sounds from the office, contributing to the overall sense of quiet—profound, meditative—that pervaded the space.

Every element in “Outer Air” seemed to have been given a great deal of thought and been placed in its spot quite precisely, though according to what logic, we ultimately couldn’t say. “Why this quotidian object *here*,” one wondered, “and why alter it this way?” Scanning our own memory banks for answers, while standing on someone else’s roof, and some animal’s shit, had the effect of transporting us to a place somewhere between reality and dreams.

—Sarah Schmerler



Artforum

November 2010

ARTFORUM

Nathaniel Robinson

FEATURE INC.

Taking its cue (and deriving its name) from *l'heure bleue*, that fleeting moment of atmospheric ambivalence at dawn and dusk when daylight has not yet begun (or has just finished) drawing a world of legibility and clear distinction, Nathaniel Robinson's New York solo debut, "Civil Twilight," operated within a territory of formal, conceptual, and material indeterminacy. The suite of restrained sculptural scenarios—most consisting of some object or set of objects cast from pigmented polyurethane resin, occasionally augmented with found materials—was engaging if clearly transitional, finding the young artist similarly *between*: between things and arrangements, verisimilitude and deformation, materiality and meaning.

Possessing a technical proficiency that, thus far at least, outstrips his conceptual range, Robinson nonetheless has a knack for representational precision in the service of a certain mode of poetic abjection, and the six pieces on view here (all works 2010) share a certain wistfulness that is only slightly less affecting for being vaguely familiar. There was a tangible ambivalence in the way the works occupied Feature Inc.'s small Allen Street storefront: The carpet of thousands of maple seedpods that constituted *Distribution* spread convincingly out from a corner at the entrance like a doleful harbinger of autumnal decline, while, nearby, *Free Information*, a sodden book cast in flat pink resin (modeled on one found on the street by the artist), was set altogether too squarely in the middle of the floor, subtly but significantly tilting its feel away from poignant objet trouvé to self-conscious objet d'art.



Nathaniel Robinson,
Other, 2010, pigmented
polyurethane resin,
1 3/8 x 8 x 3 3/4".

If the pieces taken together didn't so much propose a coherent narrative environment, they did suggest an array of closely related moods, all in the vicinity of loss, absence, and the various associated species of melancholy. This is an artist, to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss, who clearly favors things that are good to *feel* with, and his choices suggest that he has already begun to map the quickest way to the heart of the matter. Yet when routed through objects less immediately acquiescent to poetry—as in *Other*, a discarded lavender soda cup lid with two straws tucked into its drinking hole like sweethearts nestled together; or an untitled duo of squashed beer cans in blue resin, a pair of street-wise perfect lovers that nods toward Jasper Johns and the clearer influence of Felix Gonzalez-Torres (along with Jim Hodges, Robert Gober, and others)—the artist's tendency toward sentimentality is less prone to prescriptiveness, and to the kind of mawkishness that can attend it.

The majority of the work here functioned as a primer on the formal vocabulary accessible to Robinson as an obviously skilled maker of compelling things, but two pieces seemed to suggest potential forward trajectories for his program. A second work titled *Distribution*, consisting of a found wooden table on whose oval surface lay a small stack of white business envelopes and a fair scattering of rodent droppings, had, for better or worse, the beginnings of narrative, one suffused with a provocative open-endedness and a low-key tang of the uncanny. Meanwhile, the core of the show (both physically and metaphorically)—the large suspended environment called *Civil Twilight*—tantalizingly raised more questions than it answered about Robinson's next moves. A dome built on an open wooden frame and hung upside down from the ceiling, the assemblage depicted an empty fountain ringed with grime and dotted with bits of dry leaves, cigarette ends, and a bottle cap. That this meticulously rendered urban still life was inverted on a structure that readily revealed the artifice of its carriage suggested perhaps another route altogether for Robinson's project—one designed to at once offer *and* dismantle the routines of trompe l'oeil, that fully privileges neither things qua things nor their instrumentalization, but instead works to productively unsettle both approaches.

—Jeffrey Kastner