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A Conversation with Landon Metz



Installation view of "Landon Metz: Asymmetrical Symmetry" at Sean Kelly, New York. (Photography: Jason Wyche, New York. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York)

Landon Metz's "Asymmetrical Symmetry," on at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York until October 20, is the rare exhibition that's been not only crafted for the gallery's space but one that has also made its response to the gallery — its walls, architecture, and environment — part of the artwork itself.

Creating "narratives" out of the gallery's space, the 33-year-old, New York-based artist, who's beloved by voguish minimalist publications like *Cereal*, has created a series of minimalist, abstract works that wrap around walls and pillars, and, in doing so, create a new kind of bisected "psychological" space, as he told *Blouin Artinfo* recently. Metz spoke about this unique form of presentation, his stylistic relationship to Marcel Duchamp, and how his work would be ideally viewed.

How have modes of presentation — specifically what you've called "site-specific" vs. "site-responsive" art — become so central to your work?

The core foundation of my work is really just this central idea of authorship, and relinquishing control of authorship to these external constituents. Whether it's the way the materials function together, or whether it's the way the viewer has an activated role like piecing back together the images across the panels or, furthermore, in finding the way that the works will articulate a place. I think you

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touched on something important, which is the difference between site specific and site responsive. This authorship conversation that I'm having is not really an all-in thing, where it's about giving any one aspect of the practice complete dominance or control or power, whatever. It's actually more of a way of trying to neutralize those hierarchies instead of reconfigure them. So, I like the term site responsive opposed to site specific because I think site specific implies that the works are meant to only live in that space. And it gives a bit too much control to a particular environment. I like the idea that they can accentuate the idiosyncrasies of an environment, and that these, maybe often overlooked, or underutilized, aspects of a place can rise to the surface and have a sense of authorship in their own rite.

How does that play into your current exhibition, "Asymmetrical Symmetry"?

If we look at the main room of the show, you're confronted with these massive columns. And the columns bisect the space — an immediate left space and then this sort of more cavernous right space. Initially, I wanted to try and find a way to emphasize that. I think, oftentimes, it's not about me trying to control the materials or the way the works function in a place. It's more about trying to find inherent values and emphasizing them, giving them more action, more play. There's an immediacy to the room when you first walk in, and that back wall calls a lot of attention to itself while the smaller space on the right is more like the end of the narrative, let's say — something that you only see on your way out. So I wanted to make that something. I wanted to give that a bit more importance. And that wall became a form of measure for all of the larger horizontal works. So again, I like to try and read a room and find the storytelling that's already implied. I do my best not to impose too much on it, and I try to find natural, organic narratives that happen within the place; I try and find these subtleties that are possibly underutilized and emphasize them as much as possible.

You've compared your work to Duchamp's readymades. What's the relationship?

One of the most important things that Duchamp did was that he acknowledged — and again I guess this comes from a notion of philosophy — the question of whether the role of the philosopher is to acknowledge what's happening in this society, or to sort of push people into a certain place. And I think what Duchamp did really well was he just he acknowledged this inherent dynamic between artwork and the viewer and the artist and how those roles have formerly, historically played out. He just acknowledged that, ultimately, what the author creates — and the intentions of the author — only matter so much and that posterity and value ultimately belong to the culture and the people. I don't think he designed a new way of approaching or to seeing, art, but I think he articulated something that was maybe so close to everyone's noses that it was difficult to see. His acknowledgment of the dialectic between the author and the work was

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in diminishing his value and the structure of this ecosystem. And I think that's a really core value in my work as well, which isn't necessarily interested in the devaluing of anything; but I am interested in finding new forms of authorship in external places that are beyond my immediate control.

Do you conceive of your own artwork in an explicitly philosophical way?

That's a really tough question. I mean, it's something I grapple with a lot. Because, on the one hand, I do want to, let's say, give purpose to everything in the work, and I do think a lot about how everything functions and works together. But, on the other hand, I think, I try and create experiential works, you know? And, I don't know, there's also this thing that if you're gonna embrace this idea of chance — and allowing works to live in a culture and society on their own — you have to also allow a certain sense of that value and idea to be self-generated. Susan Sontag wrote this really important piece called "Against Interpretation." I don't want to overly water it down, but that's basically what she's saying: there's a sensual aspect to being in front of a work that is always, infinitely more important. It communicates more than anything you could ever really say. I think that's ultimately the goal. I guess my short answer is, yeah.

Questions of viewership seem vital to you. In an ideal world, would you have people looking at your artwork free of any foreknowledge or context?

It's tough because that's almost impossible. The information levels people have access to makes it so that it's just impossible to really have a requisite for an experience. So, yeah. It's a funny game. I'm increasingly just trying to embrace letting it be whatever it is.

What's next for you?

I'm having a baby, actually. So it's a little tricky for my scheduling for this year because I'm not doing anything before that, and I also don't want to do anything immediately afterwards. I have a show in a museum in Wales, which opens next fall. But, before then, I think I may just leave my schedule open to be honest.

"Landon Metz: Asymmetrical Symmetry" is on view through October 20 at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. More information: <https://www.skny.com>