







Homework

Erik Benjamins on 2050

Don't fumble, jerk, grab an object. Drop cool possessive fingers onto it like a gentle old cop making a soft arrest.

– William S. Burroughs

A while ago I found some heavy old hand-blown wine glasses in a junk shop. At first it was just their shape which attracted my attention, but slowly, using them every day, they have become something more than just nice shapes, and I notice their presence in other ways.

– Jasper Morrison

o When considering the possibilities of small-scaled domestic utopias, consider the quieter things: a favorite mug for its perfect volume and heat retention; a reading spot on the sofa that when cozied on at the right time, gives a warmer, more rejuvenating reading light; the dish towel, neatly quartered and left on kitchen laminate so as to effortlessly swoop up the wayward spills. Relish in the ongoing rehearsal of graceful home choreographies like these, and with practice, your body will cut through space like Scott Hamilton did during his 1984 gold medal winning routine.

To imagine small-scaled domestic utopias without objects is to imagine the universe without stars. The objects made by my friend, Alex Reed, are infused with a homebodied mindfulness. Their form, tone, and flirtation with abstraction find strength in, but





confidently saunter away from, the conventions of a commercial ceramic practice. Their ambiguity to declare purpose requests that their beholder question and slowly consider the prized, quiet things that ground us within our dwellings. In other words, these objects push us to reflect on and practice our daily rhythms with a domestic agency.

In his walkup live-work studio in Los Angeles, Alex formally introduces 2050. On a large work table sits some two dozen ceramic objects. We pleasurably admire at molasses speed. We fantasy- build and day-dream of the tangential future-comforts that these vessels could triumphantly usher onto our respected low shelves, patio tables, bathroom nooks, and kitchen counters.

I admire the bends, swoops, dips, swerves, and leans of these forms and fall into nostalgic associations: a large serving bowl found in the South American diorama at the Natural History museum; a leaning tower of Pisa (my favorite); an elongated and cartoon-like red blood cell that's laterally bisected; idiosyncratic roofing tiles; chunky pill-forms; those pipes from the chorus of Windows 95 screensavers playing on the Hewlett Packards at Best Buy. This clay congregation's materiality and sense of scale allow us to clearly understand its place within the genre of well-considered Home Ceramics. The earthly red, brown, and grey of the low- fire clay feels dependable and rooted. Some are glazed in a dusty canary yellow or hi-gloss white. Some don clear finishes, and some are left naked. Step back from the oogling crowd and admire



them in total. It's easy to find joy in their genetic familiarity by way of the colors, form, tone and that recurring verticality, like prairie dogs shooting upward in casual celebration.

To hold and inspect these objects is to succumb to their refined constitution. In through the fingertips comes an energy from warmer depths, deep down, where some say, the soul reverberates. It is to gleefully fall into narrow pipe openings and swagger buoyantly around luscious curves. It is to precariously scale up the off-kilter inclines. Importantly, it is to be confronted with things that deny clear associations of use. Do I use the blood cell-looking form to bowl the navel oranges or to stow my keys? Does the L-shaped, upside-down tile sit as sculpture on some books-as-pedestal, or does it become the go-to cheese platter? These ambiguities may seem minor, but in that slippage lay the proposal for us to imagine and intimately define use, on our own terms, in our own spaces.

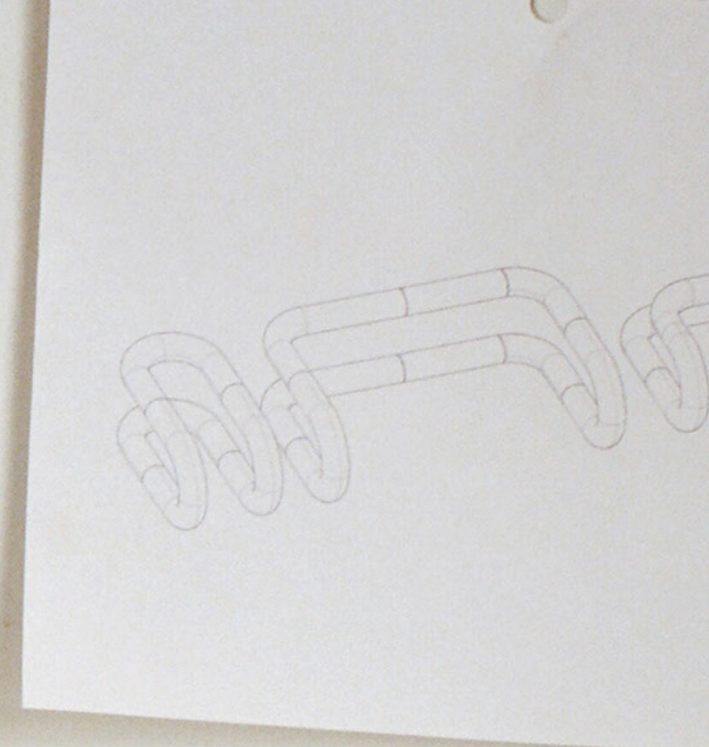
The ceramics are cast in the light of a three-phase neon sign. The sign's sequence references both an instructional pottery textbook and a fast food restaurant. Two hands in a cool blue dance around, in classic neon orange, some clay on the wheel. In a succinct, three-step sequence, the hands transform the lump into a classic cylindrical vase. This sign is the loudest and largest work in the room.

It's an important framing device to 2050, which balances a steadfast commitment to meat-and-potatoes craft with a tone that is precise, zany, and flirtatious. What else should we

expect from a maker inspired as much by Magic Johnson as he is Heath Ceramics?

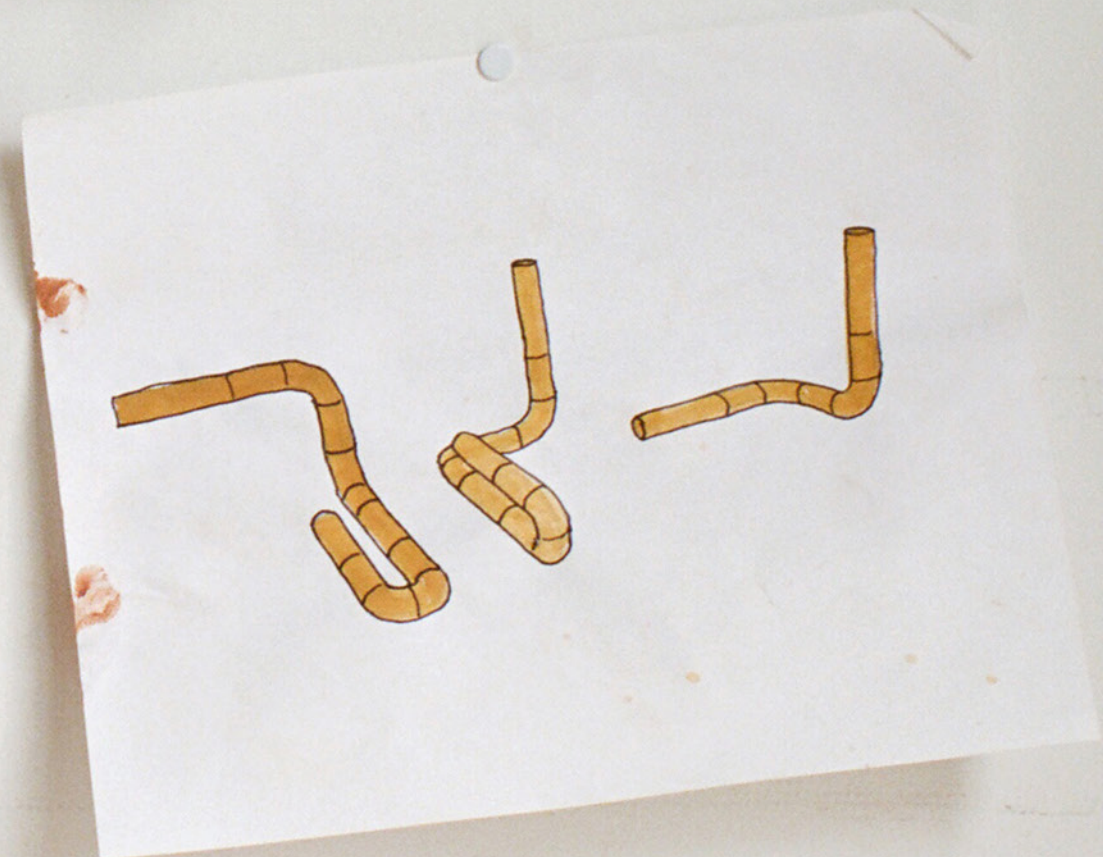
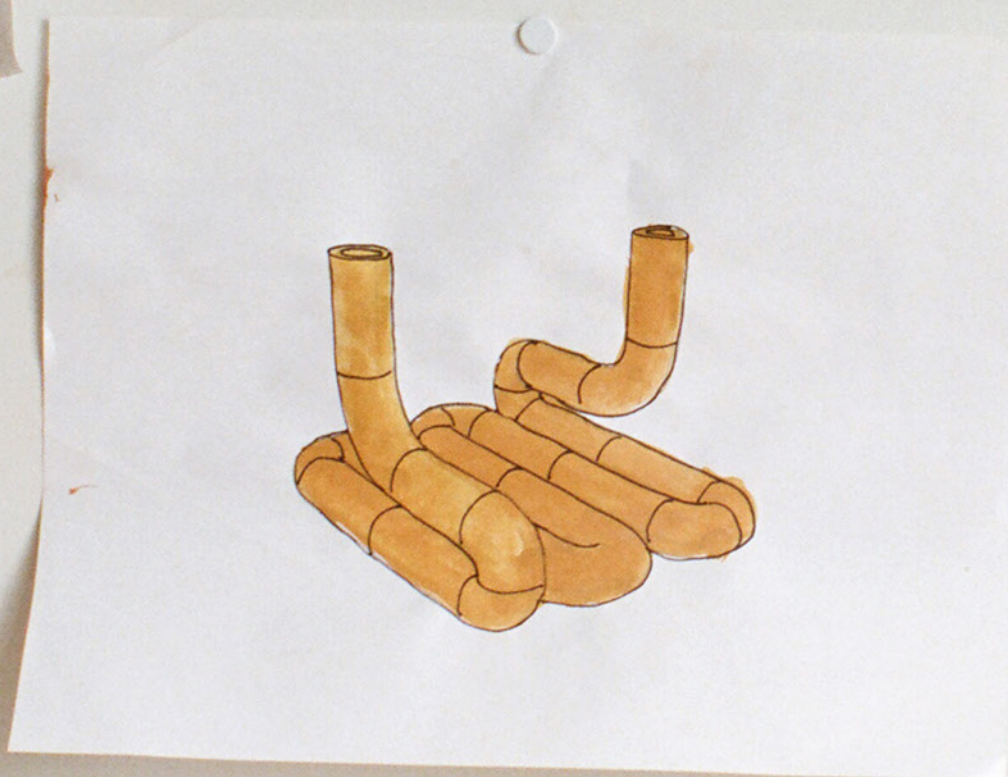
Alex tells me that 2050 is a speculative practice. To speculate is to imagine without limitation, to pleurably ponder over the unknowns. While a commercially oriented ceramics practice seduces by way of the dependable conventions on use and form, a speculative design practice relishes in the messy ambiguity of a homeward-bound object's use and non-use. Alex's commitment to side-step our desires for functional clarity pushes us closer towards a domestic agency, in which objects slip into our daily routines with uses that are made—sometimes temporarily so—with playful, changing, and confident self-assignment.

Artist Steve Lambert would have us consider utopia, not as a destination, but a direction. A bearing like this is indifferent to discipline or career or subject matter. It is leveling in its application and affect, but that doesn't mean that we can't find guidance and inspiration from those like Alex that commit their practices to small-scaled domestic utopias. Their work continues to propose ways in which we can intimately author meaning in our homes with our dearest objects. This is the kind of agency and poetry that I intend to practice in 2050 at sixty-four, with even deeper laugh lines. And while I don't think it's Alex's intention to have us imagining—or dreading—our future selves, his moniker nonetheless implores us to value and speculate on the domestic energies and rhythms that punctuate our life with warmth and purpose.



JUST DO IT.

t or die
t or die
t or die
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