

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CLEVELAND

LORRI OTT

passive voices





## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lorri Ott is the sixteenth artist to be featured in MOCA's Pulse Exhibition Series, which presents emerging and established artists from our region. She received her BFA in Painting from the University of North Carolina and her MFA in Painting from Kent State University. Ott produced most of this work during a residency at the Vermont Studio Center in August 2010. Her work has been shown locally and nationally since 2003. She is represented in Cleveland by the William Busta Gallery.

*ABOVE most sincerely, 2010*





ballast, 2010

# LORRI OTT

## passive voices

A PULSE EXHIBITION

JANUARY 28-MAY 8, 2011

CURATED BY MEGAN LYKINS REICH  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ASSOCIATE CURATOR

In her new body of small-scale assemblages, Lorri Ott transforms synthetic and natural materials into poignant, evocative compositions. Ott combines colored resin with found objects like rags, asphalt, and cardboard using alternately deliberate and spontaneous actions. Each discrete work has a subtle, distinctive voice that ranges from frail to playful to aggressive. Luscious contrasts in texture and form yield haunting references to the breadth and depth of human experience.

Trained as a painter, Ott began working with clear casting resin as a primary medium in 2003. Her early multicolored installations were a response to the contrast of manufactured materials within the natural landscape. These whimsical works led to compact abstract studies of line, texture, and form. During this time, Ott experimented with many approaches to color theory and formalism ranging from large undulating sheets of striped resin to small accumulations of painted canvas, mesh, and colored tape.

Ott's work shifted considerably in 2009 as a result of grim personal events. Marked by mottled fleshy surfaces, sour colors, and delicate materials, these new objects were palpably visceral, suggesting physical vulnerability. Two works in particular, *memories and sighs* and *the shallowness of sanity* (both 2009) conveyed a tangible presence, one frayed and weak, the other raw and rabid. The exhibition *Lorri Ott: passive voices* features the expansion of these initial abstract objects into a diverse population of empathetic subjects.

In his 1908 dissertation, *Abstraction and Empathy*, German philosopher Wilhelm Worringer proposes that abstraction and empathy are opposing aesthetic methods. Abstraction, according to Worringer, is the artistic process of transcending an imperfect world by reducing it to absolute values and systematic forms. Empathy, based on human emotion and self-recognition, is expressed in familiar representational styles.

Curator Christian Rattemeyer, in his essay for the Aspen Art Museum's 2010 exhibition *Restless Empathy*, updates Worringer's thesis by asserting that empathy is

now a condition of the contemporary art object itself rather than an artistic approach or audience reaction.<sup>1</sup> Citing one definition of empathy as an "imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object," Rattemeyer suggests that contemporary art objects become empathetic once they are imbued with a sense of their audience.<sup>2</sup> This state enables moments of emotional transference from the artwork to the viewer.

But how does an art object "become feeling," as Rattemeyer states?<sup>3</sup> Ott's practice sheds light on the artist's role in this process. To create her new body of work, Ott combines abstraction's order with empathy's sensitivity. She accesses the vulnerability and potential in imperfection, accident, and injury. Intuitively, she collects richly suggestive materials that embody different aspects of physical and emotional experiences. She then deliberates on her pairings, identifying the most stirring combination of tinted resin and found material. Most importantly, Ott resists toiling with the object after the charged moment when the poured resin cures around the found materials. In this moment, the object is liberated and given agency to exist and engage independently.

For example, *ballast* (2010) began as a quiet, warty little bit of pavement along a road in Vermont. After reflecting on the collected material's formal and symbolic qualities, Ott married it with snowy white resin and an old thin chip of crimson paint. Convened and cured, this makeshift family assumes a distinctive voice that speaks to memory, accumulation, erosion, and renewal.

Ott's works are feelings projected. *more life* (2010) features a tattered beige rag drenched in pale chartreuse resin. A fuchsia stain punctuates the center of the rag and a white and red polka dot plastic bag hangs limply behind it, a relic from the pouring process. The pooled resin resembles phlegm in color and texture; the plastic bag suggests skin; the tattered rag is like hair. Comprehensively, *more life* reads like a body. Antiseptic white tape strapping the work to the wall heightens its visceral, wounded nature. Congested, bleeding, dripping, peeling, folding in and framing itself, *more life* personifies intense physical and emotional sensations. As with each work in *passive voices*, it is a stirring and hypnotic surrogate that speaks to the raw beauty and profound severity of our existence.

—MEGAN LYKINS REICH / DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ASSOCIATE CURATOR



memories and sighs, 2009 [detail]



more life, 2010



a little wicked, 2010

ON THE COVER *foundations*, 2010. [detail] All photography by Pita Brooks.

<sup>1</sup>Christian Rattemeyer, "Empathetic Objects," *Restless Empathy*. Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson and Matthew Thompson. Aspen: Aspen Art Museum, 2010. 81-87. Christian Rattemeyer is The Harvey S. Shipley Miller Associate Curator of Drawings at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.  
<sup>2</sup> Rattemeyer cites the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary's definition of empathy. Ibid, 85.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 87.



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### WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All work courtesy of the artist and William Busta Gallery

All measurements height x width x depth

*the shallowness of sanity*, 2009

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, oil paint  
9 x 20 inches

*memories and sighs*, 2009

Resin, pigments, paper, plastic bag,  
paint rag, duct tape  
16 x 13 inches

*cut from the same cloth*, 2010

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, paint rag  
16 x 12 x 3 inches

*ballast*, 2010

Resin, pigments, roadway debris,  
house paint, gravel  
7.75 x 5.75 x .5 inches

*memento*, 2010

Resin, pigments, cardboard, tape,  
house paint  
8 x 6 inches

*a little wicked*, 2010

Resin, pigments, insulation paper,  
fiber, and foil  
10 x 16 inches

*more life*, 2010

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, paint rag  
11 x 9 inches

*foundations*, 2010

Resin, pigments, linen, foam, fabric,  
thread, dust  
9 x 11.5 x 1.5 inches

*reified*, 2010

Resin, pigments, paint rag  
8 x 16 inches

*fray*, 2010

Resin, pigments, asphalt, roadway debris, linen  
10 x 8 inches

*the beating of wings*, 2010

Resin, pigments, paper, paint  
14 x 7 x 1.5 inches

*most sincerely*, 2010

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, linen  
8 x 5 x 1.5 inches

*havisham*, 2010

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, rag, oil paint  
14 x 19.5 inches

*i could live in hope*, 2011

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, oil paint  
14 x 19.5 inches

*sunshower*, 2011

Resin, pigments, linen  
5 x 8 x 2 inches

*flake*, 2011

Resin, pigments, plastic bag, yarn,  
cigarette ash  
12 x 5 inches

*hide*, 2010

Resin, pigments, thermal knit fabric,  
oil paint, plastic bag  
19 x 14 x 1.5 inches

# MOCA

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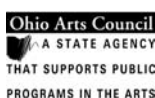
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