

TORY FAIR

Tory Fair conceived her project "Portable Window" in dialogue with a 1968 sculpture of the same name made by artist Mary Miss. Over the course of several weekends at RAIR, Fair developed an 8-foot wooden wheel that functions as a rollable viewfinder, outfitted with a rectangular window — an adaptation of Miss' original sculpture. Designed to mimic the shape of a digital screen, the piece revives Miss' concept of "framing site," inviting viewers to roll the wheel and to find their own snapshot of the surrounding landscape. Though Fair mostly focused on setting of the Superfund site, she also rolled the wheel through the tipping yard, framing the operations of Revolution Recovery and capturing them from many perspectives, rightside up and upside down, through photo and video documentation.



"I want to emphasize the collaborative spirit of RAIR. My project embraces collaboration with the early work of [Mary] Miss, but at RAIR I really benefited from the minds and muscles of Lucia and Billy. They have a can do, always positive, willing to go the distance attitude 24/7."

--Tory Fair

TORY FAIR WITH MARY MISS

INTERVIEW

Tory Fair: A little bit of rewind- since we last talked we exchanged the drawings that were looking into your earlier work and exploring variations of *Stake Fence* (1970) and *Portable Window* (1968). It was really generative and you were very kind to look at the drawings. I was making some of those pieces in the studio when I was lucky enough to be invited to a residency in Philadelphia called RAIR which is essentially two artists who started a collaboration with a recycling facility just north of Philly. Artists are invited to use the waste stream materials that are coming in from industrial construction sites in Philly. It is a very active site. Dumpsters are coming in and out, big equipment is pushing and sorting- it's a real sculptor's dream in many ways.

On my first site visit I was struck by the big field next to the tipping yard that stretches all the way to the Delaware River. I learned it was a remediated Superfund site on its way back to being reclaimed for public use. And it really interested me that there was this literal threshold between the recycling facility and the Superfund site.

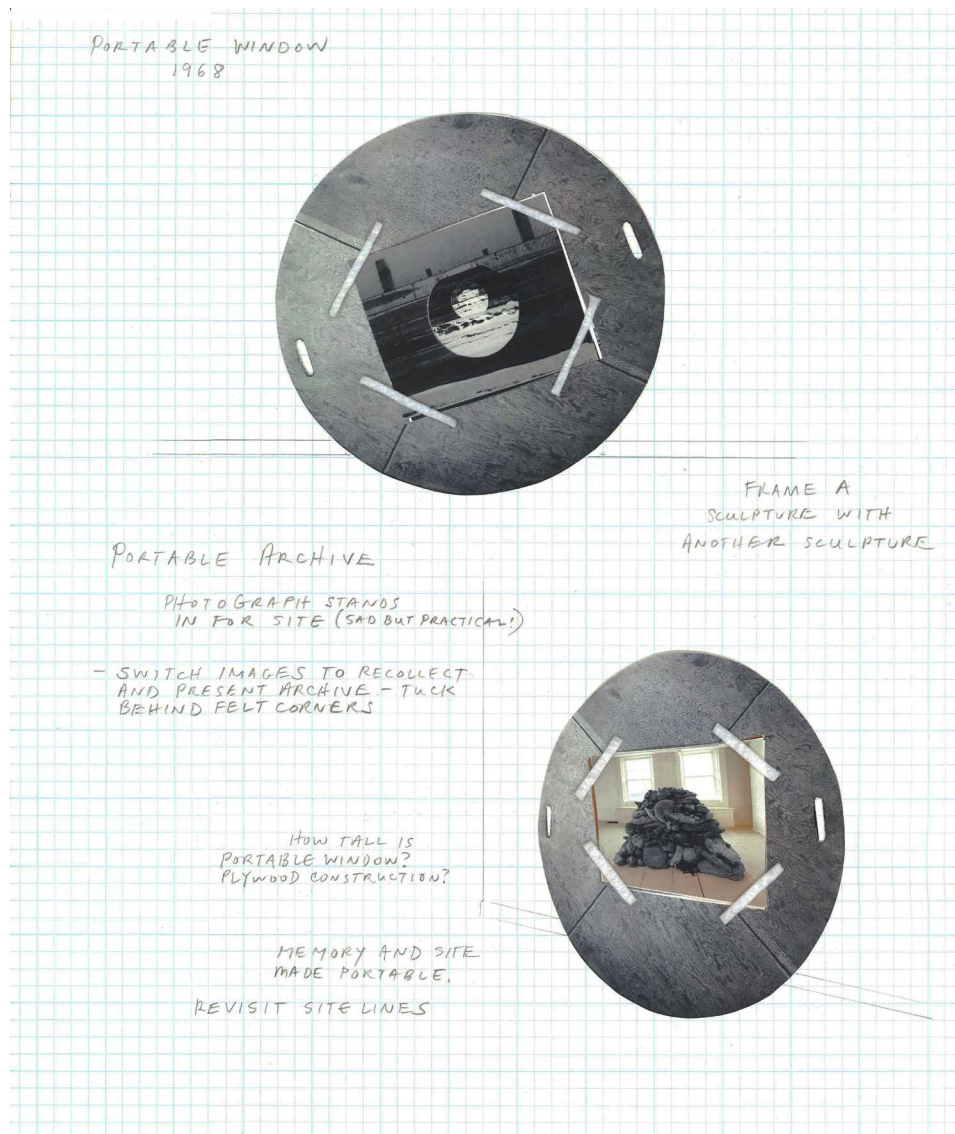
For my residency I wanted to think about how I could realize some of the ideas that you had inspired through your work in the 70s around collaboration and engagement. I specifically chose to reference your piece *Portable Window* (1968) as a way that I could frame the site. In September, at RAIR, I fabricated a version of *Portable Window* (2019) with the waste stream materials- mostly plywood and lumber. The shape of my *Portable Window* is based on your's but I chose to alter the 'window' shape a little bit by adding rounded corners that refer to the iPhone soft curves. A contemporary nod to the frame we spend a lot of time looking through. We rolled my piece around and generated a ton of footage and documentation (that I am now in the process of editing).

Since the residency ended, I've been trying to find everything I could on your *Portable Window* (1968) piece. When we talked last you said you were refurbishing the original sculpture to go to Singapore?

Mary Miss: It's so strange- someone contacted me from Singapore, out of nowhere, about this one object.

TF: Continuing my mission to uncover more about the biography of *Portable Window* (1968), I went to the Bell Gallery in RI to dig into the archive to find the show you had there of these early pieces. This was when I learned the dimensions of your piece were 4' x 4'. I was curious if you could tell me more about the piece- I imagine you made it when your studio was downtown (New York)? It was 1968.





MM: No, I was actually in Colorado at that time. I had gone to graduate school at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and I really wasn't fitting in well so I did my second year residency in Colorado, my family lived there. I was there for a year and built a number of things in my studio there. I made it during that time. I then brought that work back to the Rinehart School of Sculpture (MICA) where I was going to get a degree if I showed up again with the work I had done while I was away ...and I passed.

TF: It's essentially a big wheel. Did you ever roll it around outside? Or was it more of an inside piece?

MM: No- it was an inside piece but it was just kind of humorous to me that you could walk around with your own window looking at things, with the handles on the side. But a gallery actually just got in touch with me recently about showing several of the early works. I'm glad that they are interested in showing several of them because by themselves they are kind of like, 'what is this?' I've thought, what are the people in Singapore going to think of this weird single, very unassuming little object? So I was glad that this gallery is willing to show several pieces. Because I was trying to make things that were not about monoliths and monuments and heavy things.

TF: *Portable Window* (1968) really started to speak to me because of the idea framing site. And it was made in 1968, which is my birth year. This sculpture is my lifetime -- and in that time a lot has changed with the explosion of digital culture. We've gone from framing, to clicking, to posting, in this fluid digital compression of space. There is a whole different idea and evolution of framing pictures out there.

MM: I approached the making of *Portable Window* (1968) in a very direct way. At the time, I wanted to make all these pieces that were just rope, or just a piece of glass with holes drilled in and string through it, or just barbed wire wrapped around some 2 x 4s. I'm curious about your approach?

TF: RAIR was really a collaborative experience for me. Billy and Lucia, the two artists who run the program, make it an incredibly collaborative environment to work in. They have really become ingrained with the waste stream culture and have built a productive relationship with Revolution Recovery. And then the artists come in and Billy and Lucia have a way of being hands on and working with us in ways that were really generative- all the way from the production to the documentation to this exit interview.

I was surprised by a few things during my residency. I totally didn't anticipate how fun it was going to be to roll the sculpture. We made it big (8' diameter) so you had to have two people roll it. Sometimes Billy and Lucia rolled it and I watched, and sometimes I rolled it- playing with the possibilities was extremely rewarding. We were invited to roll the piece around an event in the Pine Barrens (*Middle of Nowhere*) which was a lot of fun. There were a lot of people there- and they just loved it! They would jump in and roll it with us, too. I also did not anticipate how much people would want to take pictures of and with it. They would step in behind the window, and in front of it, and like a big selfie, finding and capturing their own frame within my *Portable Window* (2019) frame.



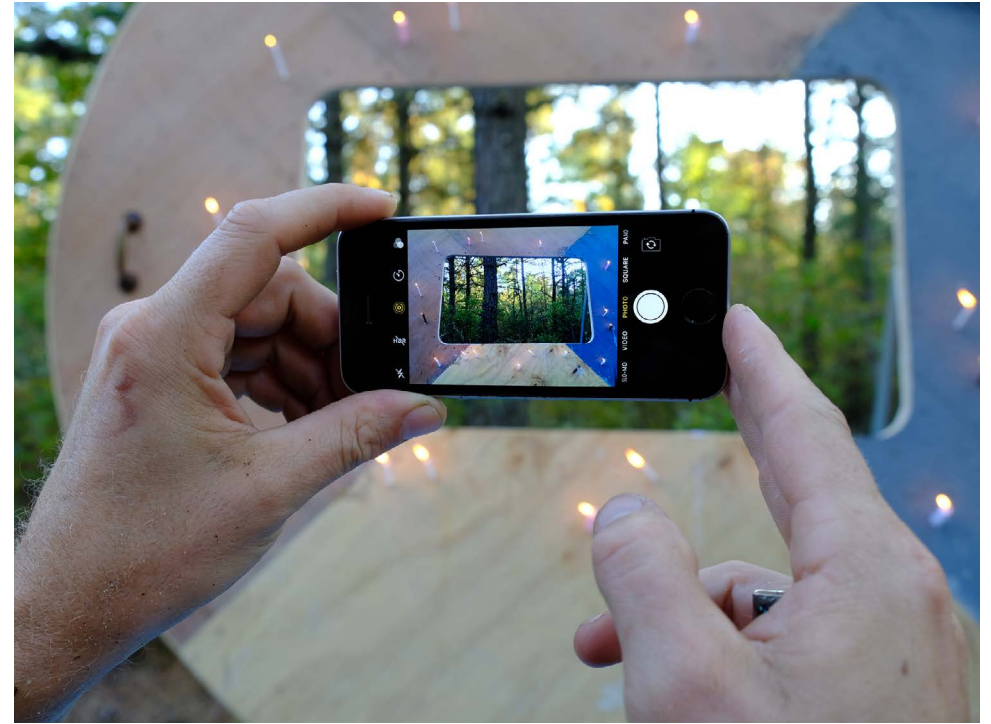
TF: I was recently rereading your essay, *On a Redefinition of Public Sculpture*, and one of the things you write is: “Give the people the luxury of engagement and not confrontation.” And I think I really experienced that sentiment when I was rolling around *Portable Window* (2019), people just wanted to be a part of it. In the essay you also point out, “Priorities: Breathing space, human scale, and first hand experience.” *Portable Window* (2019) slows down the body and you become in-sync with the roll and you can be slow enough to find a frame. It brings you into this sense of actually being in the now, being present.

TF: It was really something to experience that, to actualize your words, in my version of your original piece. I’m curious about how the legacy of *Portable Window* (1968) stays relevant to you over time?

MM: Well it is staying relevant to you!

TF: It is really fun to roll!

MM: But I must say, as far as the relevance for me and what I am doing now, I am doing these projects that are trying to take on a piece of the city or the whole city. I’m finding that even with very modest interventions, you can do that- you can really begin to engage people, especially by bringing attention to specific issues. So I carry that forward, the approach that I have, so that would be its relevance for me.



TF: In my first studio visit with you in 2018, you introduced me to the project in Milwaukee where you are creating a water atlas for the city. It inspires me to further think about how to engage people and to empower them. One of the significant opportunities to work within the context that RAIR offered was being able to ‘charge up’ or amplify the idea of ‘site’ by rolling my work through a Superfund site. Also being able to emphasize the idea of the ‘object’ as a frame to look through and by making reference to contemporary digital culture by slightly modifying that frame. I took away another important thought from our first conversation. You said,

“And that thing about engagement is still what is so mysterious. It’s almost like going beyond the object itself and going into the whole process that I am trying to set up for a connection to happen. To allow people to step into a territory which could seem totally overwhelming to them. And I mean people in marginalized communities who don’t have a lot of resources. How can you provide a zone of comfort to begin to allow that step to take place.”

I’m interested in that idea of “going beyond the object” and how both of our *Portable Window* sculptures offer this kind of agency.

MM: I think it is really nice that you are getting the agency part. I was thinking it looked like some silly person could pick it up and go around with their window, pulling it out whenever they need it. But the way you have done it, getting people involved in moving it, is interesting.





TF: In addition to documenting the rolling of the piece from afar, we also created a jig that could hold the camera so it could be rolling, capturing what was being framed in the window. It was a way to create a sculpture 'selfie stick' of sorts. To me, that was interesting because as it turns the window stays in the same orientation but the landscape flips. And that was an exciting way to capture the more mesmerizing slow turn that gives a sense of time. The roll inspires a connection to place and time. So I think that is something else that the sculpture lends itself to.

MM: So were the people you were working with like- what are you doing referencing this old sculpture?

TF: No! It was very much the contrary. In my proposal I wrote about my *MoreThan Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s* (curated by Susan L. Stoops at The Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA.) research that led me to our first interview. I proposed that I wanted to use your work as a way to think about the site and they loved it! They were very supportive of an intergenerational dialogue, so it helped me to get the residency- thank you!

I've been slightly nervous but also excited to see you and I am thankful that you are accepting of this family tree that I am creating from your sculpture. I feel it is a modest object to make, but then it is bringing me out of my studio and onto site and that is really important. I still love being in the studio and talking with materials and having that practice, but alongside that getting out and letting the sculpture have agency in a different way is really important.



MM: I must say that over the holiday I was upstate getting some of these old pieces out for the people who want to show them, and I needed to repair and do stuff with them. It was so hard- 50 years ago! I was so resistant to going back. Do I really have to do this? It was like pulling teeth. It is strange to go back to something that you've done such a long time ago. And I'm not used to physically doing stuff anymore. I've been having other people build things for me for so long. That practice of being in the studio- hammering and polishing- is just not something I am used to.

TF: Did *Portable Window* (1968) make it back from Singapore okay?

MM: Yes it did, it's in a big crate, 10 times its size. I guess I should open that box and make sure it is in there.

TF: Well I will be excited if I get to go see it and meet it in person. I promise I won't roll it away.



