

***Will and Weather: Some Notes on Kenji Fujita's
Visual Thinking***

1.

You can tell when an artist is immersed in the language of his or her forms, where verbal expression is replaced by another kind of syntax, a visual lexicon and diction; punctuated pauses and stops embodied in the physical, not the typographical symbols of commas, colons, periods. But you sense that thought is taking place, questions are being asked, digressions, elaborations, arguments: a sort of conversation between artist and materials is occurring. *The medium is the message* in the deepest sense of bringing to light, bringing to form, the most compelling responses to a silent dialectical inquiry. A work of art comes into being between the philosopher's initial wonder -- *why is there something rather than nothing?*--- and the child's query, *what if?* These thoughts come to mind when thinking about Kenji Fujita's recent show "Will and Weather" at Brooklyn's Soloway Gallery.



Accumulation #4 (2015)

2.

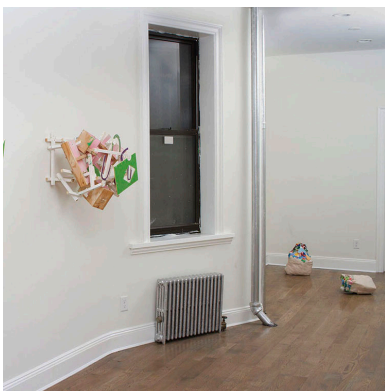
Certain elements recur; certain ways of putting things together. There are luminous patches of bright color (“Contact Improvisation”), there are narrow wooden sticks, square-shaped, of varying lengths (“Accumulations”). There’s a play between the rectilinear and the curved and a use of diverse materials; the resulting effect not of collage, where the edges between unlike elements are the signal trope, but of tactile layered textures. There is a tendency toward thickening or scumbling, an attention to surface that seems to want to at once hide and reveal the nude nature of a particular element: a bit of gray and white dotted cloth, let’s say, the head of a nail, bare wood. There is a resistance to the finality of closure, even in the more stable forms. I was reminded of some of the works of Paul Klee, his aptitude for delicate gestures that count, and of Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, with its desire to depict or distill musical motion. Rauschenberg’s *combines* and Picasso’s sculptural play came also to mind, but Fujita isn’t interested in definitive monumentality; he’s interested in transition, passage, the tender brevity of touch.



Accumulation #8-5 (2016)

3.

The titles point to process: “Accumulation”, “Contact Improvisation”, or to the most uninflected habitat, “Terrain”. The viewer begins to understand that the works are to be seen from up close to some feet distant; one is invited to peer into as well as look at. This implied shift- space seems to be asking about the nature of scale: the way one physical element or component relates to another is everywhere significant; an exactitude of focus on a particular visual fabric’s possibilities of repetition and variation. Of course this is true of many made objects, but in Fujita’s work it seems to be the very locale of content: the *what* of meaning arises from the *how*, from the structure and relational scale of visual syntax. The color palette throughout is mostly of a child’s lucid crayon box, muted by the frequent use of white; the tonal atmosphere one of freshness and quickness, of a kind of temporal immediacy. There are window and door shapes that suggest essential structures of architecture, but questions of inside and outside are kept active, the eye invited to move between and among surfaces and spaces. Because works are in series or sets we know we are looking at variants, which make us remember that how things are is not always determined or final. *Will and Weather*. We can decide and fabricate but there are forces over which we have no control;



Accumulation #5 (2016); *Terrain #2-3* (2010-16)

turbulence is just at the other side of serenity; chaos on the other side of order. I was reminded of the poems of Wallace Stevens, also interested in the variant tension between orders of will and weather:

*The sea-clouds whitened far below the calm
And moved, as blooms move, in the swimming green
And in its watery radiance, while the hue*

*Of heaven in an antique reflection rolled
Round those flotillas. And sometimes the sea
Poured brilliant iris on the glistening blue.*



Accumulation #8 (2016)

4.

Accumulations, a series of wall sculptures, pivot between stop and go, fast and slow: suspended lattice-like forms, scaffolds of revealed intention, in which the nature of attachment itself might be the salient idea. How does one thing attach to another thing? Are these attachments permanent or provisional? What is choice, anyway? The works seem to want to *demonstrate* certain unexpected properties of adherence and association; they propose the agility of dance along with the instability of gathering, as if to remind us of how at once necessary

and precarious --- improvisatory or contingent--- all of our connections are. They suggest a notational choreography, where motion and stillness, touching and turning away, are in constant ambient flux. In fact, these works resonate with associations because they are resolutely unresolved, like puzzles or games that have been jostled in their boxes. Nothing is tentative but then nothing seems permanently fixed, suggesting *it might have been otherwise*.



Accumulation #5 (2016)

5.

The conversation between notions of freedom, or randomness, or indeterminacy (“weather”), and formal order or law (“will”) has been going on for some time in democratic ideas as well as artistic practice. As modernisms wore on and attention to the fact of fabrication itself became more dominant, artists began to eschew the closures of illusionism and disguised *techne* for an open reveal, the pure pleasures of material fact. This change allowed for all kinds of new routes to altered perception, ones that would include piles and heaps, strings and nets, the haphazard realized as form; a seemingly pure materialism.

Here, on the floor, the series called *Terrain*: bundled forms, blanket rolls; small boulders; the overstuffed bags of commercial detritus. As in all this work, Fujita's agile abstractions convert to referential particulars; the mind uncovering in a single shape or work a mutating reverie of association. The works embody the generative nature of invention; freedom arrests in form.



Terrain #2 (2010-16)

6.

Kenji Fujita's work embraces aspects of the modernist love of intact, discrete forms, however distorted, as well as the postmodern conceptual or minimalist pleasure in showing that the relation of material to process is, in itself, worthy of aesthetic contemplation. But with Fujita's work, we are invited to peer into fabrication, as if we were looking at the underside of a beautifully constructed garment, whose stitches are acts of skilled, meticulous attention. And yet, even at extreme of close-up, we are not always permitted to see beyond the veil, causing a shadow play between the visible and the invisible, less in the service of mystery than as an acknowledgment of the limits of intimacy; an assertion, as it were, of privacy. The

use, throughout this work, of *layers* seems to reject ideas of total access, and so invites the viewer to a slow unfolding into the varieties of perception. Frames and circular outlines suggest vacancies and vagrancies (see “Contact Improvisation #3”), floating phantoms about to coalesce or disappear. You might see one configuration of colors and shapes at one time, and another, different visual order at another; you are aware of the angle of reception. Opacity and transparency are in flickering rhythms that allow the works to keep certain things to themselves. There is no detail, one senses, that has not engaged the artist’s attention; the fluid dialogue between the fortuitous or serendipitous qualities of materials --- their given weathers, as it were-- and the will of the artist is always and everywhere apparent.



top: *Terrain #3*; bottom: *Terrain #1* (2010-16)



Accumulation #7 (2016); *Contact Improvisation #4* (2016)

7.

These works invite a certain intimacy with the moment of decision almost as if we could trace back into them the course of their making. There is an elision of the divide between temporal and spatial perception, as if we could, in fact, watch time as it marks its changes on the physical world. We might say then that Kenji Fujita animates and inscribes the differential between accident and design, between the improvisatory and intentional. You sense not so much a tension as a duet, a harmonic, between the innate habits of the material and Fujita's arranging, positioning, adding, subtracting, until they reach an equilibrium which is as vital and perilous as it is satisfying, like a held moment in dance.

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