

Steven Cottingham



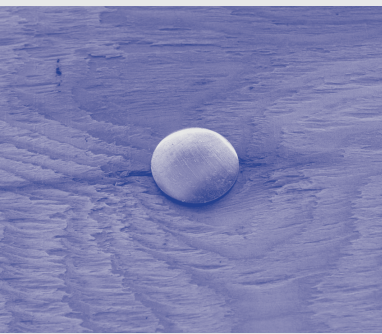
Wil Aballe Art Projects

Ultimately, we must imagine and seek out a dead world. It would be a mistake to call our current morass a ruin—in fact, we live within a paradigm that valorizes life and liveliness at the cost of all else. Existence is earned based on activity, animation, and productivity. There is no room for the inert, the slow, or the unproductive. Neoliberalism enacts a prohibition on all instances of ‘dead time’ wherein the entirety of one’s day and night must be steered toward the creation of value: personal and professional time are conflated within the single category of life. The paradigm of liveliness is used to justify capitalist competition (‘survival of the fittest’) as well as the re-‘vitalization’ of gentrified neighbourhoods, the re-‘animation’ of fossilized organic matter, and the pro-life protests of zealous misogynists. Everywhere life is upheld as an ideal. But we know that life and death are intertwined to the point of becoming indistinct: one’s composition is always predicated on another’s (inevitable) decomposition. Things live because other things have died. It is the same if a cell consumes a cell, if a forest fire burns away old growth while dispersing new seeds, or if a human expends life-force to affect another being. Art walks a line of complicity, but ultimately offers one possibility of emancipatory death through acts undertaken in defiance of the need to be lively and to produce legible or actualized efforts that re-embolden exploitative labour and value extraction.

Accordingly, the assembled work dwells within this framework to instantiate shifts of value on the formal level. The paradigm of life can be said to have an inherent programmability: that is, life has a dictatorial relationship to meaning and production. Life seeks to preserve and reproduce itself, as does capital. Conversely, death leads us into virtual (unprescribed) spaces. Here, small shifts have been made in order to remove a given object’s dictatorial properties and imbue it with virtual capacities. For example, artillery shells become vases—forms that hold but do not cage

matter. Police batons become wooden flutes. Coins are defaced to assume the quality of mirrors, and they are rematerialized against their prior incarnation as the immaterial symbol of fiat currency. And yet these new forms retain traces of their ‘past lives’, carrying a metonymic chain of relationships while simultaneously pointing toward future morphogeneses. We must note that capitalism is not only an oppressive force, it is also a repressive one. And so it seems important to congregate within its aporias to instantiate forms that are irrecoverable by capitalist programs—without resorting to transcendent forms (forms that do not appear in our present moment/space) to imagine our exodus. The new world is not elsewhere, it is contained within this old one. It must only be exhumed.

Front: René Magritte, *L'Esprit comique*, 1928, oil on canvas / huile sur toile, 30 x 24 in. (75 x 60 cm)



5. *Necrotic holomovement*, 2018, bleach on cotton / eau de javel sur coton, 79 x 44 in. (200 x 112 cm)

In order to grasp the implicate order—the secret domain of quantum physics—physicist David Bohm proposed the analogy of making cuts into folded paper. Upon unfolding the sheet, there is an elaboration in the form of geometrical patterns; this represents the explicate realm of observable action. The resulting work borrows its initial template from René Magritte’s *L'Esprit comique* (1928)—signifying a regime where the explicate order is only a ghost of the implicate.

Afin de comprendre l’ordre impliqué de la physique quantique, le physicien David Bohm propose une analogie comprenant des coupures dans une feuille de papier pliée. Lorsque la feuille de papier est dépliée, un motif géométrique devient visible, représentant le domaine explicite d’une action observable. Le résultat de cette expérience utilise comme modèle l’œuvre de René Magritte *L'Esprit comique* (1928), suggérant que l’ordre explicite est un fantôme de l’ordre impliqué.

4. *Untitled*, 2017, garment sourced from haunted factory, copper / vêtements provenant d’une usine hantée, cuivre, 34 x 24 x 24 in. (86 x 61 x 61 cm)

In *Untitled*, a second-hand jacket is draped across a chair made of copper piping. Sourced via eBay, the jacket was one of many garments produced at a factory in Gazipur where production was interrupted as a result of mass hallucinations and ghost attacks. Copper provides material precedent for the unseen exchange of energy in the form of electricity, gas, labour-power, or spectral vitality.

Untitled est compose d’une veste usée drapée autour d’une chaise construite à partir de tuyaux de cuivre. Obtenue sur Internet via le site eBay, la veste provient d’une usine de Gazipur close pour causes d’hallucinations en masse et d’attaques de fantômes. Le cuivre est un matériau conducteur pour différentes formes d’énergies: électricité, gaz, force de travail et vitalité spectrale.



2. *A curse cannot be broken, can only be understood as that which does not break*, 2017, repoussed artillery shells / obus d’artillerie repoussé, 14 x 3 x 3 in. (36 x 8 x 8 cm), 19 x 3 x 3 in. (48 x 7 x 7 cm), 12 x 3 x 3 in. (30 x 7 x 7 cm)

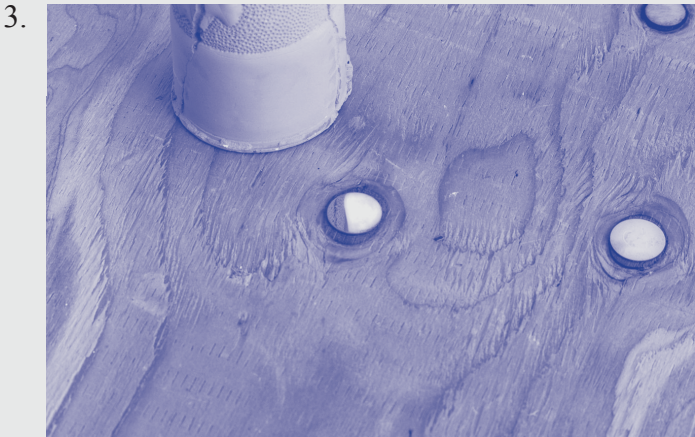
During the First World War many (male) soldiers spent their downtime fashioning empty ammunition shells and bullet casings into art objects and souvenirs. Elaborate patterns and images of vegetation were hammered into recycled weapons of war—brass artillery shells transformed into flower vases. At the same time, women were recruited as productive labour for the war’s munitions factories, using scarce metals to produce the very shells that flooded the battlefields.

Pendant la première Guerre Mondiale, de nombreux soldats convertissaient durant leur temps libre des douilles d’artillerie en souvenirs ou objets d’arts. Des motifs élaborés ainsi que des images de plantes étaient martelées sur les douilles, transformant l’artillerie de laiton en objet décoratif tels que des vases. Durant la même période, les femmes étaient recrutées comme force ouvrière pour la production de munitions destinées au champ de bataille.

1. *Untitled*, 2015, wooden batons turned into flutes / matraques en bois converties en flutes, 14 x 1 x 1 in. (36 x 3 x 3 cm), 19 x 1 x 1 in. (48 x 3 x 3 cm), 24 x 1 x 8 in. (61 x 3 x 20 cm)

Decommissioned police batons are hollowed and tuned to become wooden flutes.

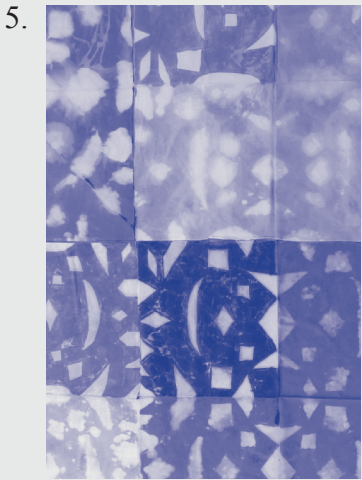
Les matraques de bois sont vidées et accordées afin d’être transformées en flutes.



3. *Infinite ullage*, 2017, coins defaced to the point of becoming mirrors, dimensions variable / pièces de monnaies polies et transformées en miroirs, dimensions variables

Infinite ullage comprises a selection of coins that have been stripped of fiat value, defaced to the point of becoming mirrors. Precluded from circulating themselves, the emptied coins now contain temporary reflections of the circulating bodies that pass around them.

Infinite ullage consiste en une série de pièces de monnaies dévaluées et polies au point de devenir des miroirs. Détournées de leur fonction économique initiale, les pièces de monnaies deviennent des contenants pour les reflets fugitifs des corps qui passent autour d’elles.



Steven Cottingham

Steven Cottingham (b. 1989) is another artist. His work has been exhibited in both professional and guerrilla contexts, including the Wellcome Collection (London, UK), Agora (Berlin, DE), Centro Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales (Havana, CU), Chamber (Milwaukee, WI), The Luminary (St Louis, MO), and the Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton, AB). Recent residencies occurred at Fogo Island (Fogo Island, NL), Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (Berlin, DE), and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (Skowhegan, ME). Currently his interests include labour and pre-socratic monism.

Wil Aballe Art Projects (est. 2013) exhibits local and international artists, notably the innovative younger generation of Vancouver art practitioners. The program is comprised of a series of interdisciplinary, concept-oriented and space-based exhibitions in a variety of media including sculpture, video, sound, painting, printmaking, photography, and performance. The gallery operates somewhat nomadically, having shifted into 3 distinctly different locations (an open-concept apartment, a spare warehouse, and a unit in a historical building that dates back to gold-rush era Vancouver) since conception while also hosting several “off-site projects” as the art demands.

Translations provided by Nicolas Sassoon

Poppositions, *In Watermelon Sugar*: April 19–21, 2018, Brussels

WAAP

Wil Aballe Art Projects