



Grant Mooney

calcis

September 17–December 8, 2024

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery | Center for the Arts | Wesleyan University

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calcis

Grant Mooney's *calcis*, his solo exhibition in the North Gallery of the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, continues the artist's practice of sculpture that attends to its materials and proximal surroundings.

Working with the received conditions of the space, Mooney's work departs from the materiality of the gallery's walls which, like the entire Center for the Arts complex, are composed of large limestone bricks. Limestone is a type of rock formed of crystalline calcium carbonate from deposits of seashells, and calcium carbonate is the predominant chemical compound found in cuttlebone, the cartilaginous internal shell of the cuttlefish. Cuttlebone is used for carving and casting metals within jewelry-making practices. Originally trained in jewelry design, Mooney has used cuttlebone in a number of sculptures, foregrounding the processual material in his solo exhibitions *radial* at Progetto (2023) in Lecce, Italy, where limestone is a predominant architectural material; and *extence* at Miguel Abreu Gallery (2022) in New York, where limestone can be found in the gallery's floor tiles.

Mooney's practice positions art objects as "severely entangled entities" through a careful attunement to the social extensions of material and its technological production. These attunements and their relationality are expressed through their interaction with another active material in Mooney's practice, light. In his words, light itself has "a material consequence," transitioning substances in and out of visual presence. In *calcis*, Mooney's sculptures are placed directly on the floor in front of interior thoroughway's large windows, and in the gallery, which is partially-illuminated by an ocular skylight, activating the vertical axis in the space.

CHECKLIST

Grant Mooney

Deisal c. i,ii

2024

Rotary motor, steel, glass, polyurethane, iron, water

Each:

80 x 12 x 10 inches

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Cation c. (x)

2024

Electroplated steel, silver

12 x 7 x 2 inches

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Cation c. (xi)

2024

Electroplated steel, silver

12 x 7 x 2 inches

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Temps

2024

Wall panels, limewash

98 x 39½ x 3½ inches each

Grant Mooney

Partials i, (Gain c.)

2024

Plaster, bronze

22¼ x 19½ x 27½

All works courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco.

Walls behind the walls

Benjamin Chaffee



Image from promotional materials for the Mila-wall© Moveable Wall Panels by MBA Design & Display Products.

The rear wall of the gallery has another wall standing in front of it. This structure, a setting of temporary walls from the gallery's inventory, is a modular wall system by MBA Design & Display Products Corp. Mila-wall© Moveable Wall Panels are made of hollow-core aluminum panels with an internal fastening system. The panels are designed to be resurfaced with adhesive vinyl as needed to maintain their appearance. Marketed for use by trade shows and museums, these walls can be reconfigured into free-standing rooms for display.¹

Walls within a gallery are objects we are trained to look past, to see only as a support for the presentation of something else. Grant Mooney's rearrangement of these walls in *calcis* challenges this initial invisibility. Without physically supporting the installation of an artwork, the walls become a gesture in their own right. Titled *Temps*, they exist in a state in-between artwork and utility, compressing the space of the gallery and narrowing the floor from its original proportions. The limestone bricks, though monumental in scale, would be structurally compromised by drilling required to install artwork. In consideration of the limitation of the gallery's walls—a space purpose-built as a site for hosting art exhibitions—*Temps* becomes a surrogate for the existing gallery walls that are unable to support the installation of artwork without sustaining ongoing degradation.

The work of supporting is often overlooked, appearing as "subsequent, unessential, and

lacking value in itself."² Céline Condorelli, author of *Support Structures*, cautions us to read these structures only through what we already know, "Structures are not the shape of things, but the underlying principles behind how things appear, as if they resided behind a curtain. A structure displays; but properties that are manifest in its appearance can only be understood formally, and do not necessarily disclose the inner structure, and are in fact able to hide and obscure it exactly by offering a front, a skin, a first degree depth of comprehension. The superficial appearance of things, by the same token, often has the strategic function to hide their hidden deep structure."³

There are precedents for walls (or their absence) becoming the focus of an exhibition. Often cited, Michael Asher's works addressed the received conditions of a gallery space. In his 1970 solo exhibition at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College, Asher reconfigured the interior walls of the gallery so that it could be open to the exterior twenty-four hours a day.⁴ For Heimo Zobernig's self-titled solo exhibition at the Renaissance Society in 1996, Zobernig instructed the staff to lay the temporary walls constructed for the previous exhibition in place on the floor. In writing about the exhibition, curator Hamza Walker queried, "[i]f in fact, what art is depends on where art is, then scrutiny of place is of high priority. As art seeks to understand itself through a comparison with objects outside its own classification, it should not have to travel too far. The floors, walls, pedestals, shipping



Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center, Pomona College, Claremont, California, USA, February 13–March 8, 1970, viewing out of gallery toward street from small triangular area. Photo taken with daylight. Photograph by Frank J. Thomas, courtesy of the Frank J. Thomas Archive. © Michael Asher Foundation.

crates, and gallery benches are the most convenient places to begin. Although this may not sound like a flattering comparison, it allows the physical elements of context to be thought of not only as an active component but perhaps the ultimate component from which to reformulate art.⁵

Mooney makes sculpture without sculptural materials, instead preferring to use industrial or architectural materials in his work.⁶ This imbues a critical capacity to the work regarding the status of the art object but also results from the artist's practice of developing installations and artworks in response to the site or setting. In a 2017 interview Mooney spoke about site-specificity in his work, "I don't consider these materials coordinated to site, but a consequence of what is near.

By allowing proximity and the particular settings I encounter to play out, I arrive at some materials over others. This proximity...situates me, it gives me a position."⁷ Mooney continues, "Context-specific modes of art production are also my favorite to witness because they internalize the body as the place where decisions are calibrated even if inexplicit."⁸

Art objects are not separate from historical and contemporary social and political issues but are always already embedded within the critical frameworks and networks within which we, and the objects themselves, move. Mooney's coordination and consideration of nearness includes the material specificity of the display space, its architectural and political history, the material of the work and its methods and histories of production, possible chemical

exchanges between the work, the space, and the environment, the semantic or linguistic status of the work and how this affects our understanding of all the materials listed. All of these become materials within the artist's work in addition to our own perceptual processes. In the artist's own words, he is interested in "... making what is sensed or felt become part of the work's operation..."⁹

Within Mooney's work, the viewing subject is implicated within a network of material relations that include, but also exceed, the institution. These consist of the desire of the viewer but also their chemical presence, their breath, the air's interaction with the material of the gallery itself, and all of those subsequent interactions with the artwork(s). All of these are expressions of systems of material relations. The viewer becomes an agent within these systems through their physical and material presence in the space. Theorist and physicist Karen Barad addresses human, and more-than-human relations in her writing, "The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which "mattering" itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities. Temporality and spatiality emerge in this processual historicity. Relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion are reconfigured."¹⁰

calcis, the title of the exhibition, is a Latin word which translates in English to lead vial, bottle, or jar. Google Translate connects *calcis* to "kick" in English, the *os calcis* is the large bone of the heel. In common usage *calcis* refers to liquified calcium carbonate, which is used as a "liquid lime supplement for lakes and ponds" to help "create ideal living conditions for aquatic life and promotes overall productivity in fishing ponds."¹¹ *calcis* is both container, structure or vessel, the potential for movement, and a pro-biotic.

The walls within *calcis* are supporting something. Their surface has been treated with calcium carbonate in the form of limewash. Appearing at first like white interior house

paint it's only upon closer examination (and especially in grating light) that the variations in the surface become more apparent. Limewash is used primarily for resealing absorbent exterior surfaces and is manufactured from limestone that's been crushed, burned, and mixed with water.¹² Limestone is the same material composing the institutional walls behind the aluminum walls forming *Temps*. The bearing walls of the Zilkha Gallery (indeed, of the entire Center for the Arts) are constructed of large limestone bricks, interceded by levels of poured concrete. Historically, "lime-based cement binders, such as lime putty" were used as binding agents to make concrete.¹³

Calcium carbonate, the primary chemical component of limestone and lime, is also the predominant chemical compound found in cuttlebone. In the artist's own words, "the internal shell of cuttlefish works as a buoyancy system, bringing water in and filtering it out to move between ocean depths."¹⁴ Cuttlebone is used for carving and casting metals within jewelry-making practices. Originally trained in jewelry design, Mooney has used cuttlebone in a number of sculptures. The two wall-based sculptures in *calcis*, (*cations*) *xii* (2024) and (*cations*) *xiii* (2024) do not actually contain cuttlebone directly but rather its imprint. The suspended silver objects of focus within the silver-plated frames have repeating lines, almost topographical in nature. The layers of growth of the cuttlefish is reflected in these lines in the cuttlebone and in the cast silver.

On the floor in the center of the gallery, its long view framed by the architecture is a new work. Cast in bronze, *Partials i*, (*Gain c.*) (2024) retains some of its calcium carbonate, or plaster shell, from the process of casting. The work is installed directly on the gallery floor with the plaster mold cracked and the bronze partially obscured. The bronze cast is a sectoral horn, a form derived from early designs for sound amplification. *Partials*, in the title of the work, refers to both the visibility of the bronze and is

also another term for overtones, or a series of harmonic and inharmonic frequencies above a fundamental tone.

Objects, their systems of display, and their systems of production, are all significant within *calcis*. These entities, though not of equal visual presence, are equally considered and responsive to the received conditions of the gallery, physically, chemically, socially, and politically. These conditions will continue to change throughout the run of the exhibition, modifying the context, and in return, the objects. Niels Jørgen Gommesen writes about these systems of contingencies, "changes in one context continuously interface with changes in other contexts, differences react to differences, rhythms resonate and create new objects, and bodies are translated into new states of being, by becoming more or less intensive. What defines these potential states of being, how they are emerging and unfolding, we never know in advance."¹⁵



K.R.M. Mooney, *c. ii (April 11)*, 2023, Bronze, scagliola alabaster, polyethylene, 21 1/4 x 15 3/4 x 6 1/4 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

Endnotes

- 1 More information available here: <https://mbawalls.com/>.
- 2 Céline Condorelli and Gavin Wade, "Foreword," in Céline Condorelli, ed. *Support Structures*. Sternberg Press, 2009, p. 6. Condorelli offers a definition of support structures as that which "bears, sustains, props, and holds up."
- 3 Céline Condorelli, "Directions for Use," in Céline Condorelli, ed. *Support Structures*. Sternberg Press, 2009, p. 28.
- 4 For more information about the exhibition and for Michael Asher's own reflections on the exhibition see: Michael Asher, "February 13 – March 8, 1970, Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College, Claremont, California," in Benjamin Buchloh, ed., *Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-1979*. Primary Information, 2021.
- 5 Hamza Walker, "What Makes This Art?" 1996, Renaissance Society, essay published in conjunction with Heimo Zobernig's exhibition.
- 6 Conversation with the artist, August 19, 2024.
- 7 K.R.M. Mooney quoted in Jenny Gheith, "K.r.m. Mooney," August 2017. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, <https://www.sfmoma.org/essay/krm-mooney/-essay/>
- 8 K.R.M. Mooney quoted in Kyle Dancewicz, *K.R.M. Mooney at Progetto*. https://files.cargocollective.com/780779/radial_Mooney_Dancewicz_Progetto_Text_ENG.pdf. Accessed 2023.
- 9 K.R.M. Mooney quoted in "Contact Points: K.R.M. Mooney Interviewed by Maddie Klett," *BOMB*, November 8, 2021.
- 10 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Peformativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms*. Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2008, p. 135.
- 11 <https://biosafesystems.com/product/calcis/>. Accessed June 13, 2024.
- 12 <https://www.remodelista.com/posts/remodeling-101-limewashed-walls-limewash-paint/>. Accessed August, 21, 2024.
- 13 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concrete>. Accessed August 21, 2024.
- 14 K.R.M. Mooney, "One-to-One," in Alice Channer, ed., "Sand in the Vaseline: On Twenty-First Century Process Art, Alice Channer with Alisa Barenboym, Nicolas Deshayes, K.R.M. Mooney, Tania Pérez Córdova and Alison Wilding," *Sculpture Journal*, June 2022, p.259.
- 15 Niels Jørgen Gommesen, "Reflections on Daily Runs and Material Flows," *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies*. Issue 1: Object/Ecology, 2014, p. 165.

Profile

Grant Mooney (b. 1990, Seattle, WA) lives and works in New York. He studied art at Central Saint Martins, London and California College of the Arts, San Francisco. Mooney's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Midway Contemporary, Minneapolis (2024), Progetto, Lecce, Italy (2023), Miguel Abreu Gallery (2022/2023), Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin (2021), Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco (2019), Kunstverein Braunschweig (2017), and as part of the SECA Art Awards at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2017), Pied-à-terre, Ottsville, PA (2015), and the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2015). His work has been included in group exhibitions at Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2024), the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (2022), Braunsfelder, Cologne (2022), Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2021), the ICA, Los Angeles (2021), Yale Union, Portland (2020), Stadtgalerie Bern (2020), SculptureCenter, New York (2020), Fondation D'entreprise Ricard, Paris (2017), and Kunst-Werke Berlin (2017), White Flag Project Library, St. Louis (2016), Futura Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague (2016), and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco (2016), among others.

Related Events

Opening Reception

Tuesday, September 17, 2024, 4:30pm–6pm

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Artist Talk with Grant Mooney and Alan Ruiz

Moderated by Benjamin Chaffee

Tuesday, November 12, 2024, 4:30pm

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha South Gallery, Reading Room

Curated by Associate Director of Visual Arts Benjamin Chaffee '00, with Exhibitions Manager Rosemary Lennox and Preparator Paul Theriault. Special thanks to past Exhibitions Intern Emmett Levy '24 and current Intern Noah Shacknai '25. Thank you to Grant Mooney, Tim Saltarelli, Miguel Abreu Gallery, Altman Siegel Gallery, Rani Arbo, Andrew Chatfield, John Elmore, Tony Hernandez, Lynette Vandlik, and Joshua Lubin-Levy. The related programs are co-sponsored by Wesleyan University's Studio Art Program.

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