

## **Ordinary World: Encountering the extraordinary in the work of Keith Kaziak**

Fred Stonehouse, June 2022

A restless questioning is at the core of Keith Kaziak's creative practice. His deceptively simple sculptural gestures embody doubt, illusion, faith, assumption, and expectation. His work relies on what we think we know and how we think we see the world around us, all the while knowing that the world is never quite what we think we see. Like a magician, Kaziak relies on our assumptions about the physical world; how it typically behaves and the roles that things and materials normally fulfill. Interestingly, this is very close to the mechanics that comedians rely on; the presumption of expectations and then the flip, the space where the expectation drops out and an unexpected turn occurs can produce surprise and/or laughter. The simmering sense of humor in this work could be missed by those who are more interested in the reductive physicality and simple, straightforward presence of this work, but over and over again, when encountering Kaziak's work in person, one is left chuckling and thinking "that's funny". The humor in his work ranges from clever, to peculiar, to laugh out loud realization. In that way the work is generous; it allows the audience to share in Kaziak's own sense of discovery. It's almost as if the artist is alongside the viewer saying: "Look how funny this is....it's odd, right?"

The humor in this work does not in any way take away from the seriousness of that basic questioning, however. The way things are not quite right produces a sense of unease, or an uncomfortable distrust of our own faculties. When our sense of something as intuitive as gravity is drawn into doubt, the general fabric of reality can start to unravel. Kaziak's probing of "seeing", tests all of the ways we know our world and by extension, what such an unstable construct says about meaning. If our eyes can't be trusted, what are we to think about any sensorial experience and that begs the primal existential question of why? Why are we here, what does it mean, how do I proceed with creating meaning in a world where everything is slippery and unreliable? How do I take a next step, when every direction is precarious? Kaziak seems to answer this difficult dilemma by stepping in the one direction that can be trusted.... inside. For all of this work's reliance on the physical stuff of our world, it's strongest affect is one of personal poetics. The specific choices that Kaziak makes seem to proceed from a very particular, and very personal sense of what is beautiful and evocative of his interiority. After all, the world is full of "stuff" and "things" but it is only certain of those that strike his personal tuning fork creating a resonant hum.

I would argue that this is how Kaziak's work arrives at something unique and original. While he treads some ground that has been made familiar in contemporary sculpture practice (the readymade, the counterfeit, the banal...) it is the striking stylistic consistency that emerges when one considers a body of his work. He has an "eye" that sees in a very peculiar and surprising way. He is tuned into phenomenology but through a metaphysical lens. Materially, his work embraces careful craftsmanship and is meticulous in its fabrication. The work's understated, but exquisite formalism does not draw attention to itself but seems completely organic (though it's mostly synthetic) taking advantage of methods commonly used for theatrical sets and props. An important aspect of the physical nature of Kaziak's art is that it is labored over. The element of time and care and physical investment in the process resonates

from the finished works in a way that must be experienced in person. The haptic quality of this work is easy to miss in reproduction, but these are not works that could be jobbed out. Kaziak's hand, while relatively slick, is evident at every turn. While this work is certainly conceptual, Kaziak is clearly a "maker", and it is his love of and engagement with the physical "thing" that gives his work a great deal of its power and presence. When his work is at its best, it manages to parlay a skillful legerdemain into wondrous magic.

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