



OKAY MOUNTAIN

MARK MOORE GALLERY | *STATEMENTS*

OKAY MOUNTAIN STATEMENTS

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Mark Moore Gallery: *Statements* introduces a featured gallery artist through images and candid interview. From noteworthy early examples to present bodies, the works featured in *Statements* act as an overview of the varying practices and movements implemented by a given artist in tandem with their thoughts and interpretations.

Okay Mountain is a nine member artist collective based in Austin, Texas. Formed in 2006 as an artist-run alternative gallery space, the group has exhibited their drawing, video, sound, and performance projects throughout the United States and in Mexico City, and has been widely recognized for its "inventive construction, loving attention to detail and keen-eyed connoisseurship." Okay Mountain repackages, reconstitutes, and rekindles our consumerist desires with a sardonic edge. Their installations and multi-media assemblage works mimic the stock vernacular of our communal materialism, yet tweak them just enough to reveal our superficial insecurities and convictions.

While most artists are alumni of the University of Texas at Austin (TX), others are graduates of University of California Los Angeles (CA), Rhode Island School of Design (RI), and the University of Kansas (KS). Institutional exhibitions have included those at the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston (TX), Austin Museum of Art (TX), McNay Art Museum (TX), Arthouse (TX), University of Tennessee, Chattanooga (TN), and the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum (MA).



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OKAY MOUNTAIN

Interview by: Marielos Zeka, Mark Moore Gallery

Before the collective formed, the Okay Mountain gallery space located in East Austin, Texas opened in 2006. Did the gallery start out of necessity; was there a need in Austin for a space that exhibited young artists from around the world?

There was certainly a lack of exhibition possibilities for the artists that we were interested in; artists close to us in age and experience. This definitely motivated us, but more than simply satisfying a need for white walls, the gallery became a place to see our ambitions and interests reflected back to us socially. We created part of a “scene,” which is not uncommon for youngish creative people in any city. Of course, the gallery’s priority was to hold art exhibitions and to sell work—which we took very seriously—but the location was large enough to host musical performances, readings, and gatherings of all kinds. Basically, the gallery helped us find out who was out there and what we had in common with them. It was a place where like-minded people could have a series of shared experiences, where people could walk up to each other and enter into conversations about art, music, culture, and more. In retrospect, community building was the real project of the gallery. There was a need for the gallery’s existence, but the need was more complex than a lack of exhibition opportunities; it was about discovery as much as it was about filling a void.

OKAY MOUNTAIN



How did the name Okay Mountain come about?

The name Okay Mountain was the result of a long, exciting meeting - the first of many. There were a lot of very strange close calls with the name. I think we wanted something sort of plain. The fact that the gallery and collective share the same name is important. We were very deliberate about that. It was the one name no one hated, and we liked that it spoke to this idea of a large, monumental thing, but just an okay version of that, sort of a metaphor for what we might become.

The collective formed in an organic way at the gallery. Can you recall what brought you all together? At what point did the collective become a formal entity?

Initially we came together to run a space, to organize exhibitions, and other events. We were all in this difficult business of running a gallery together and thus spent quite a bit of time with one another. We met every Wednesday evening during gallery hours to discuss upcoming shows, building maintenance, finances etc. and we would joke and pass drawings back and forth to keep it lively. All the members of Okay Mountain engage in drawing in some way or another, which has proved instrumental to our development. In the beginning stages, we were hesitant to adopt the “collective” label, because of how we came together. In our minds, collectives formed as a result of shared ideological or aesthetic concerns, but we came

together to organize exhibitions - not make artwork. Incidentally this fact made our group more diverse than it would have been otherwise. Putting that aside, a few key events prompted us to think differently. Jade Walker asked us to exhibit at the Creative Research Laboratory in Austin, initiating our identity as a creative entity. Another key event was being asked by Elizabeth Dunbar to represent Arthouse at the Pulse Fair in Miami. *Corner Store (2009)* allowed for the expression of our multiple voices while creating a coherent image and experience for the viewer. At about the same time, we began painting a large-scale indoor mural for a venture capitalist firm. Although this was a different kind of experience it forced us to invent yet another way to work together. Just about every Okay Mountain project has required us to invent new ways to work together, which doesn't always get discussed, but is as important as the work itself.

What does it mean to be a collective nowadays? I wouldn't expect you to have a manifesto; but it seems like a loose association of like-minded individuals striving to create a sense of community.

What it means to be a collective is very unique to our circumstance. Because there are so many of us and we have become so spread out over the last few years, we are in a constant state of redefining our working methods. Devising new ways to communicate and agree on ideas has been a very large part of our recent identity. Each of us has very different experiences, which get folded back into the group dynamic. For this show, we used video chatting, along with cloud computing, email, and even land mail to arrive at and and decide the fates of various projects.

As a result, the work naturally reflects issues of communication and information sharing. There has also been a general interest in collectives that we have been able to benefit from. It may have something to do with the mystery of it all, the mystery of creative interpersonal relationships. Nobody really knows how it works for sure, not even us.

As a collective do you consider the historical trajectory of working in groups? If so, what are some of the collectives you look to?

We are certainly aware of particular art historical developments. The fact is that artists have been working in informal groups and communities for many years. However, the emergence of the collective is a unique phenomenon, perhaps even a critique of the importance traditionally given to the solitary artist working in the studio alone. We were influenced by places like Space 1026 in Philadelphia, the Mission artists in San Francisco, as well as Forcefield, and Paper Rad out of Providence. We were definitely influenced by music culture and the way certain rap collectives function. The Ant Farm is a big deal in Texas as well. There are a lot of models out there for how people can work together, and each of us probably has a distinct list of important art groups and collectives—not to mention artists—that have collaborated either long or short term.

For the group exhibition, *New Image Sculpture at the McNay Art Museum (TX)*, you created *Multi-Station Machine (2011)*, which was made specifically for the

show. Do you consider site specificity each time or do you simply prefer to work out new ideas?

We do work in a very site-specific mode; always mindful of the setting that a project will appear in, and often times making specific works in relation to where they will show. The McNay is made up of two museums: the Stieren Center for Exhibitions (a modernist glass, steel, and concrete structure), and the original Spanish Colonial house museum. For *Multi-Station Machine*, we drew on the architecture of the house museum, which is full of wrought iron and rough-hewn wood. But we had also been entertaining a project inspired by gym equipment for some time, independent of any particular venue. In short, we do both. We consider the audience and venue where a project will appear as well as develop ideas without any particular location in mind. This definitely keeps our decisions about installation and project strategies fresh and open to change.

Many of the projects that the collective have completed—including *Corner Store (2009)* at Pulse Miami and *Benefit Plate (2010)*—depend on the viewer's ubiquitous experiences with channel surfing, convenience stores and gyms, etc. I think one could safely say Okay Mountain creates works that activate audiences, wouldn't you say?

As a group, we tend to draw on our communal and everyday experiences, and look for interesting pre-existing forms that we can inject with unexpected or humorous meaning. Although we don't make work that is specifically connected to

relational aesthetics, our work is very much about people and audiences, what holds their attention and keeps them investigating. Participation can be a very motivating factor, but it is not mandatory for us. There is something interesting about creating that dilemma where participation is possible but not necessary. Our large sculptures and installations tend to hint at a body. The bunk beds, bleacher seats, and staircase that we made for the Blaffer Museum of Art (TX) are more examples of how some of our work invokes a body without guaranteeing audience participation. But we also make work meant to be interacted with, often in the form of a take away, like a pamphlet, or in the case of *Roadside Attractions (2012)*, a broadside.

Finally, how would you describe the current trajectory of the collective? How has the work changed from the first few years of working together?

One of the biggest changes to the collective is the fact that many of us have moved away from Austin over the last few years. This has made working together challenging, but it has also strengthened our resolve to continue developing projects, to continue to interact. Oftentimes, we only find ourselves totally assembled as a collective at our openings, which is a nice place to be. We have had a very long and ongoing conversation about what it means to work together and have learned a lot about setting up projects in ways that allow everybody to feel satisfied about their participation and effort. Figuring out how to work together over long distances will continue to define the evolution of our work.



“A twist on the traditional sailor’s lament, *Water, Water Everywhere So Let’s All Have a Drink*, 2010, is equal parts commentary on media oversaturation and introspection of masculine longings, fears, and desires.”

–Lauren Scarpello, Tori Bush, Adam Falik and
Kathy Rodriguez, *Pelican Bomb*,
February 2011

Page 2: *Cornerstore*, 2009
Mixed media installation (Pulse Miami)
Dimensions variable
Collection of 21C Museum Hotel, Louisville, KY

Pages 6-7: *Water, Water Everywhere So Let’s All Have a Drink*, 2010
Single channel video (Still), 28 min loop





Left and above: *School Night*, 2012
Foam, resin, enamel, astroturf, wood, trash
Dimensions variable

Opposite Page: *4-Wheeler Rollover*, 2012
(on display through 2014)
ATV, concrete and paint
Dimensions variable
deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA



Food Fight, 2010. Commissioned mural, 7 x 40 feet. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN









Above: *Stationary Machine*, 2011
Mixed media (installed at McNay Art Museum)
144 x 108 x 96 inches

Right: *Wheel*, 2011
Mixed media
156 x 156 x 37 inches

Opposite Page: *Muti-Station Machine*, 2011
Mixed media (installed at McNay Art Museum)
Dimensions variable



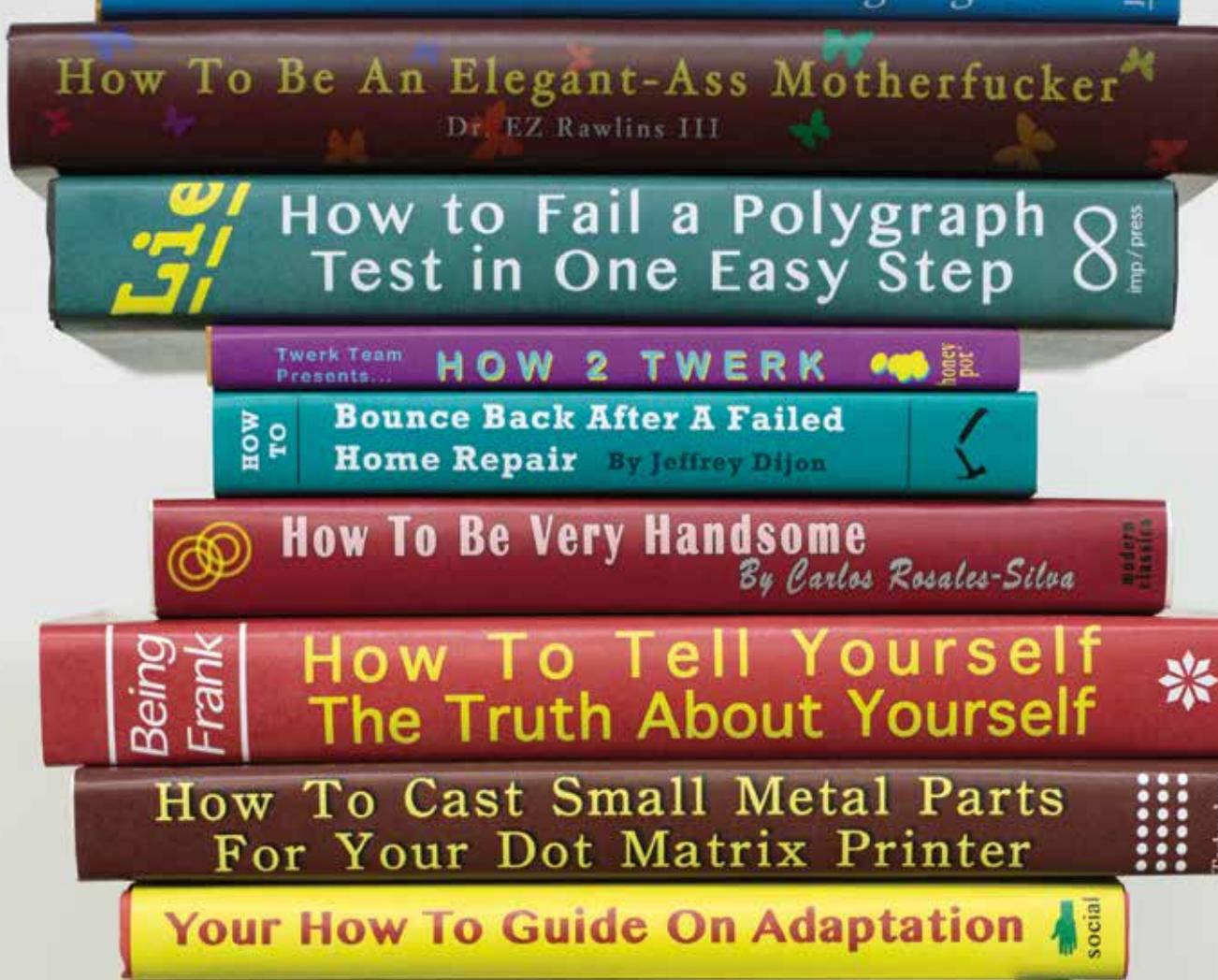


**“Sophisticates may chuckle at the
abysmal taste that the
barbecue trailer represents and,
on a deeper level, ponder the
spiritual vacuum that acquiring
such shiny toys tries to fill.
But it might also be seen as a
tribute to the proletarian
creativity and to ways people in
all walks of life invest their souls
in alluring objects.”**

– Ken Jonson,
The New York Times, August 2010

Pages 16-17: *Benefit Plate*, 2010
Mixed media installation (Freight + Volume, NY)
Dimensions variable







Above: *Prototype #8*, 2013
Digital C-print, 18 x 24 inches

Right: *Prototype #6*, 2013
Digital C-print, 18 x 24 inches

Opposite Page: *The World is Yours (Detail)*, 2013
Books, laser prints, bookshelf
32 x 16 x 80 inches



BIO

OKAY MOUNTAIN

Founded 2006

Lives and works in Austin, TX, Boston, MA, Chicago IL, and Los Angeles, CA

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2013 *Long Plays*, Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA
- 2012 *Four Wheeler Rollover*, deCordova Sculpture Park & Museum, Lincoln, MA (through 2014)
- 2012 *Okay Mountain*, Cress Gallery at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, TN
- 2011 *First Take: Okay Mountain*, Blaffer Art Museum at University of Houston, Houston, TX
- 2010 *New Works: Okay Mountain*, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Benefit Plate, Freight + Volume, New York, NY
Big Strange Mystery, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX
- 2008 *It's Gonna Be Reverything*, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, MO
It's Gonna Be Everything, Creative Research Laboratory, Austin, TX
Group Hug, Texas Lutheran University, Seguin, TX

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2012 Dallas Biennale, Dallas, TX
Art on the Green, AMOA-Arthouse, Austin, TX
- 2011 PULSE LA, Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Ultrasonic VI, Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA
New Image Sculpture, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
- 2010 *Prospect 1.5*, Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans, LA

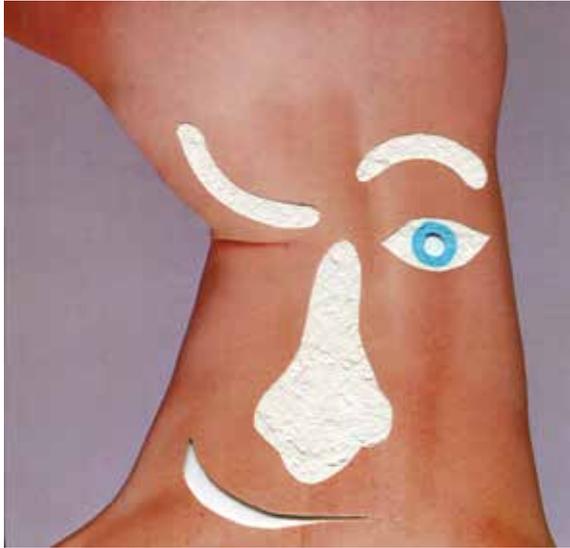
- 2009 PULSE Miami, Freight + Volume, Miami, FL
Group Show, Bradley University, Peoria, IL
PULSE Miami, Arthouse at the Jones Center, Miami, FL
SCOPE NY, Okay Mountain, New York, NY
- 2007 *Me Odio Y Quiero Comprar*, Galeria Enrique Guerrero, Mexico City, MEX
Between Resistance & Surrender, ONF Project Room, Monterrey, MEX

Other Projects

- 2010 *Food Fight* – Commissioned Mural, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
- 2008 Commissioned Mural, Austin Ventures, Austin, TX
- 2006 – Present
Founded, directed and programmed Okay Mountain Gallery, Austin TX

Lectures and Public Programs

- 2012 University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN
- 2011 McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
- 2010 Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX
- 2009 Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO
Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
- 2008 Creative Research Laboratory, Austin, TX
- 2007 Pecha Kucha, Austin, TX



Front cover:

School Night, 2012

Foam, resin, enamel, astroturf, wood, trash

Dimensions variable

Back cover:

Cornerstore, 2009

Mixed media installation (Pulse Miami)

Dimensions variable

Collection of 21C Museum Hotel, Louisville, KY

Left:

Untitled (7 x7 Collaborative Drawings #5), 2011

Mixed media on paper, 7 x 7 inches

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