

David Poppie
Roger Sayre

(re)mixed media

by: Brice Brown

David Poppie and Roger Sayre's sculptures bring to mind the anecdote of the artist Joe Brainard who, while walking down the beach with a friend, stopped, pointed at something that caught his eye, and said, "look at that." Presto! By merely isolating an object from its surroundings — by shifting the comfortable, received perception of a known object just a few degrees off-center — Brainard made his companion newly aware of the hidden beauty lurking in common, everyday objects. A deceptively simple concept, to be sure, yet one rich with aesthetic, emotional, even psychological implications. And Poppie and Sayre's gossamer strands of pulled magnetic recording tape, stacked and splayed plastic cassette casings, and photograms of colorful vinyl records sit squarely in this world born of the transformative effect of just looking at something from a different point of view.

In Poppie and Sayre's hands, audio and video recording components — all items admittedly lacking inherent aesthetic qualities in their natural state — are resuscitated as dynamic and poetic evocations of the brevity of a moment, the shifting nature of time, and the associations of memory with material. Plastics, both hard-edged and ribbon-like, are calibrated to induce a bracing austerity of form and astringency of color, creating a truly surprising mash-up of the ethereal with the concrete. In our society pitting disposability against sustainability, Poppie and Sayre play the role of dung beetle jesters, turning garbage into works of art rife with intelligent wit, formal integrity, narrative backbone, and even wink-wink humor. Similar to the work of Kurt Schwitters, or even Jacques Villeglé, it's as much a political strategy as it is a formal maneuver, resulting in simple, rich, and at times foreboding works reveling in the beauty of the disregarded.

Thankfully, Poppie and Sayre don't allow material to steal the show. And while we are absolutely aware of what we are looking at — this is a VHS cassette, that is a vinyl record — 'materiality' is ultimately subsumed into the sculptures' quirky metaphors. Material becomes just a substrate for the hard work ahead. For example, look at the depth of personality and narrative umph Poppie and Sayre wring from the humble materials used in the large hanging piece titled Ring Cycle. Here, three drum-shaped structures made of audio cassettes wrapped in magnetic tape are suspended from the ceiling, each one discharging long strands of the tape down from their centers to form small piles on the floor. By suspending the work from the ceiling, Poppie and Sayre impart a counter-intuitive strength to the magnetic tape, for it impossibly buoys the weight of the upper structures. While it's very possible to read this piece formally, what's more interesting is how Poppie and Sayre playfully shift the focus away from material by injecting a large dose of character. These three hanging pieces are more than slightly menacing, taking on the feel of armed sentinels, or even alien invaders. Immovable, domineering yet restrained, and oozing with a world-weary knowledge of things unknown to

us, this piece somehow manages to use minimal aesthetic gestures to smartly invoke all the high drama and myth-mongering found in Wagner's opera of the same title.

Sequencing of time in Poppy and Sayre's works takes on a real musicality. The staccato of the tightly packed cassettes in the Analogue series is nicely counterpointed by the lugubrious legato of Magnetic Field. This considered pacing lends the work a snappy feeling of growth, imbuing these inert materials with a sense of autonomous life. In Mix Tape I and II, tightly stretched strands of thin magnetic tape form rapidly moving horizontal and vertical stripes skittering across a rectangle. Simultaneously fast and slow, you can almost hear the whirl of tape. So simple, yet bursting with a barely contained energy, it's as if Poppy and Sayre have ensnared the essence of sound and movement.

One of the overarching themes of 20th century art is the fraught relationship between man and nature. Poppy and Sayre have recast this eternal struggle for the 21st century as the curious relationship between man and the obsolescent cast-offs of his journey into the new frontier; or, put another way, they've presented a sideways look at ourselves as reflected in the waste products of our rapid, fast-forward progression and open-armed embrace of technology. Their work invokes nostalgia for an innocent past we never knew we had and offers clues for navigating an uncertain future, all while presenting us with a nervy meditation on the treasures to be found by taking a closer look at the anonymous objects cluttering our daily lives.