

Press release
September 2019

Wyatt Kahn

September 7 to October 20, 2019
39 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012
Opening on Friday, September 6, 6 to 8 pm

Eva Presenhuber is pleased to announce its fourth solo exhibition by the New York-based artist Wyatt Kahn.

Wyatt Kahn's most recent body of work is, weirdly if paradoxically, as tough as it is vulnerable. Working with sheets of lead, oil stick, and shaped stretchers, Kahn constructs what can be considered, for lack of a better term, "specific objects." Neither painting nor sculpture, in the strict sense of the art forms, they are both, and more. The artist's three-dimensional wall works draw on a formal figurative reference, which becomes so abstracted as to take on an obscure semiotic or linguistic complexion. Kahn also considers these "signs" flattened characters based on people from his immediate milieu.

The works are assembled from dozens of smaller, puzzle-like components, which are fitted together to form his image-objects. These small parts consist of shaped stretchers around which he wraps and staples sheets of lead or canvas. Once assembled, the sheets are sometimes left raw, or their surfaces are thickly, if unevenly, striated with monochromatic oil sticks or wax-filled oil paint. The colors chosen initially look primary but, upon closer inspection, are just a bit off. Everything about the work forcibly evokes the presence of the hand: the nuanced construction of the parts to the imperfect wrapping of the lead to the heavy application of the oil stick coloring. Indeed, to the phenomenological frisson of paint applied with a brush to canvas, Kahn responds with the strange satisfaction that accrues from mapping, problem solving, and building. In this sense, for all their seemingly (post) industrial character, the new wall works are intensely human, speaking to the fundamental, existential need to construct and organize space, language, and experience.

It is this salient human quality that distinguishes the work from minimalism and its intention to eliminate narrative through largely industrial production and procedures. As such, Kahn's oeuvre can be more comfortably situated in a trajectory of post-minimalism and its interest in the messiness of materials and process. That said, contrary to the conspicuous muscle behind some of the era's most aggressive works (i.e. Barry Le Va's cleavers and broken glass), Kahn's faceted constructions testify less to the might of his manipulation than to the care with which they are manually fashioned. The subtle imperfections that flow among his surfaces mark the work with an unexpected poignancy and vulnerability. As much could be said about his drawings, which include correction fluid and traces of former failed attempts, in turn investing their surfaces with a certain weave.

In a time when the structure and reduced texture of human experience tend to adhere to ready-made templates and formats (Facebook, Instagram) on seamless, hand-held screens, Kahn's work both speaks to and contravenes this state of things. It does so through constructed-ness, texture, and the objects' just beyond human-scale—not to mention the sheer bulk and gravity of these pieces. These works wield and communicate the special capacity to be rebuilt by every person who experiences them. Given our chronic, technologically-induced distraction, the late modernist strategies of which they avail themselves feel particularly welcome and refreshing: in beholding them, which is a doing, they engender the presentness of anyone who takes a moment to get lost among their rough anfractuosity and maze-like contours.

EVA PRESENHUBER

Wyatt Kahn (b. 1983) lives and works in New York, NY. Recent solo exhibitions include *Variations on an object* at Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Trento (2016); and *Object Paintings* at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2015). The artist was also included in the exhibition *Jay DeFeo: The Ripple Effect* at Le Consortium, Dijon, which travelled to the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO (both in 2018). His work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

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