

Over the last several months I have been looking at the MSU collection from a distance, reading the database entries about works, and looking at the images which accompany them. With each work presented centre frame against a plain background and on a simple plinth as appropriate, these images are, as one of the curators wrote me in an email, intended “for identification purposes only”.

Clicking from one image to another, I’ve been looking at works in succession; each image seen, and read, in relation to those that precede or follow. The position of works in this sequence is not determined by their history, style or medium but from the fact that they have adjacent accession numbers.

In truth, sometimes the works following one another in the collection are linked in some more narrative way. Perhaps they were acquired from the same exhibition and will therefore have something in common. Or they might be works by the same artist, part of a bundle acquisition of an *oeuvre* or an artist’s studio, such as might take place after the artist’s death. Most of the time though, the works that appear next to one another in the database don’t share an explicit connection of this kind – they arrive on my screen in London apparently “at random”, a shuffled pack of cards whose sequence throws up unexpected relations and dialogues.

I’ve long been interested in how we look at things, and how acts of looking are changed through temporality, proximity, and modes of representation. How we look at anything from a distance, how we look at things that are not in front of us; the past, traces, legacies and precedents, material culture, that which is no more. How we read the places we inhabit or move through in real life, and how we read them later as photographs, or as memories. I’m gripped by the question of how we look and what we see, and how these direct acts of looking operate in tandem with more indirect and associative processes of memory, imagination, speculation, wondering.

In my work more broadly I’m preoccupied with different ways of encountering objects – as *things in the world* (present and three dimensional) and as images (“absent” and two dimensional, as well as imagined/invoked). I’m attracted to a paradoxical logic also – considering that images are also *things in the world*, and *things in the world* can also be considered images.

Going through the vast number of database photographs of works in the MSU Sculpture collection, I was aware that I was looking at these objects *as images* while simultaneously trying to imagine them – picture them – *as things in the world*. In that process I found that I was looking for conversations between the works, for equivalences and echoes. Eschewing the narrative, art historical links that might be drivers for a collection categorization, I was instead looking for more personal associations or links, as well as for simpler, more straight-forward connections; the repeated gesture, the mirrored action, the corresponding shapes.

Even though the process prompted me to research and learn about the work, life, and context of artists I was not familiar with, I gave myself permission to make my groupings without reference to their alliances with particular groups, movements, or approaches. Instead, I wanted to focus on the works’ physical and material properties, on visual equivalence or contrast between them, on shapes and lines, on energies, gestures, and impulses, at least in so far as these formal properties could be seen through the particular view and angle of the database photographs.

I started making strands of images, grouping works because – for whatever reason or reasons – I thought they “belonged together” in a sequence. Or, I “made them” belong: clustering all the round things together – heads and globes and balls; all the upright things – figures and tall structures and sticks; all the “blobby” things – undefined presences, at once bodies and soft piles and cocoons and lumps; all the crumpled things or fragmented things – things caught in processes of becoming or forming, or else in processes of coming undone or disintegrating.

*Morphologies*, the work resulting from this research process, is a wall publication of sorts in the form of a series of collages. It’s also a long visual poem, as well as a documentary record of my process, making visible my gesture of re-ordering of a segment of the collection. These horizontal strands of small images – interrupted by the vertical lines of folded paper – might also be seen together as a puzzling timeline, a horizon of forms, a string of polysemic sentences which deploy shapes and flattened objects instead of words.

Photographs not only flatten objects, spaces and bodies into surfaces and pictures, they also eliminate scale, volume, and the temporality of live presence. In the images in the museum database, all objects appear to be more or less the same size. Large, small, and medium-sized things alike are rendered as miniatures, available to the eye as a whole.

In the room it's a different story. Objects are different sizes, and their three-dimensional totality can never be grasped from a fixed vantage point. They invite us to walk around, our entire bodies moving around their bodies; our entire bodies doing the looking.

When I arrived at the museum for installation, encountering objects I'd selected as *things in space* for the first time, I was taken aback with a combination of thrill and surprise. I'd known each work's dimensions from the information in the database, but the feeling of standing next to a work like *Large Tree of St. Sebastian* by Slavomir Drinković, for instance – which towers over you with its massive body and girth – is a relation that can't easily be imagined from looking at the photograph.

Other works I pictured in my mind as larger, or possessing a different atmosphere, than they were when I encountered them in actual space: a dolomite sculpture by Vesna Popržan so small it would have had to be placed under a protective dome; a wiggly piece by Belizar Bahorić that seemed to have a particular roughness, with its spikey metal "arms" reaching out, turned out to have actually a much more friendly presence "in person."

Working with the sculptures in the gallery, differences in scale between pieces play out in performative ways – in respect of their connections and differences from each other, and in respect of my own presence in their company as I'm installing. Questions of why sculptural works have been brought together, and how they have been organized, are played out here not in "clean" linear trajectories of the wall-based *Morphologies*, but in complex spatial relations between objects in the three-dimensional space of the gallery.

I've taken some liberty in respect of the artworks, deploying them in the new relations they inhabit for this show, reaching for the insight that comes out of playfulness and mischief. Indeed, my hope is that the groupings I have made on the wall and in the room – lines and clusters – might invite us to look at these pieces anew. To look more closely and to be guided in our looking not only by that which we know about these particular works – from culture, from art history perhaps – but also to wonder about that which we don't, to see them also *as things*.

The dynamic fragility of the arrangements I've made using images and sculptures in *Good Company*, echoes my sense that the structures we use to categorize the world on a daily basis are equally provisional and open to question. Encountering these objects and images together in their clusters and lines makes me think about questions of affinity and belonging, about order and disorder, as well as about the criteria and framing that guide every act of grouping, organizing, and connecting in the world we inhabit.

As well as the artworks on display here, my hope is also that the show might prompt us to think again about what-we-know-about-things-about-which-we-think-we-know-everything; about bodies and heads and spheres and boxes and lumps of earth. To think about and "question our tea spoons", to quote George Perec, and as he says in the same essay, "to question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us".

If I place a human figure next to a sail, and a sail next to a house, in a puzzling meeting of seemingly unrelated things, I find that I am not only looking for connections between them along the lines of formal qualities or physical similarities, wondering about what makes one *like* the other one. I am also beginning another process – that of considering the figure *as a sail*, and a sail *as a house*. In this way, the procedural game of ordering things based on formal properties – similarities and contrasts – gives rise to other readings; narrative speculation and rethinking, the blurring of realities and "what ifs": the generative question of what is what, what belongs where, with whom, and for what.

These to me are also political questions of course; questions of belonging, of community, of sharing space and standing together, in good company, on an unstable ground.

The exhibition is part of the *Triggers* cycle, in which invited artists engage in a dialogue with works from the Museum collections.

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