

SHANZHO

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MICHAEL JOHANSSON

Objects Subjected



to
 pack,
 to stack,
 to pile, to put,
 to collect and organize,
 to fit and economize, these
 are the games most of us act out in our
 everyday lives. Michael Johansson repeats these
 actions in the gallery and the museum, the professional venues for
 collecting and exhibiting. At first glance the sculptural work look funny.

They are color coordinated, and the carefully organized objects have an air about them, which is part efficiently serious and part absurdly foolish. The piled objects often point to a certain time in history, where these colorful industrially produced materials signaled a brave new world and were designed for functional and aesthetic purposes, and to thoughts and ideas prevalent in the period after the second world war when it came to design and what impact good design, new materials, and functionality could have on society. The objects carefully stacked and packed also point to certain people, like mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles. Piled and put in improbable constellations, these objects also comment on what meaning they have in contemporary society, either as antiques and remnants from the past, or as functional objects that are plain and mundane. From the design classics and chance finds at flea markets and auctions, to contemporary classics that you can find at convenient locations such as Ikea, Johansson utilizes an array of materials. When using a well-known brand name such as Ikea, which represents a cheap and efficient way of life and has become an international supplier of good design at a low cost, Johansson comments on the continuing Swedish social democratic ideal of Folkhemmet and how these ideas, inherent in the design and brand ethos of Ikea, are spread and recognized in increasingly more countries across the world. Johansson himself is a Swede and an avid collector and a very efficient stacker, but as we continue our musings on the colorful and cheery sculptures, we will find something more serious hiding beneath such shiny surfaces, which pretends to be playful and uncomplicated. Johansson tries desperately to make sense of the chaos of collecting and displaying, which is today's tricked out version of hunting and gathering, perhaps a way to simulate and deal with our primal instincts to collect, amass, survive, in order to achieve status, good taste and a well-organized life. There's also a hint at another skill set, not just hunting and gathering, in Johansson's work. He's crafty. Very crafty. There's something macho about some of the objects found in the stacks, like tools, cans of paint, boxes of nails and other objects used to improve our habitat and also used to create the immaculate space of the white cube, exhibiting the tools of the trade so to speak. Institutional Critique, as practiced by a number of contemporary artists, expose the hidden structures of the museum and gallery and speaks to the operation of those spaces and their supposed objectivity and autonomy. Some of Johansson's work fulfills the function of Institutional Critique by using tools and equipment found in the gallery space, effectively hindering some of the day to day activities of the gallery or museum, but it is the confluence of social critique and absurd humor that is Johanssons forte. The convergence of the ordinariness of the domestic and the extraordinary and heightened purpose of the artwork in the exhibition, Johanssons work speaks about the principles of organization in society and the way in which objects function and are amassed in consumer society, and what value they have. The objects might be arbitrary, but the surrounding systems aren't.

Geir Haraldseth



"Oops, I did it again...", 2005

Dimensions: 4 x 2 x 10 m
 Flea market, social space, objects

PART 1

As many as it takes

I am fascinated by flea markets. Walking around to find doubles of seemingly unique, though often useless objects I have already purchased at another flea market, is not only an inquisitive activity for me but part of my working process. Despite the fact that I did not have any use for most of these objects in the first place, the unlikely ness of discovering them twice in two different places makes the desire for their possession irresistible. The unique and the unknown origin of the object increases my wish to own its double. The rules compelling me in selecting things at flea markets are also central to my art practise.

Engaging directly with these objects, manipulating them, juxtaposing them against each other or representing them in a new context is my method of work. Through out my different explorations of the potentials of my collection of found and acquired things, one has been to free objects from their function. By forcing these objects into contexts in which their functional qualities are put into opposition with their field of application, the objects are stripped of their meaning for existence. "He ain't heavy, he's my brother", 2005, is one example. The stack of bathroom scales balancing on top of each other, puts measuring weight as the original purpose of a scale in connection with the force of gravity and cancels out the function.

Following similar methods my interest has been in creating work that manifests itself between deliberate exaggeration, and seemingly accidental situation. As in "Vi hade i alla fall tur med vädret" (At least the weather was nice), 2006, a caravan was filled to its limits of capacity with camping equipment, all the windows were fully covered with objects, one showing a crack from too much pressure. The work confronted the viewer with a situation that could be perceived as a very odd incident or as a carefully put together set.

Packa Pappas Kappsäck
(Pack Daddy's Suitcases), 2006

Dimensions: 1.5 x 1.5 x 1.2 m
Suitcases





He ain't heavy, he's my brother, 2005

Dimensions: 1.6 x 0.4 x 0.4 m
Bathroom scales

Next spreads:

*Vi hade iallafall tur med vädret
(At least the weather was nice), 2006*

Dimensions: 3 x 2 x 2 m
Caravan, portable coolers, ice packs, sun chairs,
camping equipment, thermoses, etc.

*Fyrahundra nyanser av brunt II, 2010
(Four Hundred Shades of Brown II)*

Dimensions: 2,5 x 2.8 x 2.5 m
Wooden furniture





PART 2

A box inside a box inside a box

I am intrigued by irregularities in daily life. Not those that appear when something extraordinary occurs, but the kind of irregularity that is created by an accidental form of regularity. Same colours or patterns on two different objects, two people passing each other dressed in the same outfits, a parking space packed by only red cars or discovering that an actor is playing two different roles at the same time when switching between TV channels. These instantiations of irregularities, or coincidences, provoke another focus in my practise.

“He had been packing all night”, 2005, is a work following simple rules of replication. Five rectangular masses, the same shape and size, sit in a row. Each structure follows the pattern of the previous structure, but each shape is made up of more and more individual boxes – the first mass is a single box, the second two boxes, and so on. The idea is similar to the Russian doll, but in this case it's the outside format that constitutes the unifying factor throughout the series, not the fact that they fit inside each other.

Platsspecifikt (Particularly placed/ Placed particularly), 2007, suggests that situations that might appear normal, random or even chaotic could carry an underlying structure. The piece which was made for the premiere exhibition in a transformed tool shed, reminds the viewer about the previous function of the space. The carpenter bench was located in the middle of the room defining the limit of stacked objects that were beneath its shape. The everyday articles were altered into a sculptural form, encouraging the visitor to visualize the tool shed as it was before.



*Han hade packat hela natten
(He had been packing all night), 2005*

Dimensions: 4 x 0.6 x 0.4 m
Boxes, bags



Dagar och Namn
(Days and Names), 2010

Dimensions: 0.7 x 0.6 x 0.25 m
Archive system, folders, binders, slide projector, telephone, etc.

Right page:
Doppelgänger, 2010
Dimensions: 0.5 x 0.6 x 0.7 m x 2
Red furniture, red objects





Monochrome Anachron, 2008

Dimensions: 1.3 x 1.8 x 1 m
Brown furnitures, brown objects, glass objects

Next spread:

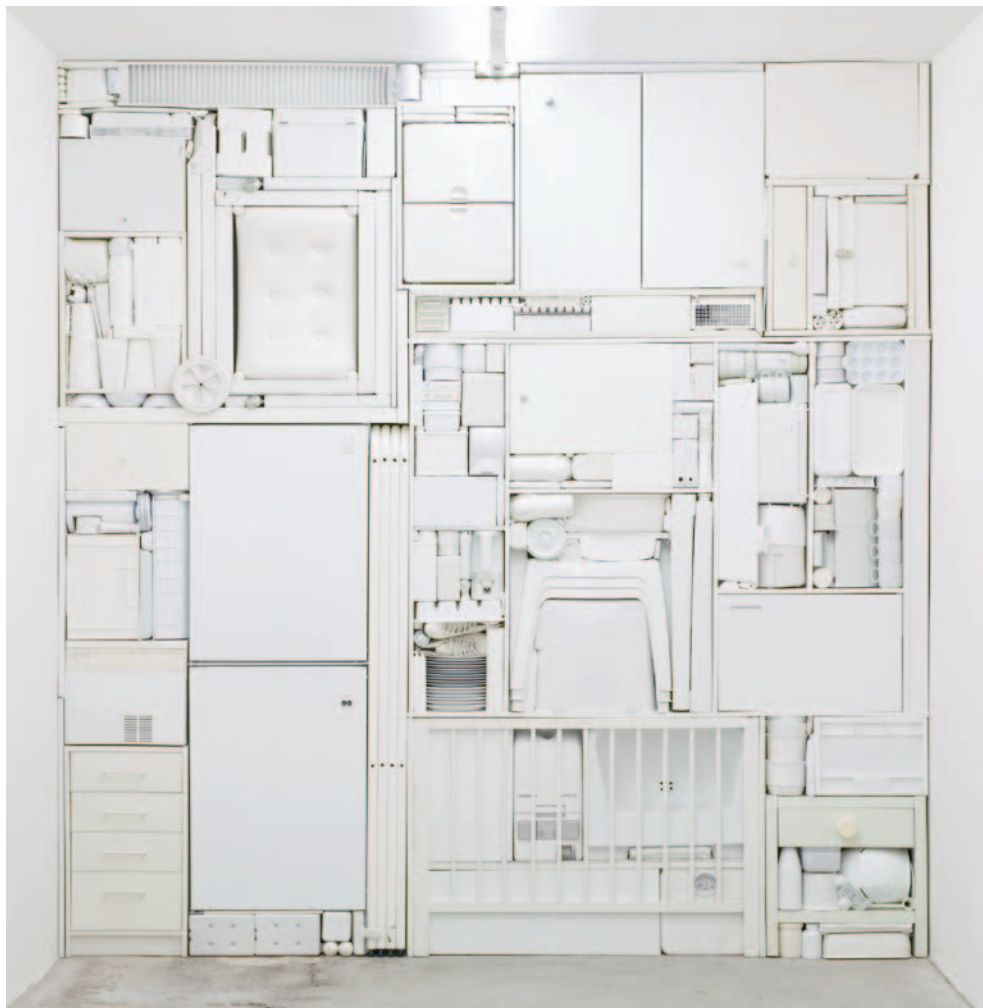
Strövtåg i tid och rum (Strolls through time and space), 2009

Dimensions: 0.6 x 0.8 x 0.6 m
Armchair, books, bags, boxes, radio, clock, etc.

Bleka Minnen (Faded Memories), 2009

Dimensions: 0.6 x 0.8 x 0,55 m
Armchair, books, boxes, cameras, radio, etc.





Ghost II, 2009

Dimensions: 2.9 x 2.9 m
White objects





Mind the Gap, 2010

Dimensions: 0.6 x 3 x 0.35 m

Cool boxes, sun chairs, picnic tables, swing, garden equipment, etc.

Left page:

Self Contained, 2010

Dimensions: 8.2 x 10.8 x 2.4 m

Containers, caravan, tractor, Volvo, pallets, refrigerators, etc.

PART 3

Set to zero

Objects gain their value through the situations in which they are placed, in other words what defines the value of an object is not the material it is made from or the function it serves but is defined by its position in a context. It might be that an originally worthless object becomes invaluable due to its unique status or that a costly mass-produced article is considered worthless almost immediately after being purchased. But it might also be that by reconstructing the settings for an item you change its context and therefore its value, setting it back to zero.

In a series of site-specific works, I used the material found in the backrooms of the exhibition spaces where the works were put on display. The objects that were used in the construction of the installations were morphed into the works as their elements and therefore part of the usual activities of the exhibition space was set to zero. The strict sculptural shape “tipi”, made for Konsthallen Trollhättan 2007, caused some complications the day before opening, since the ladder usually used to correct lighting was no longer possible to use.

For an exhibition at Gallery Arnstedt & Kullgren I carefully filled one of the two passages between the exhibition space and the garden with objects related to outdoor activities. The access to the garden was transformed to a schematic idea of a garden. The size of the bigger objects set the standard for the smaller ones, and at the same time the smaller objects constituted the fundament for the larger ones. The front of the sculpture presented a precisely stacked unit, but the backside revealed the disorder and broke the illusion of perfectly fitting objects.



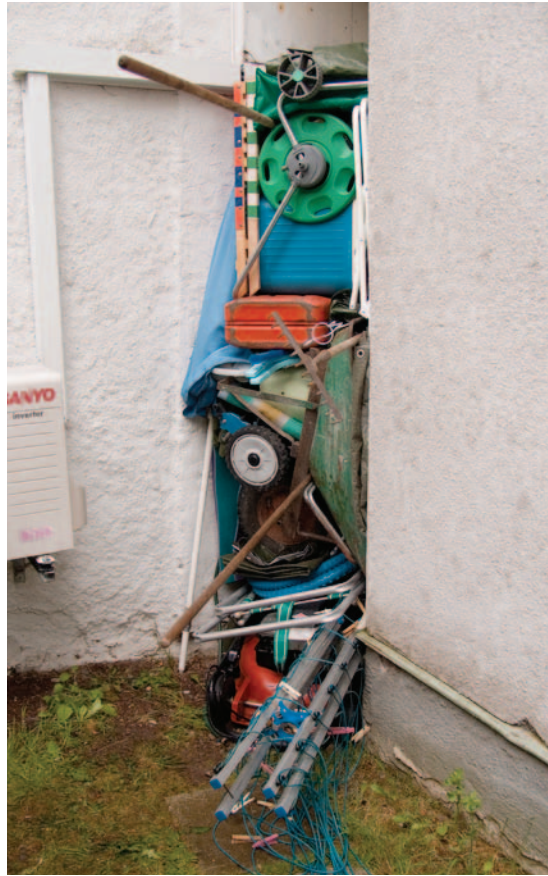
Garden Pack, 2008

Dimensions: 2.1 x 0.6 x 1 m
Lawnmower, wheelbarrow,
garden equipment, etc.



1,5m², 2008

Dimensions: 1.9 x 0.8 x 1 m
Objects from the storage room
at 21m² Stavanger (NO)



Garden Pack, 2008

Dimensions: 2.1 x 0.6 x 1 m
Lawnmower, wheelbarrow,
garden equipment, etc.



1,5m², 2008

Dimensions: 1.9 x 0.8 x 1 m
Objects from the storage room
at 21m² Stavanger (NO)





Cake Lift, 2009

Dimensions: 1.4 x 5 x 0.8 m
Objects from the storage room at Århus Kunstbygning (DK)

Next spread:
Tetris - Liljevalchs, 2009

Dimensions: 4.7 x 1.7 x 0.6 m
Objects from the storage room at Liljevalchs Konsthall (SE)





Triptych, 2010

Dimensions: 8 x 2.6 x 4 m
Objects from the storage room at
Galleri 21, Malmö (SE)

Tetris - FACT, 2009

Dimensions: 2 x 3.2 x 1.5 m
Objects from the storage room at
FACT Liverpool (UK)



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Thanks to c.cake

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