



# How Does When: An Interview with Heather Mekkelson

TUESDAY, NOV 22, 2016

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For a long time, Heather Mekkelson produced elaborate installations, combining found and fabricated materials to stage disaster's aftermath—plane crashes or floods, for instance. I wrote about *one such installation at a former apartment gallery*. In the last few years, however, Mekkelson had a profound shift—moving away from disaster source material in favor of more abstract assemblages that reflect upon astronomy, astrophysics, and the task of human consciousness to locate itself. Mekkelson is a multidisciplinary artist working primarily in sculpture and installation. Born in New York, raised in dozens of East Coast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwestern locations, she is currently based in Chicago. Her work has been exhibited in group shows in galleries and institutions nationally since 2001; it has been featured in *Art Journal*, *Art21 Magazine*, *Artforum.com*, *Artnet*, *Flavorpill*, *Hyperallergic*, *Newcity*, and *Time Out Chicago*. She has been the recipient of several fellowships and grants including the 2012 Artadia Award. Mekkelson is represented by 65GRAND. This interview was conducted as part of a month-long

series of posts, featuring artists who are contributing to The Green Lantern Press' 2016 fundraiser, *New Age Now*.

**Caroline Picard:** *Do you see a difference between fabricating objects and finding objects?*

**Heather Mekkelson:** I give the same amount of working-through to the found components as to the fabricated. In this way, I don't place a difference between the two as I'm making a piece. The platform I build from is a neutral, non-hierarchical ground. Everything is equally material. When a found object is incorporated, the residual "thingness" it imparts to the final piece is a purposeful index—I welcome it. In those instances, where a found object isn't everything I'm looking for, I will fabricate a component that resembles the original but improves upon it. It's a very fluid categorization for me.

**CP:** *I want to say that the disaster-oriented work inspired an almost implosive feeling, whereas your work now feels very expansive. Does that make any sense to you?*

**HM:** Yes, in two ways. First, it resonates when I think about the sources of these two bodies of work. Consider the force of destruction in a disaster event. The natural energy that creates that moment builds by looping in on itself, focusing all of its effort on a localized area, leaving in its wake a specific field of fragments. My current body of work departs from that past, localized energy and turns our attention to a potential, expansive one. Envisioning the what-could-be is almost like its psychological countering effect...To go from staring at the tangible on the ground, to lifting your head up to the sky.

Second, in terms of time. Time depicted in the disaster work was like a temporal hiccup. The installations were frozen snap-shots of one precise moment in linear time. In the current work, I question time in and of itself—if it even exists. If it does, it reaches everywhere, simultaneously and in more dimensions than we can measure. So instead of the question, when did this event happen, the question is, does "when" even exist?

**CP:** *How do you question time in sculpture? Is it a matter of changeless-ness? In Northwest Africa Via Mercury, for instance, there are multiple temporal registers—the salad bowl has one lifetime, the rock another, the tape, and then the paint evokes star time, but I feel like the intersection of those registers might be what you're getting at...?*

**HM:** That is the question!—maybe an impossible one for me to answer, but nevertheless, the one that challenges me. It does have to do with a certain "changeless-ness" in that sculpture is stubbornly based in form. Using a medium that results in a blatantly physical, obdurate thing seems antithetical to expressing a formless concept such as time. It's a wonderfully daunting task. I have noticed, using assemblage in particular, that each component does a lot of the temporal work on its own. Whether the object is recognizable or not, it carries its own potential, its own history. Then my associations come into play. Likewise, with symbolism and metaphor. It could be the fusion of these that allows the sculpture to dance on multiple registers at once.

**CP:** *What role does intuition have in your work now? And has that changed over the years?*

**HM:** I view intuition as a separate source of insight, rather than something that is driven from experience. Like an internal oracle providing guidance beyond discursive or immediate knowledge. In most of my previous work, matters of source material, justification, and rationalization mediated the role of intuition. With my work now, I have even more research going into it, but intuition has become the paramount rationale for exploring theories about the universe and the unseen, sometimes incomprehensible forces in our universe. Giving it free rein, intuition is the tool that allows me to simultaneously bypass and encapsulate plain intelligence to target the essence of a thing.

**CP:** *What is the relationship between one's intuition and one's aesthetic?*

**HM:** I think aesthetics are derived from instinct—very different from intuition. Instinct exists in reaction to the external world whereas intuition is a force emanating from within. To expand on that; if intuition comes from unconscious/subconscious/preconscious knowledge crystallized into a thought, instinct (and in this case aesthetics) comes from previous experiences and tangible, sensorial impressions. This isn't to say that my aesthetic choices don't surprise me! Only that I trust those decisions come from the accumulated physical intelligence of working in sculpture for this long.

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