

Mitchell Anderson in conversation with Katharina Wendler

Email Zurich / Berlin, September 2020

KW: What will you be showing at Haus Wien and what brought you to make this selection?

*MA: Plymouth Rock will be presenting a sequel to an exhibition it presented in Zurich in 2018, *Five Anonymous Readymades*. Plymouth Rock operates on an extremely tight budget and we typically refuse invitations to participate in short term projects outside of Zurich. We were looking to do the highest quality presentation with the clearest possibility of a perfect install, when we can not be onsite, at the most efficient economic point.*

KW: If I understand correctly, Plymouth Rock is a project space that you are running. How long have you been doing this and how did it come about? Who else is involved, and which artists did you decide to show at Haus Wien?

*MA: Yes, Plymouth Rock is a project space. I have run it by myself since early 2014 and I probably started it because artistic peers, whose work I found interesting, weren't having exhibition opportunities in Zurich, Switzerland or elsewhere and I wanted to see these exhibitions happen. The artists in *Five Anonymous Readymades* were never revealed and this will continue with the sequel. They represent a cross section of nationalities, prominence and age groups – all have a connection or an interest, in some way, in existing images and objects in their work.*

KW: Would you consider yourself an artist, a curator or both?

MA: I consider my artistic practice separate from the curating work I do. Plymouth Rock is a hobby, similar to if I spent the energy on joining and participating in a sports club: it's fun, it triggers interesting conversations with like-minded people and when you do a good job you drink some beers with friends and do it all again next week.

KW: I would call it a rather unconventional approach: to present works by artists whose identity remains hidden (by choice), when oftentimes the artist's name is somewhat more important than the work itself. Is it your intention to bring the focus back to the individual artworks? Are you a keeper of secrets? Is mystery an aspect of importance in your own artistic practice?

MA: My own work is centered around the narrative capacities of objects and images, the weird ways that we as a civilization embed stories into things. But I also am critical of the romanticism of believing that objects hold an aura. So, the project is really about bringing together artists that work in this way and removing the personal aspects or built up aspects in their career that often help us decipher sculpture in an exhibition space. Can a readymade really work without any supplementary support? And there is none in this project. No title. No medium. No artists.

KW: Are you critical towards gate-keeping in general? (as in: a sociological approach to describe exclusiveness and power-relations in the art world)

MA: Sure. Maybe I'm interested in bigger topics in my own work. But who gets to show what useless luxury object in which white room is something that all spaces comment on. Plymouth Rock exists because I feel a need to show art and ideas that aren't being shown or promoted. The nature of showing something that isn't being shown is critical of existing gate keepers.

KW: *Does this interest to shed light on art/objects/people/phenomena that otherwise go unnoticed reflect in your own artistic practice?*

MA: Yes, I think it reflects. I'm interest in the ways we as humans find ways to embed memory in the inanimate.

KW: *It seems you draw from a number of sources, oftentimes using found material and everyday objects that are themselves comments on (American) society: card decks, video tapes, and the like. On the other hand, you work with embroidery, a rather classical and very time-consuming craft. How important is process of production in your work?*

MA: Medium has content has well. Sometimes a pure readymade does the job, at other times having 3000 manhours visible in an image, done by hand has one. I'm looking for efficiencies.

KW: *When is an art work 'efficient'?*

MA: When no wasted labor has been added to satisfy romantic ideas of artistic practice.

KW: *And how does one run a project space most efficiently?*

MA: By removing those same ideas of romanticization. If something has a chance of being shown elsewhere there is no need to chase it. The job is done and that is great. Plymouth Rock is about opportunities that don't exist elsewhere. Every show we ever did happened because no one else locally, nationally or internationally saw a need for it. The space is really about finding work that must be shown, is not, and showing it.

KW: *That sounds indeed efficient. But what about taste and – for lack of a better word – passion for the art that you present? Like all relationships, I doubt that our relationship with art is always easy. (Or is that even too romantic a question to answer?) :)*

MA: Of course, it happens that there's work I see and I know I shouldn't like it, or it goes against "rules" I have in my head of where art should be heading. There's probably nothing more efficient than giving that show to see what that passion is, if it can hold up and where that will take you.

Mitchell Anderson (born 1985 in Chicago, USA) lives and works in Zurich. Recent solo exhibitions include Fondazione Converso, Milan (2019), Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich (2018) and Fri-Art Kunsthalle Fribourg (2017). Since 2014 he has operated the non-profit project space Plymouth Rock in Zurich. He is a frequent contributor of essays and criticism to a variety of international arts publications.

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Katharina Wendler (born 1988 in Hamburg, lives and works in Berlin and Weimar) is an art historian and exhibition maker. She studied Cultural Sciences and Psychology at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg as well as Art History at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and the University of Iceland. From 2013 to 2017 she directed the project space Safn Berlin/Reykjavik and since 2014 has realised and coordinated numerous exhibitions, publications and other projects with German and international artists. She currently works as Curator of the Bauhaus University Gallery and Artistic Associate at the Faculty of Art and Design at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar as well as a freelance curator and writer in Berlin.

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In early 2018 she initiated the exhibition format *in conversation with*, that takes as its goal to bring people into conversation and thus into collaboration. Artists are invited to enter into dialogue and to develop an exhibition from it. The conversations are formulated into texts and serve to accompany the exhibitions as text material. They enable the visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the working methods of the artist and their artworks.

in conversation with is based on the assumption that artists themselves are best able to provide information about their works, their working methods, their ideas and inspirations. One simply needs to ask.

Exhibition

Das Haus

September 21–27, 2020

Haus Wien, Kobelgasse 3, 1110 Vienna

<https://haus.wien/>