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## ARTCARDS Review

### [McKeever Donovan at Important Projects](#)



by [Craig Smith-Dermody](#) on December 2, 2011

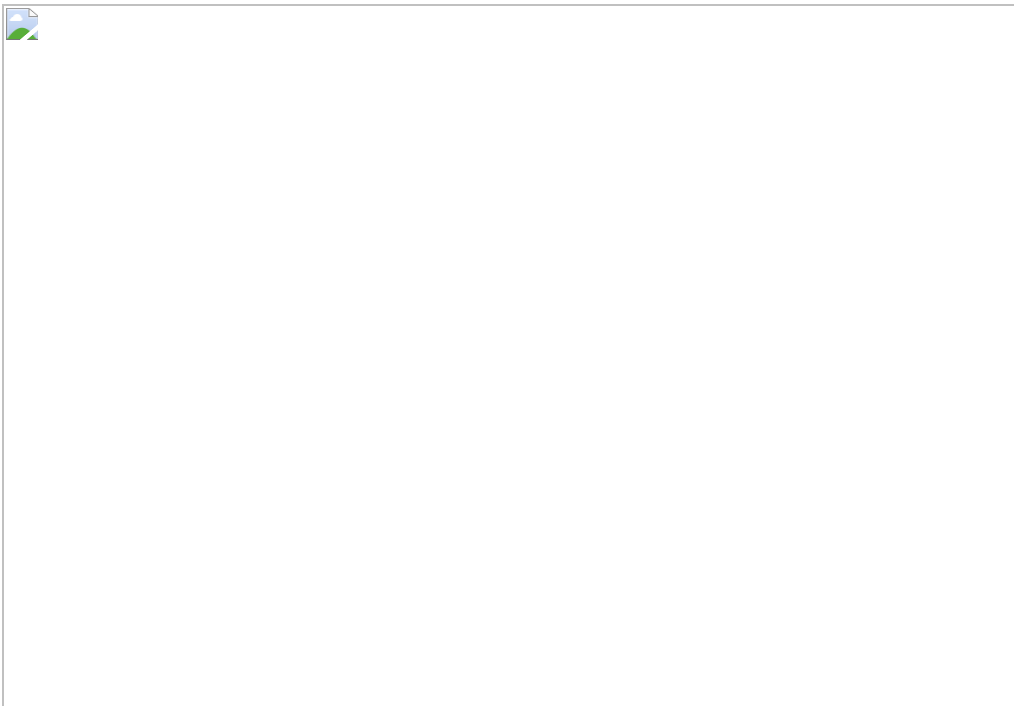
Once when I was a kid, I decided to rub two magnets along the surface of my mother's computer. The technological myth proved true and her hard drive was wiped completely. In similar form, McKeever Donovan's *New Work* explores the affective capacities of seemingly empty decorative archetypes. Donovan utilizes this space to provide the simultaneous conception and exploration of a blank slate from which his compositions emerge.



The on-paper layout of the show is as modest as the aesthetic of its comprising works. Small magnets float on the surface of three framed monochromes. A sculpture comprised of metal tubing rests on the floor atop two bath mats. The color options are equally basic. Khaki, indigo, grey, primary blue and red; a dominant presence of utilitarian décor reinforces an investment in aesthetic accountability. Donovan's this-and-not-that approach to material selection provides a grounds for divorce from the immediate ready-made coding of the hardware store vocabulary, enabling closer engagement with the virtual-rendering capacities of its signified(s). Monochromes and bath mats serve as ground for the material gestures of magnets and tubing. These gestures mark identity and form within their respective decorative grounds, wresting affective impact from formal composition.



Bath mat or monochrome? Red or blue? For the wall or the floor? Aesthetic utility is as interchangeable as it is mutable. This concept is particularly exemplified by the last piece in the show, a small grey monochrome. Similar to its aesthetic kin in format: brushed acrylic on metal monochrome in a white frame, magnets and drilled holes arranged on top. But in this case, the compositional logic has been expanded upon. Two small black strips of what appear to be torn construction paper interrupt the uniformly brushed texture of the framed surface. The compositional integrity of the construction paper proves humorously impotent within the work as a whole. It functions only as a reiteration of the already established monochrome image. A decorative gesture within an already decorative space; equally textural, and equally empty. Rather than marking the space of the sculpture itself, the black marks simply bleed into the decorative ground on which they are inserted. The viewer is reminded of exactly what's in front of them; a monochromatic space reinforcing the essentially empty presence of a decorative allusion.



But there is a playfulness at work. Magnets obstruct the historically meditative capacities of the monochrome. A literal placeholder, its efficacy is held at bay to its new function as a refrigerator door for material gesture. The humor within these faux utilitarian gestures points to something else; a folly of sculptural purposelessness. Wikipedia yields the following on the subject:

*“In architecture, a folly is a building constructed primarily for decoration, but either suggesting by its appearance or some other purpose, or merely so extravagant that it transcends the normal range of ornaments or other class of building to which it belongs.[1]”*

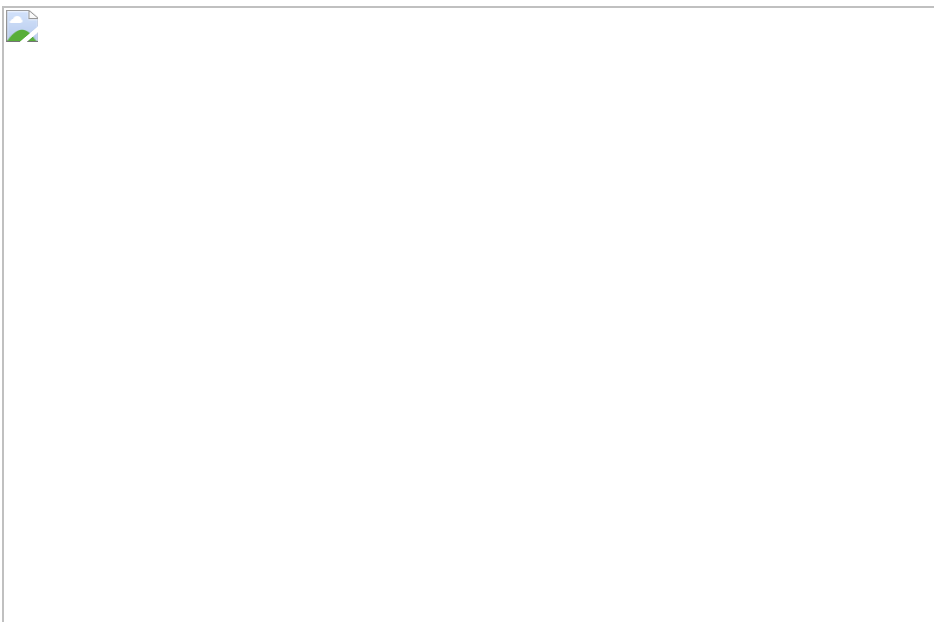


A common strategy throughout the show, utilitarian ornament serves as Donovan’s architecture of folly. We are shown one object, arranged in such a way that it transcends its historical archetype, suggesting ulterior function. In this light, the grey monochrome presents an absence of the hand in plain sight. An understanding of its authorial function collapses the handcrafted earnestness of its comprising materials. The form of the monochrome image becomes humorously interchangeable, and in turn, its material integrity is rendered cold to the earnest guise of its immediate presence; as shallow and empty as the bath mat resting on the floor beneath it.

Though I was oblivious to it at the time, when my Mom’s hard drive was erased, something else happened. With its contents lost forever, the status of the original machine was turned back to its material constituents; an empty shell of plastic and metal. Folly is the sculptural apparatus that wipes out the original coding of ready-made utility. It provides an implication of ulterior function to the work that suppresses immediate interpretations of its surface level form(s). The refrigerator door becomes virtual ground. There is no framed picture, only a sign pointing elsewhere. We don’t know what it’s made out of, but we believe what it says.



So how can this functionality be engaged in such essentially shallow territory? How do you explore the core of what you know to be hollow; dig for meaning when there's nothing beyond the surface? Donovan's solution is neither looking past, nor through, rather aiming our focus at what's on top: gestural marks, magnets, holes, and tubing. Their physicality and compositional authority feels less solidified than their respective grounds. There is a lack of strength to their bond(s) with the grounds on which they rest; a soft hand to their semi-permanent arrangement. The gentle hold of the magnet, the tack welds of the metal tubing; just enough effort to hold the thing in place while we take a closer look, but lacking just enough strength to allow a sense of singular result. These are gestures of reflective impermanence. Their soft materiality gives way to the presence of a recombinant logic; a multitude of *compositional possibilities*.<sup>[2]</sup> This multitude is the vehicle that allows the mobility of each gesture within the virtual space of its ground. Charged and waiting to be reorganized, these objects rest on the surface of monochromes and bath mats. Compositional geography becomes obsolete. They mark their respective grounds less like lines in the sand and more like parked cars; simultaneously signifying placement with the potential for reorganization.



This multitude is manipulated and utilized as a gestural whole when placed in juxtaposition to a folly of decorative archetypes. Magnets reactivate the shallow surface of the framed monochrome by bringing to light the inherent dimension of attraction. In similar fashion, the khaki tubing renegotiates the decorative void of the bath mats. Vast and malleable, a virtual space is formed, and composition is but a decentralized multitude within it. A reflexive, recombinant sea of possibilities; the shallow becomes the ideal ground for operative interpretation. Lines don't stick, they float; meaning doesn't stop, it rests.

-Craig Smith-Dermody

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[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folly>

[2] see Brooke Sinkinson Withrow's press release

[Uncategorized](#)



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• [Scopophilia @ Matthew Marks Gallery](#) »