

ADAM JOHN MANLEY

Adam John Manley grew up in an industrial lakeside community in the southern foothills of the Adirondacks in upstate New York. When he had a chance to escape to college in 2001, Manley was ready. He was eager to soak up the diversity and relative cosmopolitanism of SUNY New Paltz, a Hudson Valley college filled with students from across the state and all five New York City boroughs. Manley planned to pursue writing without knowing quite what it meant.

In the second week of school, two hijacked airplanes crashed into Manhattan's Twin Towers, a day that changed all our lives but was felt acutely and personally in the city and its environs. Global politics smashed into their lives and Manley turned to political science and international relations seeking a framework to make sense of what had happened. "College changed my life; I was not very good at it, but I just soaked up a lot." In his junior year, Manley added a minor: art.

His first class was jewelry making; it wasn't his *métier*, but he enjoyed the process. Then a friend suggested he take furniture. Manley's father was a woodworker and carpenter and his mother a weaver, so he had "the privilege of knowing what it meant [to work with your hands]. I showed up in the woodshop and there was this crew and they were there every day. They locked the door behind them! I think I fell in love with it from the minute they gave us a block of wood to try out different gouges and rasps and stuff. The feel of it...was awesome."

Falling in love with a course of study can be kismet, synchronicity, the alchemy of a particular group of students at a given moment in time. Watching Manley one afternoon, the instructor told him, "You're a natural at this," and for a young person who hadn't been quite certain what he was good at, this feedback resonated. In his last semester the tech handed him a flyer for an assistant position in a nearby shop. For the next four years he worked for furniture and cabinetmaker Josh Finn. With clients and deadlines and the work of project design, management, and fabrication, Manley soaked up learning. He was soon able to focus his energy fully on the work with Finn, who filled in the gaps between furniture design and fabrication with kitchen cabinetry builds. "We would do a project where I was sitting at the bench cutting dovetails, but then we would build a kitchen and then go frame out the house. I was learning all the different levels of accuracy that there are," he explains. "In my work now I reference all of those levels. I like to work kind of rough sometimes, and the area between hyper-focused detail and rough framing is my sweet spot."

Manley shared a studio space with six other artists, which made visible two distinct paths in wood: one in business and construction, and the other in the arts. In 2007, he took a class with Eck Follen at Haystack Mountain School, an experience that made visible the world of woodworking as art. He left Haystack and applied to San Diego State University, then-headed by iconic educator and artist Wendy Maruyama. At SDSU Manley did little outside the woodshop. He loved it and made long term connections that have shaped his personal, creative, and professional lives since.

Artists Allen Wexler and Ellen Schwartz Wexler came to campus as visiting artists, offering a workshop on site specificity that was brief and impactful. A rapid-fire series of prompts that took students out of the studio to make spatial interventions all over campus continues to stand out.

He would give us these prompts like, "Go take a half hour and find a site you'd like to create something." We'd come back and we would sketch and draw and then he'd say, "You have an hour to make the thing; we're gonna critique it at three

o'clock." And we'd go out and do it. That idea of thinking about how you can alter someone's experience in a place and space was born there [for me].

The questions of how we connect to objects and experience place through both our individual experience and shared cultural history has fueled Manley's work since. He often inserts ordinary hand-crafted objects in settings where they are unexpected, the juxtaposition prompting surprise, delight, and perhaps discomfort. "These objects carry meanings on multiple levels...How can it change the scene it's in and how can the scene change your experience with that thing?"

Manley wants people to ask questions about the objects they live with and around. Those objects have implications, histories, and context. From the functional to the decorative, the banal to the horrific, someone made them. "Making them visible and thinking about where they come from and what they mean is a big part of my goal." For example, Manley loves sawhorses, the kind we find in the shop, and the kind used to demarcate road construction or guide pedestrian or vehicle traffic. Banal and utilitarian, they can shape our movements in public space; though not a meaningful physical barrier, most of us adhere to their constraint.

Manley also uses unlikely mashups, object juxtapositions both sensible and nonsensical, and makes large format photographs which position his sculptural work within a language of performance. A sawhorse with a giant bubble level appears on the roadway adjacent to the US-Mexican border. A neon sign reading "Waterfront" with arrows pointing in both directions is mounted at the top of a hand-fabricated wooden surveyor's tripod. The photographs show it in sites as disparate as the coast of Maine and the desert Southwest. Outside of their intended context, he says, viewers are asked to reconsider use, materials, and aesthetics.

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If Manley could do just one thing, he admits, it would be music. It provides an immediacy that no other art form can mimic, and the spatial and human demands of performance mean it changes every time. As someone who dabbles in playing but is a serious listener with wide ranging appreciation, he would like viewers' experience of his work to reflect what music can do.

I like this really sort of spacious music. [Take] Brian Eno; that moment right before he gets really ambient, there are these great instrumentals. I love that kind of open sound. He often would do these repeated things that just faded away and I'd be left just humming it and wondering where it goes next, but also being completely satisfied by it. I think that that's my hope. I'd like if I can get someone to walk away and be like, rotating that thing around in their head again for a while. That's where I feel like I've succeeded.