

ARCADIA EXHIBITIONS presents

PERPETUAL INVENTORY

A RUMINATIVE INSTALLATION BY
SCOTT KIP

SEP 3 – DEC 15, 2024

Gallery Notes

Fully occupying the 1100-square foot space of the Spruance Art Gallery, originally an electric power station (constructed in 1894), *Perpetual Inventory* capitalizes on the building's utilitarian architecture, including its 33-ft. high ceiling and the exposed web of steel trusses supporting its tile roof. Advancing this Philadelphia-based artist's work both as a sculptor and producer of installations, the project invites visitors to explore a sequence of enclosed corridors built at different elevations in the gallery. Constructed using a combination of new as well as repurposed wood sourced from sites in Philadelphia¹, these linked chambers and passageways guide visitors to various viewing stations, each of which provide optical access—via mirrors or apertures—to enclosures displaying tableaux of objects from throughout Kip's life.

Kip likens the experience of *Perpetual Inventory* to that of walking through the door of an abandoned building found ajar wherein, as he has stated, “the anxiety of trespass is pitted against the urge to explore.” He has also compared the project to discovering discarded boxes on the sidewalk filled with the belongings of a stranger, a potentially voyeuristic encounter shaded with intimations of mortality. Considered together, these two descriptions only begin to address Kip's method of devising uncanny interior spaces—hybrids of architecture and display furniture—conceived to stage our apprehension of biographically resonant objects.

The experience begins with a stairway at the gallery entrance guiding visitors up to a landing where they will find what Kip refers to as a “ruminative mirror” positioned at eye-level on a wall above a magnifying glass mounted to a metal bar incised with numbers from zero to one hundred in increments of ten. When viewers slide this magnifying glass along the engraved bar, they send the mirror gliding either forward or back and at various angles to convey views of what he has called a “warehouse of the unconscious,” a diverse array of items layered chronologically from the present to fifty years into the past in strata, not unlike an archaeological site.

Motivated by his desire “to make a space where curiosity and exploration are rewarded but not required,” Kip invites viewers to proceed toward subsequent stations. These include a rubbing of the peepholes in the door of Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (1966), the opacity of which proposes an exception to the optical access provided by the work's other apertures. Another station on a lower level introduces a second mirror suspended from a track that viewers can manipulate to frame reflections of what Kip calls “Expired Symbols.” Like most of the items that comprise the installation, each can be seen by viewers from alternate angles and distances, a process activates their own memories of these items while inviting them to consider their relationships with analogous materials in their own lives.

Perpetual Inventory marks the third time that Kip has invited viewers to consider his collection of personal artifacts. The first was “Transitional Objects,” his 2015 installation at Marginal Utility on the second floor of 319 North 11th St.² Noteworthy for its resourceful, if not disorienting application of this relatively small venue, the installation encouraged visitors to climb ladders and negotiate tight, dimly lit passages that stopped certain viewers from proceeding while nonetheless eliciting forms of haptic inquiry. Kip's 2018 project at Penn State Abington, *The Enchanted Hunter*, featured a selection of different autobiographical detritus in a space that was approximately ten times smaller and encountered on a single, horizontal circuit. *Perpetual Inventory* dramatically expands on both earlier projects, not only in terms of scale but in complexity and scope.³ The phrase “perpetual inventory” also proposes that Kip might add or adapt the collection of objects once again if given the chance to create another installation in the future. The project at Arcadia thus suggests a monolithic, ongoing life work, an extended, if not oblique self-portrait that is ideally suited to its evolving contents.

The installation at Arcadia also builds on Kip's *Illuminated Structures*, an earlier body of sculpture he began in 2008. Resembling maquettes of industrial architecture and devoid of the personal memorabilia that characterize Kip's more recent installations, each example was painstakingly constructed from wood and presented on pedestals positioned in the manner of “tunnel book” to allow an individual viewer to occupy a central point from which to look both forward and backward. As such, they strived to serve as a model of time inspired by concepts in T. S. Eliot's 1936 poem *Burnt Norton*⁴, which Kip has committed to memory. The precise alignment that distinguishes the *Illuminated Structures*—in one case assisted by a red thread held taught through a set of three—evokes the geometry of light that is critical to *Perpetual Inventory*.

In addition to the work's “Ruminative Mirror” and the row of “Expired Symbols” is its “Inventory,” a booklet available in the gallery featuring an annotated list of many of the items in the installation along with an appendix of newspaper clippings regarding the history of 319 N. 11th St., where Kip has spent half of his life. These articles about previous occupants and enterprises going back the 1920s demonstrate that the building has never been under conventional forms of corporate control and has sustained an exceptional character unique to Philadelphia. These clippings propose an objective, collective record in relation to the subjectivity of Kip's first-person entries about his belongings, which are noteworthy for not being available as typical exhibition labels. This gap between the objects and their descriptions encourages open forms of engagement as well as critique. While it is possible to consider the personal components of Kip's warehouse in universal terms, they also confirm the deep connection that all artists have with their tools and processes, helping to blur the difference between work and life and distinguishing Kip's project as a sculpture that, as he has stated, is attempting to be about “everything that ever happened to me.”

Kip's practice has been informed by skills gained working as a cabinet maker, machinist, and clockmaker, including his 18 years as a restoration woodworker and technician for the five-story Wanamaker Grand Court Organ as well as his work maintaining the Philadelphia City Hall Tower clock and the lodges at the Masonic Temple. These vocations have given Kip intimate access to a variety of non-public spaces whose instrumental utility has helped to preserve their original construction and materials, properties that also lend Kip's work its enigmatic presence. As he has stated, “I like to use materials that look like they have a history. There is a type of beauty that cannot be created and I go to great effort to find and store materials that have it.” The idiosyncratic quarters in which Kip has operated, along with his expertise crafting reproductions of 19th-century display cases for the Mutter Museum since 2010, have helped to cultivate the tone and tenor of his work.

Construction on Kip's project, which was conceived as both a residency and installation, began the first week of June allowing him the extended access to the gallery that he and his helpers needed to realize the project. Special thanks to Greg Biche, Melanie Bilenker, Jonathan Buchanan, Tim Day, Rob D'Amico, Yona Davidson, Christina P. Day, David Dempewolf, Steven Dufala, Emily Elliott, Iva Fabricant, Adam Franklin, Phil Jackson, Paul Etienne Lincoln, Annette Saggiomo, Justin Shellenberger, and David Spolum.

The project is curated by Richard Torchia and supported by a grant from Edna W. Andrade Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation.

NOTES:

1) Most of the bead board used in the installation came from the Episcopal Cathedral in West Philadelphia. Woodshelving from a derelict grocery store near Kip's studio served as another generous resource.

2) It was Kip who first contacted the owner of the building, an address that has become significant to Philadelphia's art community and whose 6th floor remains Kip's studio. The hand-painted sign with the landlord's phone number is one of the objects on Kip's inventory.

3) This includes the addition of a passageway on the work's ground floor that can be accessed upon request.

4) *Burnt Norton* is the first poem of Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

– Richard Torchia
Guest Curator

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Scott Kip (b. 1974) attended University of the Arts (1995-1999) where he majored in Craft/Furniture Making. He began to exhibit in 2008, initially focusing on his *Illuminated Structures*, model-like sculptures installed in precise alignment, which became the subject of his 2010 Wind Challenge exhibition for the Fleisher Art Memorial. Subsequent development of these works led to solo exhibitions at The Flux Space (2008), Marginal Utility (2012), The Delaware Contemporary (2014). His first full-scale installation, *Transitional Objects* (Marginal Utility, 2015), was followed by a more compact, portable variation, *The Enchanted Hunter* (Penn State Abington Art Gallery, 2018). Kip's work has been enthusiastically reviewed in *Title Magazine*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Art Papers*, *One Review a Month*, and on multiple occasions in *Artblog*, which gave Kip its 2015 “Liberta Award” for *Transitional Objects*. Kip was in residence with the Asian Arts Initiative in 2014 and has facilitated projects related to clock mechanics and mechanical music at Temple Contemporary, Drexel University Art Gallery (Bower Bird Productions). Additionally, he has maintained longstanding affiliations with the Wanamaker Organ, The Mutter Museum, and the City Hall clock, and the Masonic Temple. From 2011 to 2015 he taught in the sculpture department at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He has been nominated twice for a Pew Fellowship in the Arts in 2012 and 2013.