

Allison Wiese

Untitled, 2002–ongoing



Handmade wooden doorstops; Installation diameter approx 45cm

Allison Wiese began stealing wooden doorstops in 2002. The accumulation of these hand-made, pragmatic, but inexpensive objects forms what is currently “a slow-growing pile, about 18 inches across.”

Atopia Projects: Why doorstops, and why steal rather than make them?

Allison Wiese: The project started as an improvisation. There were doorstops spread throughout the building I was working in, and I took them all into my studio and made a pile out of them. I really like them as objects, but there was also a major effort in the building to keep doors routinely closed (however inconvenient) in order to pass an impending fire inspection. So I was able to see the first phase of the project as either a benevolent or a mischievous act, depending on how I looked at it.

The piece started with an act, and the sculpture was evidentiary. It never occurred to me to make the doorstops. While I suppose I could mimic the appearance of weathered/distressed wooden wedges, and create the illusion of a “collected” pile, it couldn’t have happened that way, and it wouldn’t serve my interests.

There’s something about the theft that is as interesting to me as anything else about the work. The transgressive behavior is important. So are: gradual accretion; a concrete and compulsive “trophy” collection gathered from institutions; and the funny implications of this multiplication of an everyday object: there are a lot of closed doors around the country.

One part of me thinks this is the cranky, and possibly sick, behavior of an artist wrestling with the limits of art’s actual power, influence, and place in the world—a sort of poltergeist reaction.

Also, each doorstop theft is a small nearly insignificant nuisance act. But like a door-wedge, it leverages something larger. The project irritates my ethical judgment repeatedly. After all, the thefts violate community spirit, and may inconvenience people I care about or share space with, albeit a little at a time. It’s so wrong. And I know it. Lately I’ve been trying to find examples of ritual transgressions or clinical compulsions to relate it to. But I’m probably trying to let myself off the hook as much as situate the work. Is this some kind of secular antinomianism? Or just mild kleptomania?

What precedents are relevant to this work?

I haven’t conducted a survey of sculpture created through serial theft. Tom Friedman’s *Hot Balls* comes to mind, but that piece seems almost as much about the title pun to me as the method of creation. I also figure there’s something different about stealing items of limited use (cheap toys) and stealing something handmade and regularly employed like a doorstop. I don’t know if I’m helping or hurting my own case as a good citizen or artist by pointing that out....

How does this work relate to your other projects (conceptually and in method... do you have other ongoing projects or are there other ways in which theft or appropriation connect in direct or oblique ways to your practice as a whole)?



I'm as interested in creating sort of dumb, literal relationships—a kind of concrete sculptural poetry with the ready-to-hand—in the world as I am in making images. I guess this may be a pretty fussy distinction for anyone looking at the piece who wasn't implicated in the theft somehow, or doesn't see the pile grow over time, but it's important to me.

Several recent projects of mine have depended on borrowing banal stuff and recontextualizing it. I've often employed a simple strategy of displacement – both of material through space, and ideas through time. In an untitled work from a couple years ago, for example, I had a pallet-load of Valencia oranges shipped to a Houston gallery, where they were displayed in a pile during a summer exhibition. I saw it as a reverse Steinbeckian narrative, where imagery from a utopian fruit-crate came east to rot out-of-season.