



Behind the Scenes

LA-based artist Amanda Ross-Ho on
studio mess, real fakes and holes.

INTERVIEW & INTRODUCTION
FRANCESCA GAVIN

Stepping into an exhibition by Amanda Ross-Ho is like stepping into a conceptual version of an artist's studio. Sometimes that 'studio' is the site for careful choreography and super-enlarged everyday objects, at others, messier, chaotic collaged studio walls are covered in the patina of art grime. Behind her work there is a strong sense of intellectual rigour and a desire to get to grips with how life marks the space around us. Born and raised in Chicago, Ross-Ho studied at the city's respected School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), before heading to Los Angeles to complete an MFA at the University of Southern California. She has exhibited everywhere from Melbourne to Brussels, including a solo show at MOCA in LA titled *Teeny Tiny Woman*. Though her work is largely sculptural, collage and object-based, Ross-Ho made her name as an artist with her incredible reworking of photographic elements. Here the DIY manuals and throwaway images of the everyday are charged with new meaning. Ross-Ho is an artist who liberates the photo from the page, one shot at a time.

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OPPOSITE: Amanda Ross-Ho, *Untitled Dropcloth Painting (DIRTY RAINBOW)*, 2013.
THIS PAGE: Amanda Ross-Ho, *WHO BURIES WHO*, 2014.

What are you currently working on?

It's usually a circus over here. There are always a lot of things happening in the studio that aren't dedicated to projects—there are a lot of on-going productions. There's never any rest, which is how we like it. At the moment I'm actually completing a couple of things for art fairs and I'm working on an exhibition for Paris, which will take place at the end of March, at Praz-Delavallade. It's going to be a very different set-up. And I'm working on a really large public project for New York in the summer, through the Public Art Fund. It's an interesting balance of the intimacy of working in the studio, and then working with fabricators.

The studio pervades your work. The idea of handmade-ness. Why is this so important to you?

I've always been interested in the idea of focus and heightened attention. I moved to LA [in 2004] and the studio became my surroundings fulltime. I describe the work sometimes as local reporting. It's literally where I am all the time, so it's a lot about locating these sorts of universal ideas in things that are in my immediate surroundings. I've been very interested in the way that production creates an aesthetic in and of itself. Spending long periods of time in a physical space, and the impact of my own activity—how it actually absorbs into the space, how the tendencies of the objects in the room start to be revealed. There are not only formal interests, but also some indications of watching closely the way a state is affected by this process. Seeing

the works in the studio is kind of an interesting redundancy. The moment of export is the moment where it has become a project. It's really about this idea of translation into another field of vision.

You've used the concept of grime and mess and dirt from within the studio. We create these fantasy ideas of what an artist's space is like, but I actually have no idea what yours actually resembles.

It's a large warehouse space in downtown LA I share it with my partner, the sculptor, Erik Frydenborg. The two of us have had the building for about five-and-a-half years. It's in a former denim factory so it's pretty spacious. There is a lot of mess down here, but the mess factor is less about being chaotic and more about the fact that certain things need to stay in the space for a long time to develop; I think of it as an almost geological pace. Elements of former installations that have come back, they're sitting in the space and kind of becoming a thing. Some of the individual works sit in the space for a very, very, long time to kind of absorb the patina. There is an ecosystem of sorts that is set up to allow things to occur.

I've been making these sheetrock pieces for many years now, they are wall fragments that are simulated moments of the studio. They're a theatrical version that is invented. That is a fiction. They are based on close focus and watching the way that the studio wall actually accumulates. They are almost still life observational surfaces.

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THIS PAGE Amanda Ross-Ho, *Periphery Composition With Basket of Dead Brushes*, 2010.
OPPOSITE Amanda Ross-Ho, *Aperture (Throw)*, 2010

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What do you like about that playing around with what is real and what is unreal—the fictional, a simulation of reality or of a medium or a craft?

It's almost like testing the boundaries of something in both directions. Looking at a studio wall and thinking about what it means as an artefact. What if I invert that? What parts of it can still hold? Making something that is very intentionally a replica is less about simulation and more about understanding that original chance mark. It is why I've become hugely interested in the idea of the prop. When I first came to LA I did quite a bit of prop-making. There's a materiality to it, but a vessel is really a conceptual endeavour. There's an aspect of freedom to it. It's really about setting up a situation for how I like to think, and then moving through not just my space but also the world.

Some of your more recent works feel like stage sets. What interests you in extending the idea of the theatrical?

I love to direct the entire experience, whereas individual objects have logic. My favourite way to work is to build an environment where you can connect and see things. I think about language a lot, and the work being this language that is continuously being built. The main form in the last show at The Approach was from a found image from a funny, banal source—a photograph from an interior-decorating book from the mid-eighties. The image is a basic white mask that is projected into several different lighting conditions to demonstrate how light affects objects in a space. I was really taken with that image because it has this larger poetic implication in terms of ideas of mood, ideas of comedy and tragedy,

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theatre, and so many funny crossover things. I love the idea that it's from this very simple source and it's not intended as a poetic image. I increased the scale. Hyperbole is something I use so much because I'm so interested in ideas of how transportation can change the rate of things. So there is very much a stage presence to a lot of things that I make.

Hence the oversized T-shirt works, giant gloves and martini glasses.

They're amplifications. It's like turning the volume up on something and allowing an intimacy with something that is very familiar.

You often include a lot of photographic found imagery in your collage work, from manuals to amateur compositions and tabloid imagery. How do you find these images and what draws you to them? Are you interested in the history of photography?

Yes, definitely. When I started mining images and incorporating them into pieces, I was thinking about a very broad hierarchy of sources—the idea of the tabloid versus a vintage book or the internet, all of these different databases of imagery. The idea of flattening them into plains so I would find individual elements and combine them into one surface. The collaged works end up being these crystallised moments of looking at something incredibly disparate, and yet there's a way in which it's all connected. The images—a lot of times I'll mine them and have them in stacks or bins or drawers. They're everywhere. They also play the role of this heightened cultural information. They act as data. I have vast files on my computer of digital imagery. Maybe a decade ago, close to the advent of Google searching, that became a really important methodology in the studio. Of course it's shifted so much in that period of time that your access to imagery is different.

The discovery of imagery feels more policed or structured now.

There is so much filtering, which is necessary, but it's an interesting change. There was a period where it just felt limitless and unmanaged. There was this wildness to the very early moments. We have a lot of resources here of vintage books. The books mostly talk about giving access of information to general viewers. Like taking a picture or performing a craft, so that how-to imagery is very interesting as formal information. I've always been excited about that.

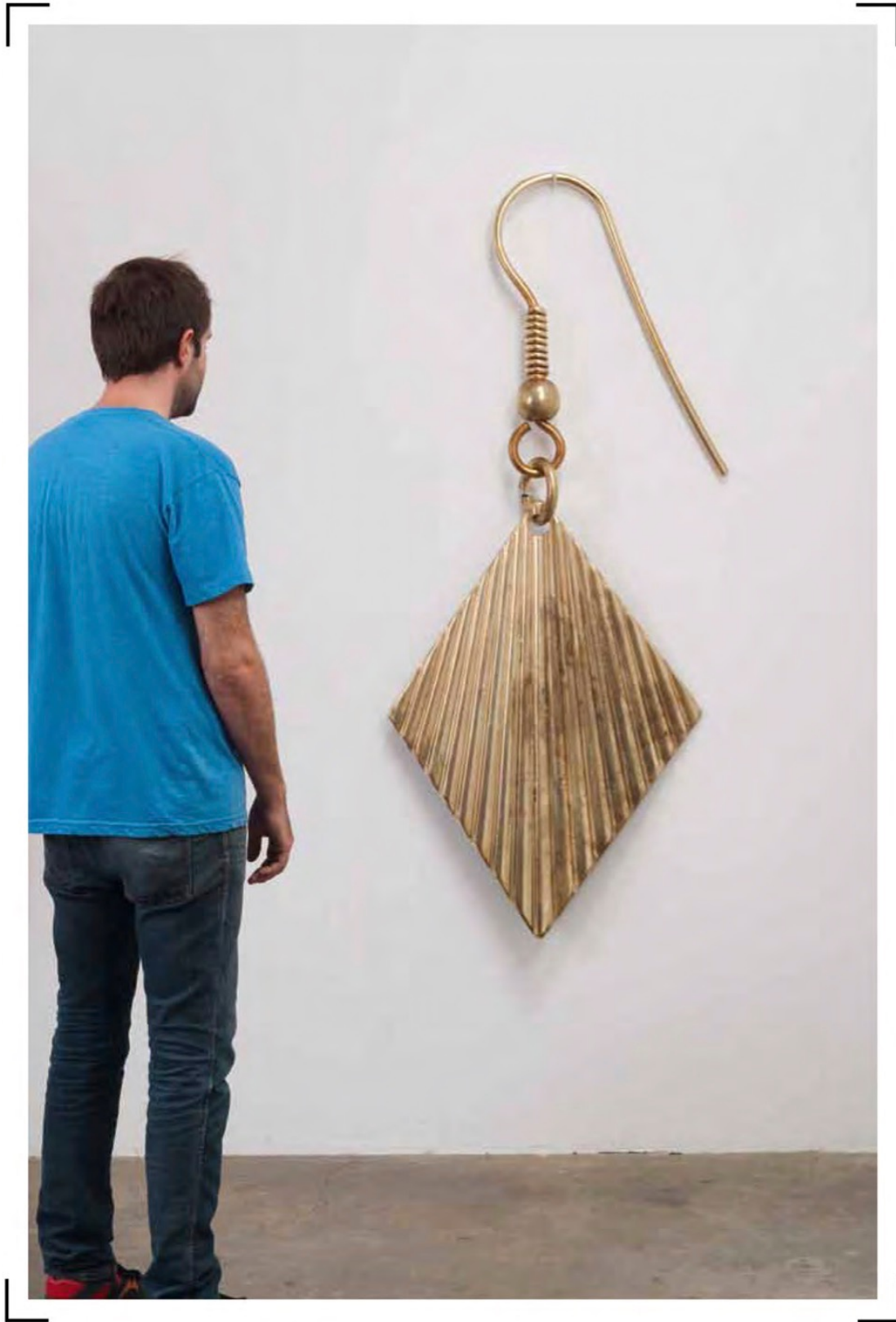
Your early simulated macramé pieces drew on that.

Yeah, definitely. I haven't done those for years and years. Those really came from a moment of thinking very hard about translation. I was finding these textile manuals from the Sixties and Seventies and pulling those macramé images out, digitising them and then projecting them, drawing them, painting them, and hand-cutting them. So the process was really very laborious, which has a relationship to the original production of the textile.

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OPPOSITE Amanda Ross-Ho, *SKIES THE LIMIT (LEAVE ME ALONE)*, 1998-2009
THIS PAGE Amanda Ross-Ho, *Tarnished Diamond C.*, 2013

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Amanda Ross-Ho, *Cradle of Filth 2*, 2013

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Amanda Ross-Ho, Untitled Dropcloth Painting (WINTERSCARF), 2013

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Do you want to tell me a little bit about holes—whether it's ripping holes out of the wall, spaces within the painted pieces, the drop cloth works. What do you like about things that are holey?

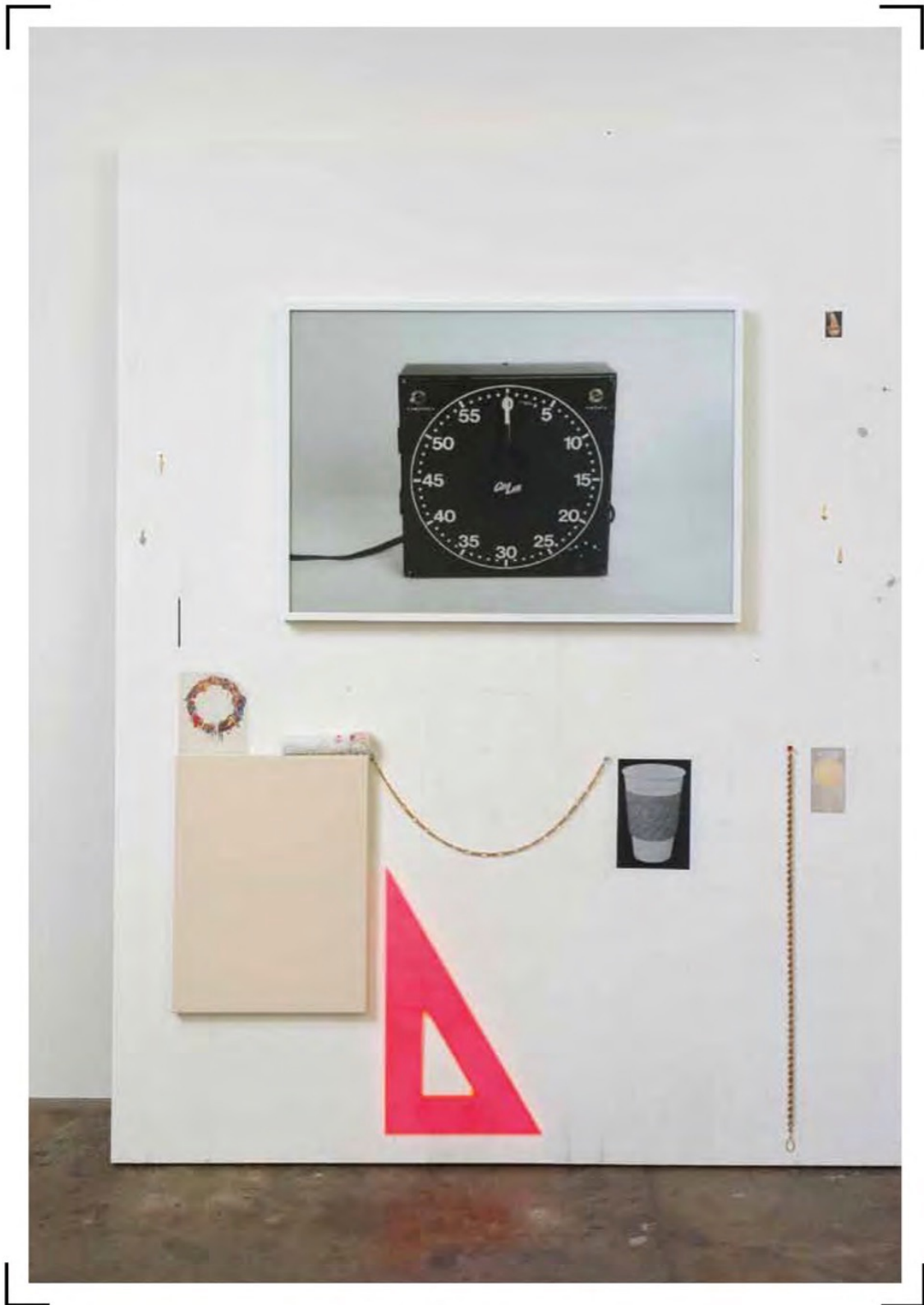
I think for a very long time I've been interested in the basic idea of negative space, the presence of that absence. What are the possibilities of that? I'm also interested in this basic inversion of subtractive processes, meaning making something via a subtractive action rather than an additive action. In this kind of psychic way it's about things that are opening rather than closing, or end points or stoppages, or moments of closure.

What do you like about the banality of everyday objects, such as wine glasses and paint pots and coffee cups, within a conceptual high art context?

Those things operate in this moment of familiarity. I started to notice that bobby pins and rubber bands were all over the floor in our studio and apartment. They are these tiny little things that occasionally get knocked off the table. They're small and you forget them and they float around the floor. They're really these things that continuously play a role in our everyday existence, which I amplify. Not everything warrants that relationship. I think that the selection of those things comes from a moment of discovering intimacy. That became this perfect moment to talk about the very personal relationship that I have with these basic things. To bridge a universal relationship as to how people have relationships to their things too. The work is really meant to promote a heightened attention to your surroundings in general. For me it's all about understanding, and ways of working, so the work is meant to ask people to look at things slightly more closely, as silly as that sounds.

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OPPOSITE: Amanda Ross-Ho, *Vertical Dropcloth Quilt (JACK IN THE PULPIT)*, 2012
THIS PAGE: Amanda Ross-Ho, *Untitled Wall Arrangement (TIMER)*, 2012

All images are courtesy of the artist and The Approach, London

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