

## Evan Holloway's Analog Counterrevolution

*Ralph Rugoff*

Since he first started exhibiting in the late 1990s in Los Angeles, Evan Holloway has produced some of the most compellingly intelligent and inventive sculptures of his generation. He has also made drawings, collages, photographs, sound works, and videos – all interesting in their own right – but his main artistic activity has been creating discrete, free-standing objects with a scale in the general ballpark of the human body. Like a number of other artists working during this same period, he has playfully and critically revisited and reworked various legacies of modernism, often in ways that are laced with unpredictable and incisive humor. Far more acutely than most of his peers, he has also looked into how art can model and question basic social transactions, as well as how it can lead us to think twice about the limits of our ability to represent and accurately comprehend both our own experience and the world in which we live. A lively skepticism courses through his art, and while it never quite veers into smart-ass territory or biliousness, it regularly skewers with pointed and deeply felt doubts some of our basic assumptions about how we produce meaning and knowledge. Towards that end, his work often cleverly probes the fault lines of our perceptual habits, both physiological and psychological. This can lend it a mischievous character at times, but Holloway's work tends to be unusually generous in its address: it finds new ways to expand, rather than contract, our role in the different conversations in which it engages us.

If asked to sum up the most distinctive traits of Holloway's

art, I would enumerate three aspects: its exuberantly heterogeneous character; its ingenious layering of ideas and allusions under a deceptively makeshift veneer; its inspiringly eccentric physical form. And perhaps into that last category we could also shoehorn his apparent lack of self-censorship – his willingness to make objects that look utterly awkward or strange or even embarrassing on some level because they so thoroughly depart from accepted conventions, or even recognizable arenas, of contemporary sculpture.

Holloway has himself spoken about his work in ways that, without wishing to sound grandiose, might reasonably be covered by a term like "the aesthetics of resistance" – resistance in this case being directed toward our market-friendly tendencies for facile consumption and glib interpretation, as well as our penchant for camera-ready slickness and spectacle. At a moment when digital production has become the cultural norm and many sculptors have their work fabricated, Holloway's practice of working directly with everyday materials comprises part of what he has termed his "analog counterrevolution." He drives home that agenda with low-tech, wonky modes of construction that imbue many of his objects with a jerry-rigged, slightly precarious air. Far from flaunting an illusory purchase on eternity, his sculptures often look decidedly provisional. It is worth noting that this stands in stark contrast to the aura of professional detachment, at once elusive and complacently self-reflexive, that characterizes so



Richard Stankiewicz  
**Untitled**  
c. 1959  
Iron and welded steel  
29½ × 16½ × 14 in | 75 × 41.7 × 35.6 cm



Bruce Nauman  
**Collection of Various Flexible Materials Separated  
by Layers of Grease with Holes The Size of My Waist  
and Wrists**  
1966  
Aluminum foil, plastic sheet, foam rubber, felt, grease  
3 × 90¼ × 19¼ in | 7.6 × 229.2 × 48.5 cm

much post-conceptual sculpture from the past 20 years. By comparison, the odd or ungainly physicality of Holloway's work can seem almost abject, or even slightly goofy, which for arbiters of appropriateness in high art is ultimately far more disturbing. (Abject art, however visually un-seductive, can at least look "serious," while that is clearly much more of a stretch for "goofy.")

Consider this partial list of the materials he has used over the years: bacon, batteries, burnt cookies, office carpeting, tree branches, incense, pickles, Styrofoam, tires, plastic dolls, and concrete. These are not exactly the kind of media that we routinely associate with high-end contemporary art. Yet the humble materiality (which is at times provocatively pushed to the point of ridiculousness) of Holloway's objects, coupled with their whacked demeanor, is central to his aesthetics of resistance. It helps to disrupt our rote consumption of the work by leaving us unsure as to what exactly we are looking at. Or more precisely, it leaves uncertain *how* we are meant to be looking at what we are looking at, since the usual reassuring cues that connote, say, "conceptually sophisticated art," or "formally rigorous art" – those implicit benchmarks of worth that define (and are defined by) a particular community of art consumers – are conspicuously absent. Never seeming to take itself too seriously, his work pulls the rug out from under our familiar (consensus) evaluative criteria, leaving us to rethink what we value in art. This is not simply a matter of Holloway impishly wishing to make us feel uncomfortable (in a long tradition of artists putting the screws on their audiences), but is also a way of drawing attention to the social underpinnings that shape our judgments of art.

The heterogeneous character of Holloway's art feeds into this dialog. Drawing on funk assemblage as well as Conceptual art, Minimalism as well as home crafts, his approach displays a remarkable formal as well as conceptual elasticity. It shares affinities with the work of figures as diverse as Bruce Nauman, Ree Morton, 1960s junk sculptor Richard Stankiewicz, Louise Bourgeois, and Mike Kelley, and, more generally, with some of the performance objects made by various Fluxus artists. Following no single trajectory, his art asserts contradictions and disparities at every turn. It overlays unrelated aesthetic and semiotic systems to create the metaphysical equivalent of moiré patterns. In different works, Holloway might pair irony and sincerity; craft and craftiness; systems of organic growth and mathematical ordering. These competing and colliding elements jam up the smooth functioning of our faster mental shutter speeds. They encourage us to slow down and take the time needed to sift through, track and assimilate the various streams of aesthetic and conceptual crosstalk in any given work. They resist facile, one-glance readings.

The streak of deliberate amateurism that runs through his work, meanwhile, may seem to indicate a reluctance to behave like a gallery-oriented "professional" artist. In this respect his

approach bears an affinity with the democratic ethos of early West Coast Conceptualism, as well as funk assemblage. As with those Californian forebears, Holloway's lo-fi approach often serves as a means for breaking down, or at least questioning, the conventional (and institutionally sanctioned) distance between artist and audience. Instead of prompting us to regard its technical accomplishments with awe or reverence, his work encourages us to respond more in the manner of a potential collaborator. Indeed, perhaps the salient attitude of his sculpture (if sculpture can be said to have attitude) is its seemingly liberal interest in us, and in the nature of our mutual encounter. This is evident in the invitation that it extends, occasionally somewhat wryly, for our physical interaction. Most sculpture, of course, offers us a chance to walk around and inspect it from different sides, but Holloway frequently takes this a step further by making works that require us to perform actions like bending over and looking up, crouching and peering into recessed compartments, or dropping a coin into a slot and listening to the racket it makes when tumbling down a metal chute. He has also made sculptures that incorporate distorted reflections of our limbs into their skeletal structure, or which engage us in disarming optical experiences that are triggered by the movement of our eyes and our position in space.

While none of these gestures toward the audience are especially radical in and of themselves, they all form part of Holloway's program of messing with the generic scripts and assumptions that shape our typical encounters with art. On one level, works like those discussed above can make us more self-conscious about our physicality, and how we occupy the space that we share with the objects at which we are looking. But the "performative" response solicited by these works also underscores the fact that interpretation is itself a kind of performance, rather than a simple receiving of preexisting meanings. Holloway continually, and inventively, reminds us that the significance of an artwork is not limited to its appearance, but also involves the way in which a particular object behaves in a particular context, and what it asks from us.

Holloway first conspicuously explored some of this territory in two works from 1997, *Smell Oven* and *Drum Box*, neither of which is primarily "visual" in its mode of address. The former consists of a box-like plywood structure that houses a hot plate used for heating up a frying pan of bacon. An exhaust system draws the pungent smoke out of the box and discharges it, via a venting duct, outdoors. Anyone encountering the work in the gallery could tell (from the sounds of frying, and presumably from the list of materials on the accompanying wall label) that bacon was being cooked inside the wooden cube, but was deprived of its familiar smell, which was perceptible only to people who remained outside the building. Local passersby and residents, in other words, were treated to the sensory aspect of *Smell Oven* (but not the knowledge that it was intended as part of an artwork), while faithful gallery-goers could only



**Smell Oven**

1997

Wood, FRP panel, hardware, glass, rubber glove, foam, hot plate, skillet, bacon, galvanized ducting, duct tape  
Box: 48 × 36 × 36 in | 121.9 × 91.4 × 91.4 cm,  
Dimensions variable



**Drum Box**

1997

Wood, sand, egg crates, hardware, clamps, carpet, soundboard, foam, wire, wiring, drum kit, drummer  
Exterior: 96 × 96 × 96 in | 243.8 × 243.8 × 243.8 cm;  
Interior: 60 × 60 × 60 in | 152.4 × 152.4 × 152.4 cm

access the work's conceptual structure. Dividing its audience into "insiders" and "outsiders," *Smell Oven* implied that our experience and interpretation of art, far from being universal, depends in large part on what social group we belong to.

For *Drum Box* Holloway constructed a heavily soundproofed, miniature music studio (approximately 5 × 5 feet or 1.5 × 1.5 meters in its interior) with just enough room for a drum kit. A performer would pound out a deafening drum solo inside the work, but "viewers" in the gallery would only hear a muffled and seemingly far-away rumbling. On one level, then, the work created an illusion of distance, an auditory equivalent of forced perspective. At the same time, it also ironically revisits "experiential" installations such as James Turrell's *Soft Cell* (1992), a soundproof and lightproof closet-sized room designed to focus its user's awareness on bodily sensations. Whereas Turrell's primary interest lay in opening "the doors of perception," *Drum Box* engineered a formal separation, excluding the audience in order to highlight the contingent nature of our interpretations of objects and situations, which, depending on our cultural position, can generate very different meanings.

With these two early works, Holloway seemed to draw, in part, on the rich history of Los Angeles-based artists making performative objects – a history that includes the likes of Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelley, and Jason Rhoades, all of whom had roots in performance art. But Holloway's approach focuses more directly on the audience, specifically engaging with the contextual and social character of our interactions with objects. It is an approach that the artist has continued to develop in myriad ways ever since, including in a pair of works made the following year, *3-Part Sculpture* (p.170) and *7-Part Sculpture* (both 1998; p.171). In the former, three vertical L-shaped aluminum structures are linked by curving bands of reflective metal, and topped by narrow sheets of colored Plexiglas. If you stand in the "right" place, the work engages you in a kind of funhouse performance: the curved metal bands reflect a foreshortened, inverted doubled image of your legs (so that your feet appear on top as well as on the bottom of distorted-looking limbs). Conjoining physical and illusory space, the work incorporates our own structural supports – our legs – into one of its vertical elements. In *7-Part Sculpture*, each of two facing aluminum structures supports a reflective band that curves out to a middle support made from five roughly hewn blocks of eucalyptus wood. Warped reflections of the wooden stack (which on its own might recall sculptures by artists ranging from Brancusi to David Nash) appear in the bowed panels of metal on either side, like illusory columns. Juggling tropes from Minimalism, Op art and Light and Space installations, both works stage a rhetorical clash between constructed oppositions like "organic" and synthetic or "virtual" space. With their piecemeal and provisional appearance (each work looks as if it could be dismantled



**Left-Handed Guitarist**  
1998  
Styrofoam, plaster, paper, graphite  
63 × 61 × 52 in | 160 × 154.9 × 132.1 cm

and folded up in a matter of minutes) never resolving into a coherent stylistic "whole," they pointedly reflect on the heterogeneous foundations of sculptural experience.

Holloway set up another kind of play between physical and illusory space in his 1998 grunge masterpiece, *Left-Handed Guitarist* (1998; p.64). Made from polystyrene foam and plaster, it features a crudely carved figure holding a guitar and perched, as if standing on the edge of a stage, on one of two irregular wooden beams. The beams frame a drawing on the floor at which the figure appears to be gazing: an abstract, one-point perspective rendering of an infinite spatial regress. A hybrid work combining (or opposing) different modes of depiction, *Left-Handed Guitarist* offers us – on the most basic level – the oddly compelling spectacle of a sculptural object "looking" at a drawing. Taken less literally, the work readily invites a range of allegorical readings: presenting a lone figure peering into immeasurable vastness, it could be an abject twist on the Romantic tradition of the Sublime, or perhaps an update of a Rimbaudian romanticism in which inspiration is sought in a disordering of the senses. Even when we learn that the figure is a reference to (if not exactly a representation of) Kurt Cobain, the lead singer (and left-handed guitarist) of Nirvana, who notoriously killed himself in 1994, the work still seems ambiguous. We might now wonder, for instance, if it allegorizes the singer's consumption by a vortex of celebrity and pop mythology, or even whether Holloway's use of Styrofoam is a dig at Cobain as a cultural lightweight who sold out his early promise. (The artist was a serious fan of Nirvana's first album *Bleach*.) Or perhaps, as critic Bruce Hainley has written, *Left-Handed Guitarist* ultimately raises the pertinent question of "who decides what cultural work has 'depth'?"

Holloway's sculpture of the suicidal rock star (the only actual person to whom his work has so far referred) adroitly interweaves and overlays its various allusions in a manner that generously accommodates a wide range of associative interpretations. This is characteristic of his approach: in revisiting various modernist mannerisms over the years and contaminating their codes with alternative systems of meaning, he creates aesthetic and conceptual hybrids that critically unsettle any attempts at pinpointing a singular reading. *Grey Scale* (2000; pp.136–37), for instance, conjoins the self-imposed compositional procedures associated with an artist like Sol LeWitt in the late 1960s with a structure of organic growth. For this first work in a series of related sculptures, Holloway reset the branches of a tree at 90 degree angles, and then painted them, moving left to right across the horizontally repositioned "tree," in the 12 gradations of the grey scale. Yet despite the overlay of rigorous tonal and geometric systems, the sculpture – thanks to the irregular shapes of the branches – retains an idiosyncratic, "organic" composition. It thus embodies an uncertain state of "inbetween-ness," and in this respect recalls a pivotal modernist painting, Piet Mondrian's *Grey Tree*

(1912), which comprised a crucial halfway point in that artist's move from representational painting to reductive abstraction. Perhaps the most conspicuous attribute of Holloway's *Grey Scale*, however, is its extreme physical fragility, which seems to echo the vulnerable, makeshift character of its conceptual scaffolding.

With considerable humor, both *Incense Sculpture* (2001; p.100) and *The Sculpture That Goes With The Bank* (2001; p.98) address the popular assimilation of modernist abstract sculpture. In the former work, a steel plinth topped by a piece of grey industrial carpet (and itself standing on a similar piece of carpet) supports a looping organic form made of plaster. It is the kind of anodyne abstract sculpture that mindlessly recycles a modernist tradition linked to artists such as Constantin Brancusi and Isamu Noguchi, except that in contrast to the polished finish of their objects, this work has a folksy, handmade facture. Its aesthetic autonomy has also been drastically compromised by its use as a holder for a piece of burning incense. Commingling references to the transcendent aspirations of modernist abstraction, hippie mysticism, and corporate office art, *Incense Sculpture* wryly reminds us how, under different historical conditions, the meanings of aesthetic codes can radically change. Yesterday's sublime apparition can wind up as today's feel-good decor. No language is inherently, and thus permanently, revolutionary.

Marking an unusual use of model scale in the artist's work, *The Sculpture That Goes With The Bank* presents miniature versions of a suburban single-storey brick building (based on an actual drive-through Bank of America in Hollywood) and a piece of public art from the "drawing-in-space" school of metal sculpture. At first glance, the pairing of the bland suburban architecture and the sprawling sculpture seems like a study in contrasts, pitting spontaneous and intuitive art-making against the rational planning of commercial architecture and finance. Yet Holloway has engineered this rigid dichotomy to fall apart: the modernist sculpture's existential declaration of individuality long ago became a historical convention as generic as the bank's deadpan suburban architecture, while art's exuberant irrationality has been dwarfed in the larger social landscape by the "irrational exuberance" of our financial institutions. Those cultural disjunctions are echoed by the work's out-of-synch scale: the size of the model sculpture dwarfs the building beside it.

Holloway's drive to comment critically on modernist history while also alluding to societal mores and social relationships led him to reintroduce figurative references in his work. Of course, an interest in grafting new meaning on to earlier artistic languages, especially those of Minimalism and Post-Minimalism, was shared not only by many of his artistic peers (including a number of fellow Los Angeles-based artists such as his studio mate Jason Meadows and Jeff Ono), but also by a preceding generation. In the 1980s, artists like John Miller,



**Incense Sculpture**  
2001  
Steel, plaster, carpet, incense  
37 × 53 × 30 in | 94 × 134.6 × 76.2 cm



**The Sculpture That Goes With The Bank**  
2001  
Steel, chipboard, colored paper, paint, graphite  
72 × 29 × 9 3/4 in | 182.9 × 73.7 × 24.9 cm

Mike Kelley, Félix González-Torres, Janine Antoni, and Charles Ray (with whom Holloway studied as a graduate student at UCLA) made work that rewired Minimalist tropes, often by imbuing them with explicit anthropomorphic content. In Ray's *In Memory of Sadat*, for instance, an arm and a leg unexpectedly extend from a rectangular steel box positioned on the floor. In 2005, as if making a caricature of Ray's caricature of Minimalist purity, Holloway presented a series of box-like sculptures, each of which featured a single, slightly comical, mask-like face emerging from one of its textured sides.

In a series of works begun a year earlier, in 2004, Holloway began incorporating humanoid figurines and heads, often in large numbers. The titles of some of these works referred to social relationships based on property and power as well as to the social production of knowledge. In *Equity* (2004; p.79), approximately 30 naked male figurines are interlocked in a grid-like structure with each kneeling figure skewered by rods that pass through both anus and mouth. The rods, not incidentally, are liberally covered in a crusty layer of brown paint, so that *Equity* – made at the height of the speculative housing boom in the US – depicts a social system of shitting on one's neighbor (and eating shit in turn). Freud famously speculated that our relationship to money and property was anal in character (it's all about not letting go), but Holloway adds another, complicating note here through his use of the grid – an ambiguous emblem of modernism denoting a democratic principle of division (essential to social equality) but also conjuring a prison of regulated behavior.

That might all sound somewhat grim, yet what throws off any such straightforward reading of this work is the fact that the figurines have the comically innocent look of models made for a school claymation project. Sculpted with homecraft materials like Sculptamold and Celluclay, they are painted with reductive, emotionally neutral features and a range of cheery skin tones that seemingly allude to a multicultural spectrum of humanity. Any "humanity" on display, however, is a function of our own propensity to project psychological traits on to every form that even vaguely resembles human features. That foible is explicitly addressed in *I Don't Exist* (2004; pp.88–89), a wraparound, wall-mounted work in which 50 small painted faces gaze back at the viewer in the sculptural equivalent of a staring contest, as if challenging the construction of our own subjectivity. At the same time, in most of his sculptures that present crowds of blank faces, Holloway overlays formal concerns about part-to-whole relationships – an abiding obsession of formalist modern sculpture – with allusions to social relationships between the individual and society. In *Social Epistemology* (2006; p.44), a totem-pole-like stack of differently colored male heads that feature blinking lightbulb noses, possible relationships are suggested by the varying patterns and sequences in which their luminous noses flash: equality or uniformity when they are simultaneously alight versus hierarchical orders when the lights

move up or down the stack. The essential arbitrariness of our projections onto these mathematically generated sequences of flashing lights returns us to the title's reference – a theory in which human knowledge is considered to be what is believed and institutionalized within a given community, rather than what is "true."

Holloway's intertwining of figurative and abstract references reaches a giddy climax in his ongoing project of *Number* sculptures (pp.152–58), inaugurated in 2005 with 0–9 (at present writing, he has completed 80, and says he will end the series when he reaches 100). In each of these works, metal supports hold aloft individual steel numerals; those numerals in turn sprout a corresponding number of narrow rods, each of which holds up a tiny, painted, mask-like face (which is counterbalanced by tear-shaped lead weights). In other words, the work mixes up our symbols for numbers and their iconic representation (#9, for example, is accompanied by nine faces). Given the seeming randomness of how the faces, whose rods vibrate and jiggle in the faintest breeze, are arranged in space, the *Number* sculptures seem like a caricature of the conceptual stunt whereby a work's formal structure is determined by a preexisting set of rules – especially since here the rules produce increasing chaos. In later works in this series, the visibility of the digits is overwhelmed by the proliferating number of competing elements: 60–69, for instance, includes 591 individual tiny masks and rods that create a swarming field of minute visual incidents.

Simultaneously figurative and abstract, the *Number* sculptures call attention to the arbitrary, or even illogical, character of systems that order our perception of the world. At the same time, along with other works that confront us with relatively large quantities of faces or figurines, they seem to raise a question about how our individual experience as a gallery visitor links up with our membership in a mass society. They may also lead us to wonder to what extent our experience of art, as well as the conditions of its presentation, is determined by values that are collective or societal. And given the consistently wide range of skin tones represented in these works – which conjure a demographic breadth that is fairly rare in the world of contemporary art – they also seem to raise questions about the limited nature of the community in the gallery itself. If these sculptures evince, in part, a clown-like or "goofy" aspect, perhaps that simply reflects the current precariousness of our notions of collectivity and community, or at least how these ideas are typically (under)represented in the art world.

In a range of works made over the past several years, Holloway has continued to devise original sculptural forms that draw our attention to the limited and partial nature of our understanding and experience of the world. Looking like an aberrant carnival sideshow, *Dark Ride* (2010), presents a slowly revolving black fabric tent with a slit in its side, through which viewers gain fragmentary views of an abstract



**Equity**  
2004  
Steel, rigid polyurethane, Celluclay, paint, graphite  
69 × 42 × 24 in | 177 × 107 × 61 cm



**Charles Ray**  
**In Memory of Sadat**  
1981  
Steel, human body  
72 × 24 × 24 in | 182.9 × 61 × 61 cm

mess of a sculpture rendered in grey polystyrene and resin. *Dark Ride* automates our time-based experience of walking around a sculpture and looking at it from all sides, but it also conspicuously limits our visual access, leaving us haunted by a sense of incompleteness. Holloway's series of mold sculptures from 2011, made in plaster as well as Aqua-Resin, seemingly elaborate on that experience, presenting antic, yet slightly ghostly-looking molds of familiar everyday objects that appear as if frozen in motion: a ladder with a "falling" bucket, or a broom jauntily angled as if in mid-sweep (and watched over by a mold of a 48 × 96 inch sheet of polystyrene, tied at midpoint to create a pinched waist and a kind of abstract "vavoom" figure). Looking impossibly balanced, they evince an inert uncanniness.

In 2012, Holloway made several bronze mold works by casting negative molds (that is, the mold of an original plaster mold) of banal items such as a rubber chicken and a fluorescent light fixture. Perversely undermining the solidity and weight of bronze, these works invert the logic of standard sculptural procedures to create a void-like presence, since the represented "original" object (itself a mass-produced item) is evident to us only as the forensic trace or impression that its form left on the initial mold. Mixing up notions about representation and source, sculptural "presence" and positive and negative form, these works dole out visual and literary puns as well: *Red Toenail* (2012; p.181), a bronze sculpture, painted in a glossy nail-polish red and depicting a hammer diagonally attacking the base of a 2 × 4, puns on the carpentry term for driving a nail at an angle through a board. *Bronze Novelty* (2012; p.180), a vertical rectilinear form with a mold of a rubber chicken at its upper end, sits eerily suspended between its echoes of artists like Bruce Nauman and Eva Hesse and its "jokey" figurative content. Setting up an uneasy balance between their conceptual gravity and their precarious and absurd demeanor, these sculptures chart out an arena of thought that eschews totalizing schemes and instead allows for the coexistence of seemingly contradictory elements.

In works such as these, we encounter a tonic skepticism about sculpture as a medium of "direct experience," theoretically opposed to an illusory realm of images. Holloway insistently, and ingeniously, reminds us that our understanding of objects always brings into play multifarious elements ranging from physical responses to architectural and institutional framing, from social expectations to larger cultural systems of ordering and classifying experience. Many artists pay lip service to this idea, but Holloway is one of the few of his generation consistently to develop unusual and arresting ways of engaging us in this experience. Positioning his own practice in relation to specific discourses from the history of modernism as well as from a broader array of contemporary cultural sources, he breaks down any expectation that there is a self-evident connection between the visual form of a work and its content. Indeed, his work repeatedly cautions us that its



Mike Kelley  
**Ouija**  
 1990  
 Afghan, kitty litter tray, double cat food dish, three cat toys  
 41 × 37 × 4½ in | 104.1 × 94 × 11.4 cm



Mike Kelley  
**Mooner**  
 1990  
 Afghan, pillow, double cat food dish, four cat toys  
 39½ × 36 × 4½ in | 100.6 × 91.4 × 11.4 cm



"aesthetic" elements are not to be taken at face value, but tend to be discussion points in a rhetorical dialog with the viewer. Perhaps the most extreme example of this approach in his work is found in *Form vs. Content* (2006; p.108), a "meta-sculpture" incorporating "no-go" items from his own artistic education – plastic dolls and barbed wire – in order to contrast apparently "hot," emotionally evocative materials with an overall intention of poking fun at the dumbness of directly linking form and content.

As in the work of an artist like Mike Kelley, which often employs unsophisticated materials to fashion highly sophisticated arguments about hierarchical systems of ordering and classifying, the intelligence in Holloway's work is not manifest in its visual vocabulary but in its conceptual packaging. That is not to say, however, that his work's modest materiality and scale, its oddball craftiness and low-tech facture, are irrelevant; indeed, these qualities prompt us to see past the art world's more grandiose distractions, and so, perhaps, to think a little more clearly about how sculpture can continue to engage us, through the small events and encounters it arranges, in a way that is not irrelevant to our relationship to the larger culture we live within. It also plays a role in the way in which Holloway very generously acknowledges and engages the viewer's interpretative presence. When his work mischievously rewires everyday logics and binary oppositions, it does so to help us unhinge our experience from the types of closed systems of thought that they support. In their place, it offers us the salutary possibility of forging links between things and ideas that do not easily fit into a single, domineering narrative. In this way, it constantly keeps us on our toes, reminding us that art is not a way of producing knowledge, but of looking askance at the knowledge we produce. This is not a cynical doubting, but an active embracing of uncertainty. It is through that attitude that our experience of his objects can comprise a social transaction with which we can better grasp, however provisionally, some of the cultural conventions and invisible semiotic wiring that shape our perception in the first place.

That spirit of inquiry is apparent, again and again, in the artist's willingness to risk making objects that do not conform to consensus assumptions about what sophisticated contemporary art should look like. As much as any artist working today, Holloway exhibits a remarkable willingness to go out on a limb, though never simply for the sake of it. He seems to possess an ornery immunity to any form of conformist self-censorship (the bane of so many contemporary artists). Like any really good artist, of course, he no doubt throws out a lot of the work that he makes – a 2010 photo series depicts line-ups of his "rejected" sculptures – but the art he chooses to show is so disconcertingly offbeat and compellingly odd that it makes most contemporary sculpture look extremely "safe" by comparison. Crucial to his success in this regard is his marvelous capacity for balancing skepticism

and irony with an intuitive, crafty approach to making objects. The result is a body of work that is always engaging even as it aims to disengage us from the usual ways of thinking and patterns of behavior that we typically bring to our encounters in art galleries. If something unsettling seems to emerge from his art at moments, it is a benign menace aimed only at our complacency, our secure self-assurance that we know all we need to know. Holloway instead beckons us to fall out of character, to go beyond our knee-jerk responses and to keep exploring in places where we might normally never think to go.