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BROOKLYN RAIL

Mooney, Ashlyn, "K.R.M. Mooney: *extence*," *The Brooklyn Rail*, December 2022

ArtSeen

K.R.M. Mooney: *extence*

By **Ashlyn Mooney**



K.R.M. Mooney, *Deposition (c.) iv*, 2022. Electroplated steel, silver, cuttlebone, aluminum, 10 5/8 x 2 1/8 x 3 inches. Courtesy Miguel Abreu.

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In K.R.M. Mooney's *extence* at Miguel Abreu, every surface is a threshold, every border a site of exchange. I mean that literally: exposed to oxygen and moisture, the metal surfaces of Mooney's tiny, exquisite sculptures begin to oxidize. Rust forms on steel, a greenish patina on copper, and in these oxides the ion-level convergence of atmosphere and object is made visible. As a process by which two seemingly disparate things—metal, air—become bound and entangled, oxidation forces us to raise questions that live at the center of *extence*. Where does one thing end and another begin? What is fixed and what is mutable in the physical or the social world? As a material fact of Mooney's sculptures, oxidation suggests metaphors for encountering art: just as metal reacts and commingles with air, our bodies react and commingle with the space, our psyches with the pieces on display. Mooney has described exhibitions as "contact zones," and in *extence*, contact implies not only proximity but continuity, as bodies, objects, and space extend toward and into each other.



K.R.M. Mooney, *Housing (c.) ii*, 2022. Steel, electroplated steel, silver, brass, neodymium, copper coated polyethylene, paint, polymer resin, iron oxide, 14 x 7 x 3 1/2 inches. Courtesy Miguel Abreu.

Miguel Abreu's Orchard Street gallery is a white cube with a limestone floor behind a glass façade. The small, luminous space serves Mooney's minimal sculptures well. A relatively narrow range of materials—mostly steel, silver, and copper—links the works across wide swathes of drywall and empty space. Other works engage the built environment of the gallery, specifically its floor, which was freshly polished at the artist's request. Limestone is made of calcium carbonate, a chemical compound that appears elsewhere in the show, too. (*Compound tripoli*) (2022), is an industrial bar of rottenstone, the type used to polish metals; *Deposition (c.) iv* (2022) features a charred square of cuttlebone, a fishbone used as a casting mold in jewelry making. The various iterations of calcium carbonate—industrial, artistic, biogenic—gesture to an underlying continuity across forms. Chemically, these things are the same; look closely, and the distinctions between them blur. We too contain calcium carbonate: it's in our bones. When I visited the gallery, the scent of ground limestone still hovered in the air, imbuing each inhalation.

To consider the works in *extence* as iterations and permutations of a few basic elements is also necessarily to consider the contingent nature of form itself. At the atomic level, where steel and oxygen swap ions and where calcium mixes with the gasses in the air, the boundaries between sculptures, gallery, and viewer are in flux. Mooney's objects are not only *in* the space, but *of* it; the elements of the works exist in a mutually constitutive relationship, both chemically and conceptually. In the "Housing" series (2022), vertical planes of electroplated steel frame squares of cast silver, and supple sheets of copper-infused plastic are folded and clipped to the edges. If these works have a subject, it's because they have a frame and vice versa. In isolation, each aspect is partial, unstable: even the steel seems to shift and transform under the light. Like metals superheated in a crucible, the compacted elements of each sculpture coalesce only insofar as they activate and react with each other.

Mooney studied jewelry making at California College of the Arts, and in his work the shine and scale of jewelry intersect with the spare compositions and barely-altered readymades of 1960s Minimalism to compelling effect. Mooney finds ways to render process and product permeable to each other. Take, for example, the cuttlebone casting mold floating at the center of *Deposition (c.) iv* (2022), or the imprint of cuttlebone on the silver element in *Housing (c.) iv* (2022). Or consider the electroplated steel. Electroplating entails running an electric current through steel to seal or fortify its surface; here, Mooney uses the technique to make the surface more volatile. The steel becomes a threshold, and craft and concept merge.

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Installation view: *K.R.M. Mooney: extence*, Miguel Abreu, New York, 2022–23. Courtesy Miguel Abreu.

There are industrial forms here in addition to the bar of calcium carbonate. An engraving block sits on the floor, inert. Across the limestone lies a row of aluminum light fixtures, abstracted by the removal of bulbs and cords. A flowing tongue of glass affixed to a float valve extends from the wall a few inches from the floor. These objects share a capacity to shape and conduct space, whether to mark space out, or to determine how our bodies move through it. Their horizontal position in the gallery makes this especially true; we have to avoid stepping on them. A somewhat overly didactic note in the exhibition brochure asserts that the empty light fixtures, titled *Radial Affordance* (2022), reveal “how one becomes absorbed and cared for by the systems overhead.” I only wish that my own experience of the works had not been absorbed by this note. Better not to seal and fix their meaning, or that of any of the pieces in this excellent show; better to let their surfaces remain volatile, reactive to our perceptions.