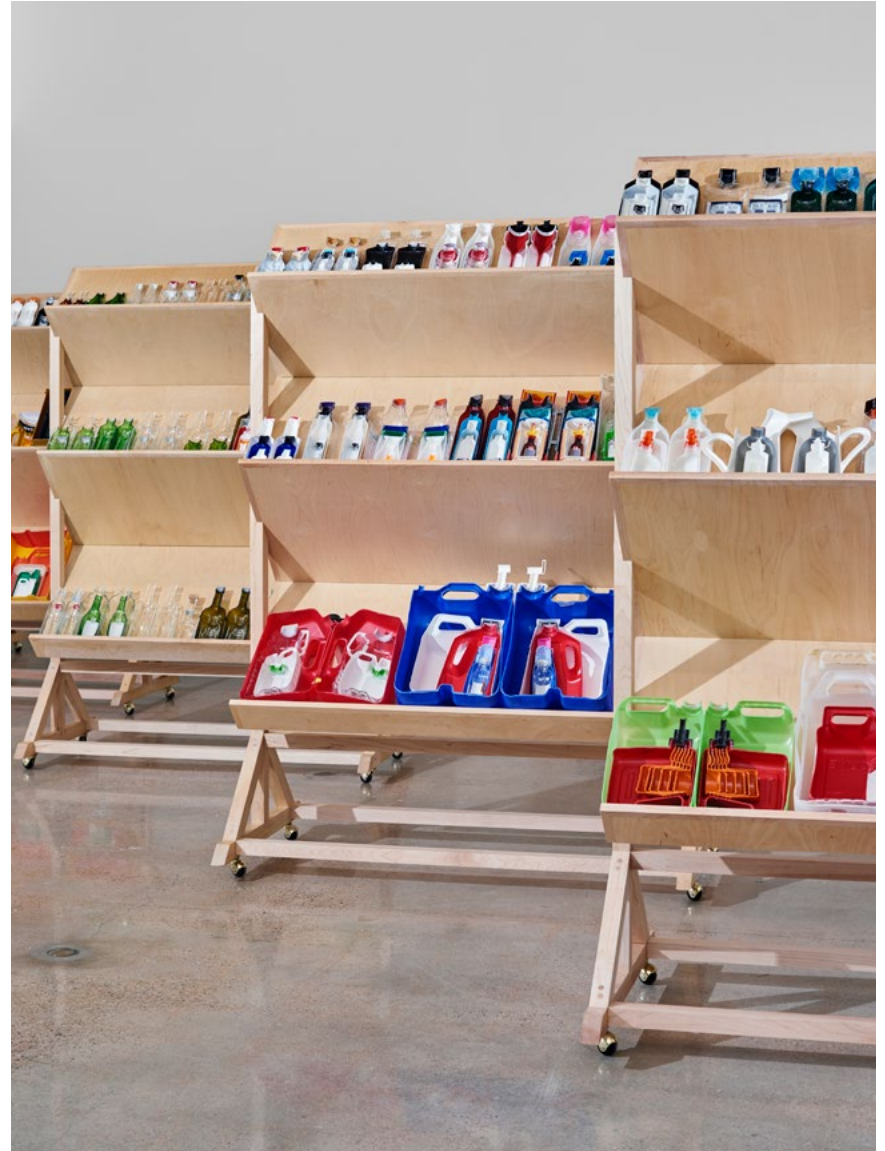


LAN TUAZON

IN THE
LAND OF



REAL SHADOWS

“WHAT LEVEL OF FRAMING AND FORMAL MANIPULATION IS NECESSARY THAT WILL ALLOW THE VIEWER TO SEE EVERYDAY THINGS—NOT JUST AS ART, BUT TO SEE THEM AT ALL?”

From the sprawling mass of everyday things, Lan Tuazon sees ordinary objects as meaningful entities in the world to be studied. *In the Land of Real Shadows* is concerned with the interconnectedness of all things, with the imaginary, constructed, space between natural and cultural orders. This exhibition presents new work that frames manmade, single-use products as the “future fossils” of our society. Here, one finds a landscape of objects in different stages of fossilization. Through an ongoing practice of observation and selection, Tuazon dissects and organizes each object into a system evocative of the aesthetics of archaeological, ecological, and geological data. This rhythmic document of society’s debris points to the fantasy of totalities, suggesting that established systems of classification offer an absurd promise to know the world in full.

Since 2015, Tuazon has been collecting objects—pill bottles, egg cartons, measuring cups, gas cans, and flash lights—from thrift stores, recycling centers, litter on the street, and her own home. While living in Michigan and Illinois, the artist transformed her collection of empty plastic, glass, ceramic, and metal containers into an archive of open, nested groups: the “future fossils” of



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our consumer culture. *No Nouns Left Whole* presents this archival stage of the project, in which pairs of future fossils are arranged on a series of stepped shelves inspired by those found in newsstands, flea markets, and secondhand stores—“the poor cousins of the library and museum,” as the artist calls them. Tuazon’s classification system thereby produces work she has named “documentary sculpture,” which visualizes archival systems of representation and provenance.

As the collection of layered containers grows over time, thematic subcategories of future fossils emerge from within Tuazon’s living library. The objects in *Liquid Commodities* are grouped according to function and include containers which once held lotion, oil, shampoo, juice, and water. *False Fruits* is comprised of objects that metaphorically or physically mimic nature’s own containers: a plastic pineapple and ceramic salt and pepper shakers disguised as mushrooms and pears find themselves in the company of empty bottles of syrup and tartar sauce.

In *Death’s Souvenir: After James Luna*, Tuazon shifts the focus of her fieldwork to a collection of anthropomorphic objects that features a set of glove forms, doll hands, and plastic skeleton bones. *Core Samples*, meanwhile, presents a prototype for the third and final stage of fossilization, in which the artist suspends cross-sections of her future fossils in a translucent resin amalgamate. The result is a series of works that appear petrified by time. Tuazon further flattens her objects in *The Gullet* by tracing them in silhouette. Here, the very byproducts of human consumption threaten to consume everything in their path and become the ultimate container.

In Tuazon’s imagination, future fossils emerge like geodes in which plastic crystals grow overtime from within compressed containers. The metamorphosis

of each object, from container to curiosity, echoes an organic phenomenon discovered by geologists in 2006 call plastiglomerates. Thought to be a marker for human pollution and anthropogenic impact on the Earth’s natural systems, plastiglomerates are formed when organic materials such as sand, wood, and shells fuse with melted plastic.

The conceptual implications of the accumulation, organization, and visual presentation of these containers reflect both the economic infrastructure that produced them as well as Tuazon’s ability to shape information and create new meanings through her practice. To prepare her nesting objects, the artist cleans out objects and removes their labels. She then divides each object with a band saw, rotary tool, or hand saw, exposing their otherwise invisible interiors. Once split open, the containers have the potential to hold, or be held by, another vessel with a similar shape or functional design. The resulting assemblages mirror one another in profile, creating alternating bands of color and texture that may conjure up associations with stratified rock or cross-sectional diagrams.

As with her future fossils, Tuazon nests the titles of her work. *In the Land of Real Shadows* presents a cumulative process: in her ecological study of order, *Core Samples*, *Death’s Souvenir*, *False Fruits*, and *Liquid Commodities* are contained within *Future Fossils*, the larger series that grew out of the ongoing, archival process presented in *No Nouns Left Whole*. In turn, the project *In the Land of Real Shadows* is an accumulation of *Anthropogenic Matter*, the third and final part of her decade-long trilogy, *A Shift in the Order of Things*. For the first part of this trilogy, Tuazon composed works using a variety of fencing designs to explore how these architectural elements operate as tools to demarcate class divisions in urban and rural spaces. In the second stage of her study on order, Tuazon found pedestals and display cases in museum storage and created a new monument of vitrines and pedestals arranged according to size. The installation highlighted the very function of museums, and cultural institutions at large, as measures and markers of value. Each of these projects explored the conventions of containment through their physical manifestations in society, manipulating and reframing everyday objects to draw our attention to the exclusions inherent in our socially and culturally constructed orders.

Tuazon’s interrogation of the concept of order was initially inspired by French philosopher Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, first published in 1966. For Foucault, European philosophy and science depended on the illusion that certain concepts were fixed truths. He argued that branches of scientific study, such as linguistics, biology, and economics, were essentially manmade systems of knowledge and were, themselves, arbitrary constructions of reality. Tuazon’s archival system builds upon the relative conditions of knowledge—itsself a product of culture and an organic phenomenon subject to change.

Trash, once bound to obscurity, goes unwasted and fuels Tuazon’s expanding archive. Through each phase of transformation, these future fossils diagram the cluttered scenery of our everyday lives, from the products we use to the culture we consume.



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By highlighting the near permanence of these discarded containers, *In the Land of Real Shadows* emphasizes the parallels between the disposable objects left behind by contemporary consumers and the archeological artifacts made to stand the test of time—jars, cartons, and aerosol cans preserved along with bridges, temples, and tombs. In this curious ecology, Tuazon conflates the visual representation of evolution with its deterministic language, while presenting the ephemera of human civilization as its relevant and stubborn artifacts. ■

Taylor Bradley
2018–19 Curatorial Fellow, Visual Arts Center

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- 1 / *Death’s Souvenir: After James Luna* / 2018
Wood plinth, plastic, nylon, foam, ceramic, animal bone, and resin / 49" x 97"
Image by Matthew Cronin
- 2 / *No Nouns Left Whole: False Fruits* / ongoing
Wood shelf with ceramic, metal, glass, plastic, and organic containers / 30" x 48" x 72"
Image by Matthew Cronin
- 3 / *Architectures of Defense* / 2010
Wood, iron, aluminum, and plastic / 8' x 8' x 14'
Image courtesy of the artist
- 4 / *Monument to Museum Preservation and Conservation* / 2011
Wood, plexiglass, velvet, linen, and steel / 14' x 26' x 32'
Image courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum



LAN TUAZON

IN THE LAND OF REAL SHADOWS

September 21 – December 7, 2018



VISUAL
ARTS
CENTER



The University of Texas at Austin
Department of Art and Art History
College of Fine Arts

FRONT /

No Nouns Left Whole / ongoing

Six wood shelves with ceramic, metal, glass, plastic, and organic containers / 30" x 48" x 72" (each)
Image by Matthew Cronin

LEFT /

The Gullet / 2018

Printing plate and oil board / 48" x 96"
Image by Matthew Cronin

The Author

Taylor Bradley is a PhD candidate studying twentieth-century art and writing her dissertation on the critical reception of photography in Los Angeles and New York during the late 1960s. Taylor's research interests concentrate on the technological history of photography and on artists who use photography as a medium of reproduction and information. Such artists include Anna Atkins, Eugène Atget, Eleanor Antin, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Edward Ruscha. Taylor earned her BA in Art History at Boston University and her MA at The University of Texas at Austin.

The Artist

Lan Tuazon is an Assistant Professor of Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. After graduating with a BFA from The Cooper Union and an MFA from Yale University, she participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program. She has held solo exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, Storefront of Art and Architecture (NYC), Youngworld, Inc. (Detroit), and at Julius Caesar (Chicago). She has exhibited in group exhibitions at Redcat Gallery (LA), the Hyde Park Art Center (Chicago), in New York at The 8th Floor, Artist Space, Canada Gallery, Sculpture Center, Apex Art, and Exit Art, the WKV Kunstverein and Künstlerhaus in Germany, and at the Neue Galerie (Austria). She was awarded artist-in-residence fellowships at the Akademie Schloss Solitude (Germany), Headlands Art Center (California), and Civitella Ranieri (Italy).

The Program

The Visual Arts Center's Vaulted Gallery Artist-in-Residence Program invites emerging national and international artists to inhabit the space for three to five weeks to create new site-specific installations. Situated in the Department of Art and Art History at The University of Texas at Austin, this dynamic residency fosters collaboration with campus and local communities and provides valuable educational opportunities to students.