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Essay by Adam Lauder
Foreword by Emily McKibbon

foreword

Laura Moore is an emerging artist best known for *one man's junk*, a series of hand-carved sculptures of computer monitors, PC towers, boomboxes and other electronic detritus. The works function like monuments, arresting the accelerating pace—and waste—of digital obsolescence in the enduring medium of limestone. Moore takes as her subject the discarded electronics she finds in the streets and alleys of Toronto, her home, after first sharing a chance moment with a monitor fallen face-up under a railroad overpass. For her installation in the MacLaren Art Centre's Massie Family Sculpture Courtyard, on view from July 7 to October 16, 2016, Moore has arranged a tower of computer parts on a custom wooden base, recalling both the museological plinth and the recycling pallet. Left vulnerable to the elements, the project inspires a strange tenderness, analogous somehow to the benevolent gesture Moore performs in transposing her abandoned subjects into stony memorial.

one man's junk holds particular relevance to the MacLaren Art Centre and its broader context in Barrie, Ontario, positioned as we are between city and cottage country, urban chaos and domesticated nature. Consequently, much of the MacLaren's programming has examined the changing relationships

contemporary artists negotiate with the Canadian landscape. In this vein, Moore's project carves out a liminal state between waste and memorial sites: while the placement of the sculptures recalls the ways in which they are found, scattered and abandoned, there is also a hint of sacralisation of the courtyard. At a 1:1 scale to their subjects, these intimately-scaled works remind us of our cozy but transient relationships with the screens in our lives even while positioning themselves as stealth future monuments for the Anthropocene.

one man's junk is accompanied by an essay by guest writer Adam Lauder. Lauder skillfully places the work within an expansive historical and contemporary context, moving nimbly between references as varied as Charles Baudelaire's poetic response to Parisian rag pickers, N.E. Thing Co.'s ecological artworks of the 1970s and the circuitous infrastructure of the information economy. Sensitive to the temporal impact of Moore's project, Lauder writes "one man's junk invites viewers to metaphorically press pause in order to reflect upon this relentless cycle of modernization." Likewise, the MacLaren is proud to present *Laura Moore: one man's junk*, and invites visitors to take this opportunity to "press pause" and enjoy this ever-shrinking contemporary moment.

—EMILY McKIBBON, Exhibition Curator

one man's junk

one man's junk materializes the contradictions and unintentional humour of the contemporary digital condition. Meticulously replicating the contours of obsolete hardware in the paradoxically durable medium of stone, artist Laura Moore calls the bluff of a supposedly "dematerialized" society. [1] In their insistent materiality, her monuments to a wasteful economy of never-ending upgrades are both poignantly tragicomic and pointedly "dumb."[2]

The series was set in motion by a fleeting encounter with the curbside remnants of a once valuable, and presumably valued, personal computing environment.[3] Today, *one man's junk* encompasses a richly allusive image bank of monitors and hard drives. Its ten elements are based on discarded equipment gleaned by the artist while cycling through the rapidly changing landscape of Toronto. Stripped of their proprietary logos and other identifying marks, Moore's bantam monoliths are disorientingly generic yet tantalizingly familiar. The objects' chiseled surfaces communicate the tactile functionality of their computational referents, even as their elevated presentation—on a custom-built wooden pallet—tacitly forbids the pleasures of contact. Though emphatically stationary, *one man's junk* summons viewers to join the artist in cognitively mapping the ubiquitous "grid" of our digital and urban environments. In retracing its rational coordinates, we are forcefully reminded that this itinerary can be perplexingly meandering, even irrational.[4]

For beholders of a certain generation, Moore's memorials to a bygone era of personal computing may trigger involuntary memories of ergonomic intimacy with outmoded media. For others, the minimalist but retrospectively ponderous morphology commemorated by the artist may retrieve a Modernist imaginary of angular and monochromatic archetypes. With typical irreverence, Moore characterizes the liminal condition negotiated by her objects as "not-quite-garbage." Like the rag pickers commemorated by the poet Charles Baudelaire or the painter Édouard Manet, Moore invites reflection on the artful potential of dumpster diving.

Like the parallel series *Small Monuments* (2015)—a random sampling of computer mice sculpted in the fittingly pliant medium of soap stone—the stony masses of *one man's junk* recall the technological "prostheses" theorized by the Canadian media analyst Marshall McLuhan.[5] In their radical de-contextualization, its monitors and hard drives suggest an exquisite corpse of severed body parts: limbs, torsos or, in the case of *Small Monuments*, fingers and toes. These corporeal resonances are further amplified in an ongoing series of drawings and new small-scale sculptures that explore the bodily associations of the allusively named memory stick. Portable devices sprouting fingers and breasts playfully re-appropriate the gendered connotations of the problematically christened *hard*ware. The artist proposes new, and suggestively "soft," understandings of storage capacity.

Moore's intimate analyses of found form can also evoke the techniques of reverse engineering mobilized by hackers to scrutinize protected software systems. But in contrast to the digital ontology mined by tech-savvy pirates, Moore's practice is

firmly grounded in the traditional materials and instruments of stone carving. The artist terms her jiu-jitsu-like interface with computing "artisanal design in reverse": an apt description harkening to the tragicomic meditations of the maverick American Minimalist Robert Smithson on modernity and its discontents. In some respects, her process more closely matches the re-documentation of legacy systems carried out by corporations to recover obsolete production protocols. But rather than intervening within the abstract vocabulary of code, Moore's sculpted replicas suggest analogies instead with the industrial plasticine moulds employed by automotive manufacturers to evaluate virtual designs on a 1:1 scale. Consistent with this seemingly anachronistic procedure of converting intangible digital prototypes into analogue facsimiles, *one man's junk* transforms that which has already become the stuff of memory into sensuous avatars. Reflecting on this striking reversal of commonsense assumptions about the order of operations mobilized by computational workflows, Moore observes that the manufacturers of her readymade models likely "never put as much thought into them as I do." The artist's simulations draw attention to the creativity of re-creation.

This seeming detour through the non-sequitur methodology of automotive design is not tangential. Moore's 2015 video *curbside* documents castoffs of an economy of accelerated obsolescence that allude to the readymade models for *one man's junk*. *Curbside* restores this unwanted excess to its contexts of appearance—or, rather, impending disappearance: the urban roadways scouted by an itinerant Moore from atop her bicycle. Channeling a seriocomic ambivalence reminiscent of one man's junk, the jettisoned monitors screened by *curbside*

anchor the work's ambient abjection even as they elicit the beholder's nostalgia. In restoring this drama to its proper *mise-en-scène*— one defiantly located beyond the confines and protocols of the white cube—Moore metaphorically launches her subjects within the circulatory infrastructure of the information economy: its human transportation systems no less than its micro-circuitry. In animating her sculptures thus, Moore invokes the kinesis propelling her initial encounters with her models as well as the broader logic of rapid exchange which they embody, even in their ultimate condition of sculptural stasis. In turn, the mobile beholder of Moore's sculpted objects is plugged into this wider network of information movement. In effect, the artist invites viewers to join her in imaginatively cycling the electronic highways and byways of the contemporary wired city.

Moore harnesses these tensions to stage a digital materialism that is as insistently physical as it is experiential and ideational. This generative duality also dramatizes the hybrid genealogy of the artist's practice. Moore's reiterative syntax of primary structures alludes to the economical vocabulary of first-generation Minimalism, while the first-person address and ironic *détournement* of the documentary strategies mobilized by *curbside* recall the witty but always situated gambits of Conceptual art. In willfully conflating the two tendencies, the multidisciplinary artist unleashes a comic potential that harkens to the puckish maneuvers of Smithson, or the Canadian conceptual company N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. The Co-presidents of the latter art world enterprise, Iain and Ingrid Baxter, scanned their everyday environs in suburban North Vancouver for the effluvium of a then still emergent information society. The "critical company"

was notorious for its irreverent citations of the self-important vocabulary of American (especially New York-based) peers to deflate art world pretentions.[6] The similarly mock-serious tone of Smithson's anti-academic photo-essays— above all, his feverish Mexican travelogue "Incidents of Mirror-Travels in the Yucatan" (1969)—equally resounds in the unstable affect of *curbside*.

Tapping into a growing mood of digital discontent, Moore's ambivalent monuments to the contemporary regime of computation are—like the recent philosophical writings of François Laruelle—defiantly pitted "against the digital."[7] Giving shape to this resistance through the farcically Luddite strategy of arresting a seemingly unstoppable flood of "innovations" through monumentalization in stone, *one man's junk* invites viewers to metaphorically press pause in order to reflect upon this relentless cycle of modernization. In replicating artefacts of an already obsolete media ecology, Moore implicitly casts these musings in a past tense. The artist's meditations on a relentless technological futurity thereby interpellate, or "hail,"[8] viewers' memory of a future that is already past, even as it continues to pass before our eyes.

In unresolved tension with this *longue durée* of computation and the outmoded, *one man's junk* situates its ambivalent discourse on technology within a memory that is resolutely personal, even autobiographic. Yet, Moore's mock monumentalization of her found aides-memoires simultaneously anonymizes individual recollection, inducing a generative condition of estrangement. In rendering the media that are always at our fingertips temporarily remote, *one*

man's junk gives new shape to David Robbins's notion of "concrete comedy." In Robbins's words, this genre of prop-based sculptural activity leverages a "disrespectful" relation to time's measure to humorous, but nevertheless deeply philosophical, ends.[9] Like the paradoxical "solid-state hilarity" unleashed by the facetious "monuments" documented by Smithson on his suburban peregrinations,[10] in Moore's dexterous hands everyday objects illuminate the ever-shifting contours of a technological space-time. The improbable comic timing brought into visibility by the artist's witty crystallization of contradictory forces of mobility, obsolescence and memorialization is an absurd stasis.

—ADAM LAUDER

[1] Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International*, 12, no. 2 (1968): 31-36.
[2] All quotes from the artist are taken from an interview with the author, February 8, 2016.
[3] See A. Will Brown, "Fan Mail: Laura Moore," *Daily Serving*, Nov. 14, 2014, http://dailyserving.com/2014/11/fan-mail-laura-moore/ (accessed March 18, 2016).
[4] Sol Lewitt influentially emphasized the irrational aspects of Conceptual art's cognitive procedures. See Sol Lewitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 106-08 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
[5] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).
[6] See Yann Toma and Rose Marie Barrientos, eds., *Les entreprises critiques* (Saint-Etienne, Fr: Cité du design, 2008).
[7] See Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
[8] See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (London: Verso, 1970).
[9] David Robbins, *Concrete Comedy: An Alternative History of Twentieth-Century Comedy* (New York: Pork Salad Press, 2011), p. 145.
[10] Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, 10-23 (1966; repr., Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 21.

contributor biographies

Laura Moore (b.1979) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice is rooted in sculpture. The artist works primarily in stone, although her practice extends into wood relief, drawing and photography. Moore received an MFA from York University and a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Recent exhibitions include *Sculpture by the Sea in Aarhus*, Denmark (2015), *Material World* at the Indianapolis Art Centre in Indiana (2015), *TH&B UNITED* at the Cotton Factory in Hamilton (2015) and *Possible Futures: What is to be done? The Windsor-Essex Triennial of Contemporary Art* at the Art Gallery of Windsor (2014). Moore's sculptures have been installed in numerous public settings, most notably at Google in Kitchener as part of the *Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener and Area Biennial* (CAFKA) in 2014. The artist is a transient member of Studio Pescarella in Pietrasanta, Italy and is represented by Zalucky Contemporary (Toronto). She lives and works in Toronto.

Adam Lauder is a Toronto-based writer and academic. He has recently completed all of the requirements of a PhD in the Graduate Department of Art at the University of Toronto. His current research focuses on Canadian artists' representations of "information" during both halves of the twentieth century. He has contributed articles to scholarly journals including *Amodern*, *Art Documentation*, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *Future Anterior*, *Imaginations*, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, *Technoetic Arts*, *The Journal of Canadian Art History*, *TOPIA* and *Visual Resources* as well as features for magazines such as *Art Handler*, *Border Crossings*, *C*, *Canadian Art*, *Hunter and Cook* and *Millions*. He is the editor of *H& IT ON* (YYZ, 2012) and is the author of chapters appearing in *Finding McLuhan* (University of Regina Press, 2015), *The Logic of Nature, The Romance of Space* (2010) as well as *Byproduct: On the Excess of Embedded Art Practices* (2010).

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acknowledgements

Cover, 13, 18, 19: Installation view of *one man's junk*. Photo: Paul Cimoroni
Pages 5, 14, 15: Laura Moore, video stills from *curbside*, 2015.
Page 6: Laura Moore, *Mouse #4*, soapstone, 2015, 10 x 7.5 x 6.5. Photo: Paul Cimoroni
Page 16: Laura Moore, *Mouse #1*, soapstone, 2015, 10 x 7.5 x 6.5. Photo: Paul Cimoroni
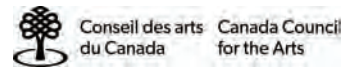Page 17: Laura Moore, *Mouse #18*, soapstone, 2015, 10 x 7.5 x 6.5. Photo: Paul Cimoroni
Page 20: Laura Moore in her studio. Photo: Juliana Zalucky
Page 25: Monitor in progress. Photo: Laura Moore
Back cover: IBM in progress. Photo: Laura Moore

Design: Shannon Linde

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