

ARTslant

Perfectly Random

by Robyn Farrell Roulo

Tony Tasset : Selected works from 1986-1996
Kavi Gupta Gallery
835 West Washington, Chicago, IL 60607
May 1, 2010 - July 17, 2010



2010 has been a good year for Tony Tasset. Known for his witty and often sardonic approach to Postmodern art, Tasset's work has gained quite a bit of attention in the city he calls home. The artist was selected alongside fellow Chicago artist, Phyllis Bramson to participate in the College Art Association's annual Artist Interviews during the organization's conference that was held in Chicago in February 2010. Last month, Tasset's *Blob Monster* (2009) was one of several large scale installations that made an impressive appearance on Orleans Avenue outside of The Merchandise Mart, in collaboration with Art Chicago and NEXT. This summer, Tasset's larger than life sculptures will once again join the public sphere thanks to a dual commission from the Chicago Loop Alliance for their inaugural Art Loop program slated for early July. The artist will unveil *Cardinal* (2010) an installation of more than one hundred banners along Chicago's famed State Street. Tasset's vision for the series of installed sculptures is to form a collective image of the state bird, a cardinal taking flight. The second work, standing 30 feet in the air and scheduled for Pritzker Park, is aptly titled *Eye* (2010), a massive mixed media sculpture of an eyeball overlooking the Chicago community. More examples of Tasset's work can be seen in the MCA's current exhibition, "Rewind: 1970's to 1990's Works from the MCA Collection", see Chicago Editor Abraham Ritchie's review [here](#). Most notable of Tasset's tour de force in 2010, however, is the solo show presented by Kavi Gupta Gallery, on view through July 17, 2010.



Installation view of *Abstraction with Cardboard Corners*, 1999, Lacquered Medite and Cardboard, 29 x 24 x 2 1/2 inches and *Double Bronze*, 1993, bronze and wood, 39 1/2 x 26 x 33 inches, in *Tony Tasset : Selected Works From 1986-1996* : May 1 – Jul 17, 2010. Photography, Sara Pooley, images courtesy of Kavi Gupta Gallery.

"Tony Tasset: Selected Works 1986-1996" takes a highly focused look at an earlier period from Tasset's career that provides a mini-retrospective of the artist's take on art theory, practice and exhibition. Tasset's open rejection of any particular is the one common thread found in all his work. His ability to employ various media to articulate aspects of artistic legacy, irony and everyday culture replace the necessity for the traditional "signature" style. Kavi Gupta embraces this randomness and celebrates the work produced in that period. The exhibition supplies a deeper insight into Tasset's perspective and provides a clearer trajectory of the artist's career. Layout and curation allow for easy navigation between the tensions of concept and form and aesthetic and meaning.

Abstraction with Cardboard Corners (1999) and *Double Bronze* (1993), seen above, flank the entrance to the exhibition. Selected for the gallery's hallway, the works create a happenstance installation. *Abstraction with Cardboard Corners* is just that, lacquered medite capped with cardboard at each corner. What resembles a blank canvas leaned against the wall, is a completed work, available for sale. *Double Bronze* (1993), a pair of bronze busts atop a wood table continues in this vein. Tasset channels the modeling of Rodin and the worktable of an artist's studio, reinforcing the contradiction of art as a commodity and its exhibition space.

The artist's critique continues into the main gallery. Here, Tasset once again makes a play on the familiar, recontextualizing it and referencing elements from art world with pop culture. *Display Sculpture (Inverted for figure)*, 1988, seen left, is in complete opposition of the traditional two dimensional approach to hang a painting, this work questions the inherent function of art on display. A concave abyss of deep red and plexiglass, dives into the surface of the wall. Although awkward and unconventional, the work is engaging, literally drawing the focus inward creating an intimate and proactive viewing experience. Adjacent to the irreverent installation, is an ironic and clever interpretation of another display, the pedestal. Just above 38 inches high and freshly painted white, a first glance may miss the humor in *Pedestal (leveled)*, 1993, seen upper right. Tasset's satire of the uneven pedestal strips it of its main function and sole purpose, to provide an even plane, with safety and security for sculpture on display. Tasset cleverly levels the flawed column with a shiny aluminum wedge lending a comment to flash and sparkle ever present in the contemporary museum. *Box* (1993) is an absurd exaggeration of the common packing vessel. Constructed of cardboard and paper tape, the 60 1/4 inch square box is devoid of typical handling bumps and scraps. Tasset's craft and attention to detail are exemplified with this mysterious work. Unopened and unexplained, its presence recalls the conceptual theory of Sol Lewitt and signature service of UPS.



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The gallery's project space looks like an abandoned construction. Similar to *Box, I-Beam* (1996) and *Pallet* (1990), both seen below, carefully laid out and pristine in condition. The industrial objects embody a dichotomy of strength and fragility. Substantial in stature, but clearly vulnerable and unexposed outside of an exhibition space, this pairing employs universal objects to debate the question of art versus function.

Another sampling of Tasset's work is down the hall, in what the gallery refers to as an "enhancement to the exhibition". On view are iconic works, like *Benchstack* (1987) and *Robert Smithson (Las Vegas)*, 1995, clearly nod to Tasset's predecessors and inject his satirical point of view. The handful or so of works are worth a view, but would have taken away from the exhibition. Keeping focus on the original nine works selected for the exhibition tracks Tasset's postmodern journey. With vastly different works on view in city, the chance to revisit the beginning is a rare opportunity.

--Robyn Farrell Roulo