

ArtReview

Glenn Kaino: Leviathan

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Conceptual artist Glenn Kaino is a protean talent. A former chief creative officer of Napster and now senior VP at Oprah Winfrey's media company, the LA-based artist is also very much a Johnny-on-the-spot in the artworld. Currently he has two major public commissions on view – one in Washington, DC, and the other at the Prospect.3 biennial in New Orleans – as well as a sprawling protest-minded installation at Kavi Gupta's new warehouse gallery in Chicago. For the latter, Kaino has done like a globavore chef and travelled near and far for provisions. In a show aptly titled *Leviathan*, he has sourced materials from as close as Ferguson, Missouri, and as distantly as Cairo, Egypt.

An artist long known for his recombinatory approach to turning standard models into innovative forms (aka 'kit-bashing'), Kaino remains an artist staunchly committed to pitting art's symbolic power against the instrumentalising effects of raw finance. Mismatch or not, the artist likes his long-term odds. At his show at Kavi Gupta, for instance, he introduces ten new works that explore – among other radical impressions – the precarious balance that keeps certain cultural ideas ascendant and others struggling to upset the status quo.



The works in *Leviathan* aim to represent what Kaino sceptically views as a zero-sum game. If several of his sculptures illustrate instances of intellectual and physical combat, the show's title also foregrounds the Goliath-like forces confronting the world's Davids. The idea of balance, consequently, is a principal theme. A wall sculpture titled *Escala* (all works 2014) presents a set of ten interconnected scales that have been finely weighted so that the structure achieves perfect equilibrium. A second sculpture, *Suspended Animation*, consists of an industrial conveyor belt extended so that the belt is horizontal to the floor, the whole teetering on two rather than all four of the points on its base, which appears to be performing something akin to a static wheelie. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that the machine's rock load is the only thing keeping it from crashing to the ground. Courtesy of Kaino's farflung travels (he travelled to Egypt as the US representative to the indefinitely postponed Cairo Biennial) and a network of collaborators and friends (in the Philippines, Indonesia and Crimea, among other locales), the belt's random chunks of cobblestone and asphalt serve as a second through-line for this smart 'connect-the-rocks' show.

Take, for instance, the works the artist refers to as his 'dent paintings'. Polished steel squares and rectangles arrayed in typical door and window configurations, they represent – divots and all – the official architecture of American embassies (Turkey, Greece and Syria) after they've come under attack by protesting mobs. Another rock-based work, *Don't Bring a Gameboy to a Gunfight*, presents a pile of candycoloured stones printed using the 3D printer MakerBot. Having chosen a reproduction process that takes many hours per work, Kaino was forced to outsource the printing to online assistants. Because the US State Department regulates the digital transfer of munitions, with this piece Kaino established a criminal network – at least metaphorically.

And then there's *Excalibur*, the first artwork one sees upon entering the exhibition. Without question the painted, cast bronze sculpture is the most direct and succinct piece here. A trompe l'oeil version of a slingshot, its projectile-bearing pocket lies trapped within a hole inside the Sheetrock wall. Which raises the question: is Kaino's approach really that of a street-fighting artist-revolutionary? Or is he a hardbitten realist after all?