

In Conversation: Stephanie Buhmann Interviews Tamara Zahaykevich

Artist Reviews

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Tamara Zahaykevich, *Leftovas*, 2011. Foam board, polystyrene foam, paper and acrylic paint, 8 ¼ x 12 ¼ x 1 ¼ in. Courtesy of KANSAS

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For the past decade, New York artist Tamara Zahaykevich has created works that navigate between painting and sculpture. Her objects either protrude from the wall or are set on pedestals. Her materials, which range from discarded foam core to old paint mixing palettes, are rooted in everyday life and lack pretension. Manifesting as characters with distinct personalities, Zahaykevich's objects can either be rough-hewn and improvisational or precisely rendered. Every work is unlike any other and yet her works all have one crucial thing in common: they pay homage to the mundane by making it center stage in a thorough contemplation of color, line, and form. In early February, I sat down with Zahaykevich.

Stephanie Buhmann: We are meeting only a few months after your solo show, "Hey Harmonica!" at KANSAS Gallery. How do you feel after wrapping up the exhibition? What has changed?

Tamara Zahaykevich: Before the show, I'd been working in my studio for years without any real deadlines. Although I did not have a set schedule, I made sure to spend a certain number of hours in the studio each week. For the exhibition, I suddenly needed to think about a coherent group of works that could sit together, both in the gallery space and on their own. I can say that I have now reached a place where I love having a whole space just for my work.

SB: Do you think this is because you are now better able to define the essence of your work, its true nature? I am referring to idealism, but also technicalities. Your work fuses various elements and it certainly is not prone to clear-cut categorization.

TZ: I have always wanted to create a wide range of possibilities in my practice. I've done that by working in a variety of processes. Using techniques that are new to me opens up endless possibilities. Letting the hands do the work,

instead of the mind often leads the way to surprising solutions. It's important to me always to be excited by what I'm working on. Pieces that don't hold my interest are set aside, and are often incorporated years later, when they are ready for use.

SB: It is this range in your work, the fact that some pieces can be raw and others are more tightly conceived, that makes it unpredictable and strong. Do people tend to respond to one kind of work more than to another?

TZ: I always like to see how different people respond to my work. Which pieces appeal to whom and for what reasons? It often is a 50/50 divide between the polished-looking pieces and pieces that are more "out there." I'm not interested in classifications and in a way I do not like to think of my work in terms of verbal language at all.

SB: I think of your work as expressing an iconic concept of form, which seems somewhat classical. I am curious to know what you like to look at when you go to the Metropolitan Museum, for example.

TZ: I almost always visit the Egyptian scarabs. I like the early Greek coins. And the ancient Peruvian feather pieces. From a young age, I've been influenced by things that people have invented out of need; whether they are basic items such as housing, or spiritual and cultural objects, such as objects used for prayer. I have an early memory of my interest in vernacular architecture. My parents lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico before I was born and they had these incredible photo albums. One of the images I always loved was of my mother standing in a parka in front of a Pueblo. It looks like it was so incredibly hot outside and yet she was wearing a coat... I was very confused by that. I asked a lot of questions, which led to my learning a little about this type of home.



Tamara Zahaykevich, *Picnic*, 2011. Polystyrene foam, paper and acrylic paint, 8 x 9 1/4 x 3 in. Courtesy of KANSAS

SB: So what was it that brought you to art?

TZ: I never was that kid in art class who could blow everybody away with her drawing skills. But I was always making things. My father had a small wood shop in our home and I loved being there, sawing pieces of wood. Sometimes I would saw something just for the feeling of it. One time I rearranged the structure of my closet, making a bracket for the clothing rod from nails. I was resourceful and I was always a maker. As a teenager I made a lot of collages, covering furniture, for example. I was kind of making stuff in my own world... until I did my sophomore year abroad in Rome. And then I transferred to art school.

SB: There is something very private in your practice and, to me, it provides your work with a sense of mystery and a touch of otherworldliness. This is particularly interesting since much of your inspiration springs from daily life and every day objects that surround all of us.

TZ: In my daily life there is so much that stimulates me visually as I walk from my home to the studio. The landscape ranges from a new building to the random pattern of chewing gum ground into the sidewalk. Oh! And then there is the truck out front with the Luc Tuymans colors blotting out the graffiti! I am not conscious of what comes with me through that studio door, but I know these forms that are out there in the world have a profound affect.