"Two guys walk into a hardware store..."
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The Art Guys
2007

an exhibition for the re-opening of
The Art Guys World Headquarters
This is the real deal.

This is not funny.

This is not what it seems.

2008, cut yellow pine, joist hangers
12 x 96 x 2, each
Wanna screw for that?

A guy or a duck or a woman walks into a hardware store and says, “I’d like a pound of kielbasa…do you have any duck food…where can I find a screw?” Ask around—someone, most likely a fifth-grader, will know the punchlines for these groaners. The fact is, hardware stores are a lot of fun, and they’re the perfect setting for all kinds of jokes because they contain nearly everything in the world. They have doormats that say silly things, interconnecting parts labeled “male” and “female” and toilets. Toilets are always funny. It’s a hoot to talk hardware talk and say things like “spirit level” and “hog out.” A hardware store is a world of possibility. All that stuff is just waiting to bend itself to your will and make your humble pad fit for a pasha. When you get home and start dropping nuts (another funny hardware item) and huffing paint fumes, it’s another story. But for those few golden moments before the checkout line, you’re Wernher von Braun, Frank Lloyd Wright and that interior designer from TV.

With their unshakably firm grasp of the obvious, The Art Guys, Houston’s magicians of the everyday, have recognized the aesthetic and conceptual potential of hardware stores. Lately, they’ve been building a new studio and making lots of trips to buy tools and materials. One day, they decided to run with the chain reactions, the unholy marriages of materials and the strange schemes that occurred to them as they wandered from the plumbing to the housewares to the electrical aisles. They’ve put handles on things that don’t need handles, agglomerated things that should never be agglomerated and jury-rigged all manner of contraptions. They’ve become Helpful Hallucinogenic Hardware Men, Home Despots and D’oh-It-Yourselfers. They’ve used a 16-ounce can of Alchemicalizer to turn pot metal, plywood and plastic into art. In the hands of Michael Galbeth and Jack Massing, hardware has morphed into something smarter and funnier (also more tragicomic, mythopoetic and krypto-transcendent) than any joke that ever graced a fifth-grade playground.

- Toby Kamps, Senior Curator, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston
"Two guys walk into a hardware store..."

...and make an exhibition.

That’s it. The punch line is this show. Get it?

As a consequence of having recently built and moved into our new studio, we’ve been spending a lot of time at the hardware store. So, needless to say, we’ve been thinking about this stuff a lot lately.

Using materials from a hardware store is hardly unusual for artists. After all, many artists, if not most, obtain the materials for their work from hardware stores. But our intention with this exhibition was to use hardware store materials in such a way so that they would somehow maintain their “hardware-ness” (whatever that is).

The materials we selected, and how we chose to work with these materials, do not derive from any pre-conceived formulas or theories. Rather, as we often do when developing and selecting works, we simply said, “That would be interesting,” or “That would be funny.” So the process was, as usual, somewhat intuitive. For us, making art (whatever that is) is often a case of trying new things, experimenting with materials that are somewhat familiar to us, dealing with them in unfamiliar ways, and then trusting that the work will have some sort of resonance with audiences.

Much of this show is still in the research and development stage and many of the pieces are, in fact, studies for more substantial works. So you have the opportunity to consider these ideas in their formative state. Which means we have more work to do. So, if you could please excuse us...

-The Art Guys, 2007
Another Kind of Wrong (from The Theory of Wrongheadedness)

2006, video
Plywood Lace

2006, plywood perforated with hole saw, wooden saw horses
32 x 48 x 96”

photo this page and next: installation at Birke Art Gallery, Marshall University,
Huntington, West Virginia
Box-O'-Nails

2006, plywood, nails, sawhorses
32 x 48 x 96"
Not Right and Not Safe  (from The Theory of Wrongheadedness)

2006, video
Damn
2006, video
Bonded Activity #62 (carpenter pencil drawing)

2006, graphite on paper, carpenter pencils, wood glue
36 x 36" (paper), 8 x 7 x 4" (pencil block)
Pencil Broom Drawing #2

2006, graphite on paper, wooden broom, pencils
42 x 72" (paper), 60 x 24 x 6" (pencil broom)
Myth (box cutter scan blur)

2005, light jet print on silver photographic paper,
42 x 72"
Secure Commerce Under Defense or S.C.U.D. (nail scan blur)

2003, light jet print on silver photographic paper, 36 x 78"
Study for Clamp Sculpture (detail)

2006, dye transfer, graphite, pastel, colored pencil on paper
22 x 30"
Circular Saw Chandelier (detail)

2006, dye transfer, collage on paper
22 x 30"
Staple Drawing

2006, staples on paper, staple gun, staple box
22 x 30" (paper)
Good, Better

2006, wood, sheetrock, screws, paint
8 x 16 x 4” each
collection of Marshall University Art Department
Get A Handle On It

2006, various object with handles attached to them
dimensions variable
0100N White & M24 91 3409 – 02/28/07
Bernard Brunon, THAT’S PAINTING Productions

Showing concurrently with The Art Guys’ exhibit is a new painting by Bernard Brunon and his company THAT’S PAINTING Productions (Martin Tovar, Adolfo Mejia, Silvio Zapata). The title of this new work, 0100N White & M24 91 3409 – 02/29/07, may seem like an encryption, but it simply indicates the type of paint used in the piece and the date of execution. The work is explained in the following pages.

The Art Guys are pleased to include this painting in the inaugural exhibit of the new Art Guys World Headquarters.
In his short story, “Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse People,” Franz Kafka wrote of “… someone creating a solemn spectacle of the everyday. It is truly no feat to crack a nut, and therefore no one would think to gather an audience for the purpose of entertaining them with nutcracking. But if he should do so, and if he should succeed in his aim, then it cannot be a matter of mere nutcracking.” (1)

It could be said that my approach to house-painting is similar to Kafka’s character’s approach to nut-cracking.

My work in painting was informed from the start by 70’s theories of deconstruction, and an investigation of the codes and mechanism of representation. After a decade of frustrating studio work, I realized that, when I painted a room, I produced exactly the type of painting I was seeking in the studio. To paint a wall does not produce a picture of the wall, but it is, unquestionably, a painting of it. To paint a house, far from describing or depicting it in a fictional space, is actually to inscribe it in its real space. This understanding led me, in 1989, to start signing the rooms and houses I painted and to create the small house-painting company, THAT’S PAINTING Productions, registered as a DBA (Doing Business As) with the Harris County Clerk in Texas.

As Stephen Wright noted: “Though the company [That’s Painting] has proven economically viable – today employing a number of skilled laborers – it owes little of its success to the artworld. For, though Brunon at once boldly and unassumingly considers his new painterly activity to be an entirely viable artistic activity, there is nothing “artistic” or even “arty” about the paintjobs the company does. Indeed, the credo of the outfit is entirely businesslike: the work is well done, on time, and competitively priced. Most customers remain unaware of (and uninterested in) Brunon’s
self-perception of his company as a collaborative conceptual artwork, founded upon the motto: “With less to look at, there’s more to think about.” Though art practice exists today in a proliferation of different forms, far removed from the conventions of the fine-arts tradition and the artworld, That’s Painting is perhaps unique in remaining linked to painting as a genre.” (2)

To pursue this kind of painting, freed from representation, might seem to be formally limiting, but it is very rich conceptually, since it pushes my practice beyond formalism and opens it into other fields, such as economics and human relations. The work and its end product are no longer subject to the rules of aesthetics, but belong to the realm of ethics. Stephen Wright has analyzed the “double ontological status” That’s Painting Production’s activity brings to the work of art; but there is another dimension which, for me, is as important and innovative: its deontological aspect. Over the years, I came to realize that the moral obligations entailed by this activity have become an essential component of the work.

Hélène Sirven accurately wrote that “the best way to intervene artistically, and also politically, in society is to be economically present, through a professional structure which ties together art and business. An art anchored in life, in daily life.” (3) With That’s Painting Productions, I am not making political art, I am doing art politically, which, in my view, is a much more efficient way to proceed.

Bernard Brunon, Houston, November 2006

Notes
1- Published in 1924, under the German title “Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse,” this short story was brought to my attention by Maurizio Lazzarato, last October, in the lecture he gave at the Ecole Supérieure d’Art in Toulon, France.
house paint [details from the installation]
Two guys walk into a hardware store..."