

Singer, Debra. "Dave McKenzie." Just Kick it Till It Breaks, Ed. Jennifer Liese. New York: The Kitchen, 2007. 17.

Dave McKenzie

Debra Singer

Dave McKenzie's videos, sculptures, text-based works and performances explore relationships between belief and desire, perseverance and hope, relevance and obsolescence. *Tomorrow Will Be Better* (2007), for example, is a handmade aluminum sign that juts out from the wall high overhead, recalling quaint storefront signage. Its individual cutout letters spell out the title's hopeful phrase, even as they dangle precariously from a metal rod. Suspended in a fragile state of disrepair, the sculpture reflects a general mood of global dismay, while also projecting a tenuous sense of determined optimism. It is "finished off" with a globby cluster of aluminum that looks like the jury-rigged foil extensions attached to TV antennas to enhance reception—a makeshift solution that just might fix broken down communication. With deadpan humor, it embodies the old adage "Where there is a will, there is a way."



Also evoking a sense of chaotic disarray in the world is *Yesterday's Newspaper* (2007), a low lying walnut pedestal on top of which one places—and continually replaces—a copy of a newspaper from the prior day. Recalling works by predecessors ranging from Felix Gonzalez-Torres to Robert Gober, the sculpture is a succinct reminder of real-world headline news, calling attention to the barrage of information to which we are all subjected. More importantly, it alludes to the paradoxical amnesia that this constant flow of data instills, perpetually erasing yesterday's "just-past" with the inscription of today's ever-new. Intermingling existential absurdity and tongue-in-cheek literalness, the sculpture seems to ask: What does one do with yesterday's paper?

VIEW: TOMORROW WILL BE BETTER, SMALL A PROJECTS, PORTLAND, OR.

Tomorrow Will Be Better, 2007
Wood and Aluminum
Dimensions Variable

Yesterday's Newspaper, 2007
One newspaper from the
previous day and walnut
pedestal
20.5" x 17" x 2.5"

Next Page:
(B)LACK, 2006
Colored Pencil on Paper
12" x 17"



Or, more directly: What is its value, its relevance? Arguing for sustained attention, the piece suggests that slowing down time is the only way to fight the accelerating pace at which things become outmoded and inconsequential. It situates the viewer in a specific moment, prompting us to consider how yesterday has impacted today and how it may affect tomorrow.

(B)LACK (2006)—a work-on-paper that sets up relationships between text and object and word and image —also reflects a concise, dry wit, while addressing specific issues of identity politics and consumer culture in contemporary America. Using a found Ikea sheet of furniture assembly directions labeled “LACK” (a Swedish term that describes the product’s varnish), McKenzie riffs on the slippage of language and “fills the void” by adding the letter B to make “BLACK” and drawing himself into the diagram. Playing off the streamlined, pictographic rhetoric of do-it-yourself instruction manuals—designed to lead you to a predetermined result—McKenzie sets up an ironically flat-footed, one-to-one correspondence between his drawn self-portrait and the altered label. His sarcastic gesture suggests its opposite: an open-ended, non-delimited notion of “black.” As the artist explains: “There is no real definition of ‘black,’ as everyone has their own version of ‘black-ness.’ All answers are equal because the question is so broad.”

