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## Q&A WITH RYAN SARAH MURPHY

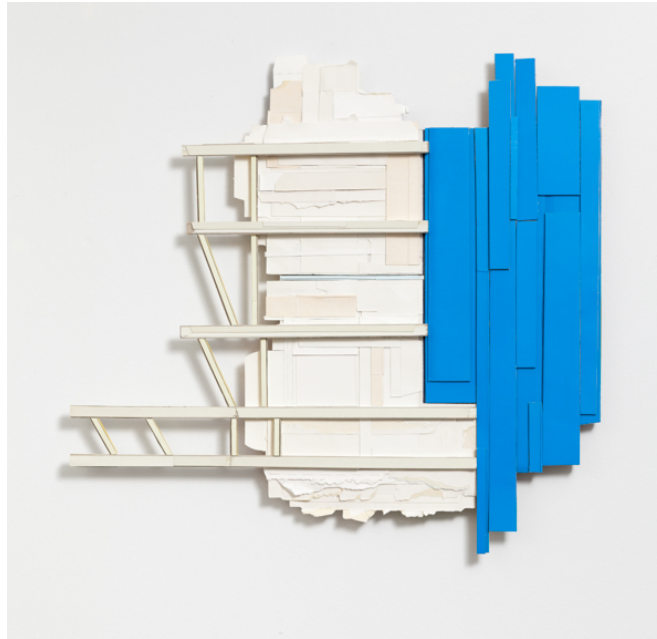
Emily Burns  
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*Co-location*, 2015, unpainted cardboard, foamcore, 24 x 23 x 3.5 inches

**Can you give us some insight into your process? How do you begin and how do you create your compositions?**

The starting point of any artwork always exists within the material. I am drawn to the found ephemera of the everyday and respond to an object's unknown history of use, the strange energy within a discarded, transitory thing that has lost its intended purpose. My work is process-driven, where I allow for the material to guide the way and arrive at an outcome with no set plan as I go.



*Fixed Departure*, 2011, unpainted cardboard & foamcore, 24.5 x 26 x 1.5 inches

**Does drawing play a part in your process?**

In the last year I began to incorporate drawing into my practice, using my cardboard constructions as the impetus for new works on paper. I've started to see my wall-hung collages not only as fully realized pieces but also as potential gateways or portals leading to a further exploration of space. It's sort of like using the completed models to ascertain the blueprints. So I've been making renderings based on photographs of the wall collages, creating basic pencil-line images that form a ground or beginning point, and then building out the imagery from there.

**You mention in your statement that no paint or color is added to the repurposed materials in your work. The colors seem so rich and vibrant! How do you find cardboard with such rich colors?**

It's everywhere! Pretty much any kind of consumer product out there is going to come in some kind of cardboard container. When I first started thinking of cardboard as a good sculptural material, I began to notice all the packaging I came in contact with and would collect specific boxes based on their color.

**When artists work with found materials, I can't help but imagine the process of finding and storing raw materials for future use—what is your strategy for this part of the preparation in your work?**

For quite some time I was really obsessed with the "noticing & gathering" aspect of the process and couldn't pass a recycling bin without taking a peek. Living in New York, the streets provide an over-abundance of eye-catching material so it didn't take long to acquire a really good stockpile of boxes. Every now and then I'll do a kind of inventory and organize all my cardboard into color-coded piles around my studio. This tends to renew my sense of the pure color and form of the material and that often generates the start of a new piece.

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## **Is there a solid sub-structure to your work or are they made entirely of cardboard and books?**

All of the work is made entirely of cardboard and/or cut up book covers. I don't use any kind of armature, I just let the material build upon itself. Each collage is attached to the wall by a custom-made cleat.

## **Have you always employed collage in your work? What first interested you in collage?**

Everything I make is the result of some form of collage or an assembly of parts. There is a sort of dual operation going on where construction and destruction are constantly at play, where the addition of one layer can then subtract what's underneath. A collage, and the act of making something in this way, both reveals and obscures at the same time. I like to engage in a process where the only thing that determines the next line is the mark that came just before it. It forces you to be really in sync with the thing on the wall, to pay attention in a certain way that allows the thing to unfold.

## **What interests you most about the book as a material?**

I like the blankness of a book's inside cover, the empty rectangles of space that hold the pages, or the story, in place. There is a great variety of found color lurking inside old hardcovers. Books are such loaded objects – they're these little chronicles of information and shared narrative and yet when they are broken down into mere parts (cover, binding, and page), they lose their intended purpose and take on this quality of negative space, or some kind of lost communication.

## **Can you talk about the importance of color in your work?**

I rely on color enormously in the making of my work. I really have no idea what a piece is going to look like until it's finished - there is no plan, I don't plot anything out beforehand. A certain color will always serve as the starting point and from there the piece begins to grow. Each collage sort of finds its way within a fairly limited palette (5-6 colors at most) that is wholly determined by the material that I have at hand.

## **What is a typical day like for you?**

If I'm not scheduled for any freelance work and the day is all mine, I'll usually head over to my studio in the morning, make coffee and do some computer stuff (emails, website maintenance, search for more freelance work...!) It generally takes me quite awhile to quiet down and ease into an "Ok, start-making-things-now" state of mind, so when I'm in the studio I tend to stay put all day and hope for little interruption. Some days the work comes easily, other days it's a battle.

## **What are some of the biggest challenges that you have overcome as an artist so far in your career?**

The biggest challenge has always been about balancing my time in the studio with time at some job that will pay the bills. Up until late 2014, I had always worked at a full time job and squeezed in studio time at night and on weekends. It eventually set in that if I continued to give away 40+ hours a week working as an assistant in someone else's studio, my own career was never going to have a chance. Though it's difficult trying to make ends meet doing freelance work, I've made my studio practice my #1 priority and that's the most important thing.



Ryan Sarah Murphy's studio in East Harlem

**Can you describe your studio space? What are your most important workspace essentials?**

My studio's on the 3rd floor of an old commercial building, a couple blocks over from my apartment in East Harlem. I have 2 large, super-drafty windows and get some nice light in the morning and early afternoon. I like to work on folding tables because I can easily move them around the space. My studio essentials are my industrial grade glue gun, my space heater and my electric kettle.

**What do you listen to while you work? Is this an important part of your practice?**

Often NPR or podcasts - if I'm focused on my work I'm really only half-listening at best, but I usually like the sound of people talking in the background. I tend to pick up bits and pieces of whatever I'm listening to and then sometimes use particular words or fragments of conversations/songs as titles for pieces. For music, Warpaint, TV on the Radio and John Frusciante are always in the rotation.

**Has there ever been a book/essay/poem/film/etc that totally changed or influenced you? What are you reading right now?**

The Martha Graham quote that starts, "There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening..." It is a perfect statement about an artist's responsibility to stay open.

**What are some of the artists that you look at / feel that your work is in dialogue with?**

Louise Nevelson, Gordon Matta-Clark, Sarah Sze, John Beech, Karla Black, Lucy Williams

**Do you have any advice for recent grads that are looking for teaching jobs, transitioning out of graduate school, or looking to begin their career as studio artists?**

I would just try to remember that you're an artist, that's what you do, and any job outside of that isn't the thing that defines you. Sustaining a life and a career as an artist is a weird and unpredictable road. There is no map whatsoever to cling to, so learn to trust your instinct as that is all you've got.

**What is one of the best or most interesting recent exhibitions you have seen?**

I just saw Martha Tuttle's wonderful show "Metaxu" at Tilton Gallery, and a few months ago there was an exhibition of Rachel Whiteread drawings at Luhring Augustine – amazing.

**2015 was a busy year for you! How do you stay involved in exhibitions and get your work out there?**

It's important to keep in contact with curators and other artists. Networking is in no way my strong suit but it definitely helps to maintain your professional relationships. It's good to keep your website up to date so your current work can always be seen in some form, and I think the more organized you can be with the business side of your studio practice, the easier it is to deal with galleries and be prepared for exhibition opportunities as they come up.

**Do you have any exciting news or shows coming up?**

I am headed to the Vermont Studio Center for a residency in the fall, and around that same time I'll have work in a three-person show called "Bauhaus Babies", opening at ODETTA Gallery in Brooklyn.

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