

Bat-Ami Rivlin: the way beyond sculpture

by GABRIELE MEDAGLINI • 8 NOVEMBER 2022 • FOCUS

Bat-Ami Rivlin (1991) is a New York based artist whose real focus of her artistic research is the sculptural practice and, in particular, the careful study of the object, its aesthetics, materiality and existential dignity. In some ways, one could say that she deals with something in clear contrast to the current, overbearing revival of that type of painting charged of a fantastic-surreal aesthetic and strongly narrative figuration. These are categorizations that neither grip nor mortify Rivlin's sculptures, capable of existing and delineating their own living space in a way that is nothing short of magnetic.

With the aim of presenting and exploring her work in detail, I had the pleasure of talking directly with the artist on some of the key aspects of her practice.

The starting point to theorize her work is the sculpture. Rivlin is, first of all, a mixed media sculptor capable of dealing with a very wide range of materials that are re-proposed and investigated using structures that can only be traced back to the universe of the *ready-made* by visual affinity. What matters is, in fact, the immediacy of the material that is concretized in the common use object (of industrial derivation, waste material and so on), integral and connotating part of our existence at any stage of formation. It is here that immediately emerges a key element for the approach to Rivlin's works: the direct confrontation with the objects, their material nature and the functionality for which they were conceived, freeing from the risk that labyrinthine narrative supra-structures could hinder the immediacy of their existence as a constituent and delineating element of our being present. Adopting a "systemic" perspective, Rivlin's object work is presented to the eye of the beholder without any claims. What is subjected to the eye does not refer to anything other than what it is, that is the ultimate outcome of an entire capitalist production process for that anything is generated for a reason and with a very specific function. Perhaps it is here that the concept of *ready-made* as commonly understood is surpassed.

Taking as a reference what has been written for her solo show *No Can Do* (February 12th – April 11th, 2021) at the M 2 3 in New York, the sculptures materialize a set of meanings as a scenic representation of fragments of a system and its inherent "failures". In the exhibition space the objects – such as *Untitled (inflatable kayak, zip ties)*, a sculpture made of an inflatable kayak and zip ties, or *Untitled (metal gate, yellow foam, duct tape)*, work consisting of a chain link fencing, metal frame, hinges, polyisocyanurate foam, duct tape and hardware – do not lose their original functionality but instead stage what remains of their hyper-tension, paradoxically making it futile and highlighting the limitation of a production machine unable to function besides the dynamics of rigid categorization and utilitarianism. However, the point is not to get bogged down in simple rhetoric. As also explained by Rivlin, her works do not want to talk directly about something. They are not "about" failure. Rather, they are real objects, true testimonies and expressions of that failing tangle with which we measure ourselves from the first moment of life. In this regard, the term used on the occasion of the group show *whereabouts* held at the Hessel Museum of Art (April 2nd – May 29th, 2022, curated by Dominika Tylcz) is particularly fitting. The works were not so much presented in relation to their "aboutness", but rather concerning the idea of "aroundness" such that the real focus to dwell on was, and it still is, the profound connection between the works, the hosting space and the observer. A whole that becomes therefore the real constitutive matter of the exhibition structure.

Moreover, the scope of Rivlin's research is not limited to consider a perspective with a universal extension. If it is true that her works are configured as testimonies of our time, capable of reflecting the hidden cracks of an entire system, then it becomes meaningful to also consider the perspective of the individual, the constituting singularity of such complexity. And perhaps, it is precisely based on these assumptions that it becomes possible to consider an emotional connection, also with a personal value, in front of her works. The history of a system inevitably includes the history of the individual. Universal and particular coexist in a continuous inter-relationship. Concerning the consideration of the role of the individual sphere, in *Thing Theory: A Roundtable On Sculpture* [1] published on "Art in America", Lydia Ourahmane talks about how her work *The Third Choir* did not want to merely emphasize the simple objects (20 oil barrels) but rather the macro narrative generated by their whole moving process from Algeria to the United Kingdom – including a multiplicity of individuals and therefore of stories – and on what the object itself was able of activating.

Therefore, having acknowledged that even in Rivlin's work it is recognized a role in the perspective of the individual, the question that arises is instead about the weight that the narrative–interpretative sphere assumes. In front of her sculptures, does it make sense to engage in a process of constant attribution of meanings or is there the risk of excessive mortification of the works? As Rivlin reiterated, it is true that universal and particular coexist and foster one the other to the point that the interpretative attempt cannot be curbed: "Categorizing the objects into utilitarian objects is in itself an interpretive act. The concern is whether that interpretation concerns the object presented, or whether it is a way of not-looking". Basically, what was said above remains valid. We are faced with real objects that have no intention of dealing with anything other than manifesting themselves in all their entirety and complexity.

As mentioned concerning *whereabouts*, the spatial issue plays a key role in the contextualization of the works. Something that emerges in an even more significantly form in her latest site specific project *EN-SITIO / PLACE-WOOD* realized at the Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro in Mexico (September 11th – November 26th, 2022) and consists of the outdoor installation of *Untitled (92 tires)* – made of a series of used truck tires tied with zip fasteners and that, despite being worn, are unable to perform their function – and the indoor installation *Untitled (duct tape, duct tape, duct tape, tires)* – found car tires arranged in a row and tied with adhesive tape but, again, rendered completely unusable. In spite of the use of a very wide range of materials, the choice of Rivlin is not accidental but aims at reflecting the complexity of the hosting environment. The objects reflect dynamics and economics actions, and it is no coincidence that different contexts require different materials (something that is also found, for example, in the work presented in the *COLAPSO* group show at TEA Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, July 2nd – September 26th, 2022).

Almost emphasizing a sort of socio-political sphere of the object that acts as a spokesperson for the surrounding environment, and as for the link between the universal and the particular, Rivlin captures the essence of the continuous dialogue between "external" and "internal", freeing herself from the urge of creating something new, but instead submitting to our bulimic gazes what are the essential components of our living experience. Objects as mirrors and synthesis of the world.

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[1] *Thing Theory: A Roundtable On Sculpture*, Gordon Hall, Abigail Lucien, Lydia Ourahmane, Michael Rakowitz, moderated by Mira Dayal, «Art in America», September 2022, pp. 72-77.



Bat-Ami Rivlin, *Untitled (inflatable kayak, zip ties)*, 2020. Ph. Shark Senesac, 2021. Courtesy the artist and M 2 3 Gallery, New York



Bat-Ami Rivlin, *Untitled (metal gate, yellow foam, duct tape)*, 2019. Ph. Shark Senesac, 2021. Courtesy the artist and M 2 3 Gallery, New York



Bat-Ami Rivlin, *Untitled (orange net, zip ties)*, 2022. Installation view, *whereabouts*, Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-On-Hudson (US), 2022. Ph. Olympia Shannon, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Hessel Museum of Art



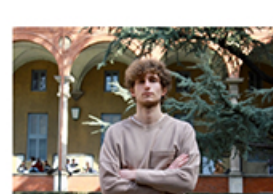
Bat-Ami Rivlin, *Untitled (LED, cord, duct tape)*, 2022. Installation view, *whereabouts*, Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-On-Hudson (US), 2022. Ph. Olympia Shannon, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Hessel Museum of Art



Bat-Ami Rivlin, *Untitled (92 tires)*, 2022. Installation view of *EN-SITIO / PLACE-HOOD*, Museo de la Ciudad Querétaro (MX), 2022. Courtesy the artist and Museo de la Ciudad Querétaro



Bat-Ami Rivlin, *Untitled (duct tape, duct tape, duct tape, tires)*, 2022. Installation view, *EN-SITIO / PLACE-HOOD*, Museo de la Ciudad Querétaro (MX), 2022. Courtesy the artist and Museo de la Ciudad Querétaro



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With a specialist degree in Economics and Management of Cultural Heritage, passionate about the field of Contemporary art, its economic dimension and, more generally, the dynamics characterizing the art market, Gabriele has gained experience over time in contexts such as contemporary art galleries, start-ups and Art Advisory. He currently works in the Art-Rite auction house as an assistant in the department of Modern and Contemporary art.