HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander at Mercer Union, Toronto | Akimblog

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Terence Dick October 23, 2025



HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, production still from *How Is Where You Are*, 2025 (courtesy the artists and Franz Kaka, Toronto)

Beyond Measure, journalist James Vincent's 2022 history of measurement, would be a perfect gift for any artist you know who obsesses over the fragile, yet necessary ordering systems we impose on the world. It would also complement a visit to Mercer Union's new exhibition by the woven together pairing of art duo HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander. Their commissioned project *How Is Where You Are* includes amongst its various threads of allusion a number of explicit references to powerful, yet arbitrary standards of quantifying reality that serve as loci of history, imperialism, and wayfinding. The relentless ticking of a metronome provides an (almost) constant soundtrack in the gallery (one that mixes in falling water, environmental noise, bird calls, drum beats, and voices). The time-keeping device appears in a video featuring a static shot of official indicators of various lengths in the imperial system (yard, foot, inch). Beside it is another video, this one depicting the prime meridian in Greenwich, England, in which the artists intervene upon the earth-bisecting marker to query its sense of centrality. These are but a few of the clues that comprise this puzzling, yet inviting installation.



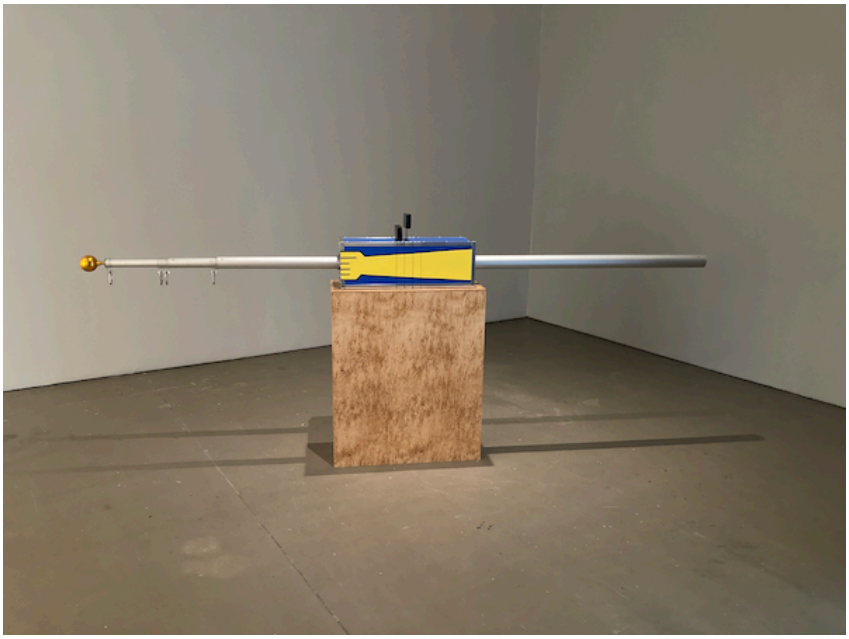
HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, *How Is Where You Are*, 2025, installation view (photo: Terence Dick)

Itemizing the array of objects on display – some found, some presumably crafted – evokes the postmodern logic of a Pynchonian narrative: flag pole, weather vane, magician's box, Nokia phone, hand symbol, pink insulation, toilet bowl, urinal, refrigerator, lamps made from recycled waste. This last item tips one off to the end-of-history context for the work, where free-floating signifiers cycle through constellations of provisional meaning-making, where the viewer makes do with the fragments one has to hypothesize the links that would bring it all together. With a new novel on the racks and a film adaptation in the theatres, Thomas Pynchon is having a moment, but the need to find some order in our world of semiotic overload has been his (and our) thing for over half a century now. Which is why there's something comforting in the impression of initial randomness that hits you when you first enter the gallery.



HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, *How is Where You Are*, 2025, installation detail (photo: Terence Dick)

The keys (both literal and metaphorical) that the artists insert into the space, and the (cracked) Easter eggs that they hide in plain sight speak to the faith one has to have in an underlying meaning that pulls the elements together like an invisible architecture. The flipside of the foundational certainty embedded in the standards of measurement that maintain the order of the universe is that they rely on everyone believing in them and everyone forgetting that we mostly just made them up (and even those that aspire to objectivity, like the length of a metre or the span of the day, are subject to doubt-inducing fluctuations). This leaves us not as confident scientists who assume all the answer will (eventually) come, but as religious adherents who spend their lives knowing that what they need to know to get through the day will never be known, yet we have to assume it's true or else what's the point? Which might sound nihilistic, but it's not.



HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, *How is Where You Are*, 2025, installation view (photo: Terence Dick)

The pleasure in the text that is HPKK's installation at Mercer is in navigating its possibilities and finding connections while knowing those things will change as time goes by. Which is what art does, so it's nothing new, but newness is overrated anyway (at least according to the new David Balzer book I'm reading). Instead, why not focus on what's old – ancient even – which is mystery and how it opens one up to the world, how it dissolves the dividing lines that restrict imaginations, and how it invites one to participate in the act of creation. That's way more fun than being told what is what.

HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander: How Is Where You Are continues until January 17. **Mercer Union: www.mercerunion.org. Terence Dick** is an arts writer living in Toronto. He is the editor of Akimblog.