

Video Walkthrough | HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander: *How Is Where You Are*

Artist duo HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander provide a virtual tour of their ongoing solo exhibition, *How Is Where You Are*. The artists discuss their approach to working with materials and their attendant cultural histories, paying close attention to the forces that shape contemporary life

Watch the walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:

<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/how-is-where-you-are>

Paul Kajander: *How Is Where You Are* is a mixed media installation. It brings in many different kinds of making. We're really interested in this idea that everything included in the show is in relation, but not necessarily clearly related.

HaeAhn Kwon: We are HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander and we're in the exhibition *How Is Where You Are*.

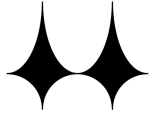
Paul Kajander: We came upon the title, *How Is Where You Are*, thinking that it's both a proposition and a question. This idea that how you are in the world might be determined by where you are. Are you happy where you are? Are you oppressed where you are? Do you have the freedom to leave where you are? So, bringing in this ambiguity around whether that's a question or a statement felt like a productive entry point to many of the concerns that are animating this exhibition.

We worked on this show for two years, and over that span of time we were committed to the idea of pursuing research and production in Finland and the UK, which is a context in which we've never worked before. Finland has a very culturally embedded attitude towards secondhand items, so there's a kind of material care for objects that one lives with.

HaeAhn Kwon: In a way, our collaboration began when we kind of noticed things on the streets of Seoul that we call vernacular assemblages. I was, you know, kind of collecting images of them on my phone, and I also noticed that Paul was doing that too, and so that felt like a kind of a creative hometown that we shared.

Paul Kajander: I love the language you've used in this exhibition to describe the makeshift as our address. Like, that's where we want to be. We want to hang out in that responsiveness. That moment was so special for recognizing we share this affinity for what we saw as the material inventiveness of folks who might not have artistic training but are nonetheless being so creative.

My Finnish grandmother had this similar material inventiveness, which we situate as a kind of post-war mentality. When resources are scarce and when there aren't a lot of means available, a different kind of creative possibility emerges when you take the material excess of capitalism or the refuse, the trash, and you repurpose it in order to improve something about your lived experience.



So, what you see in the lamp cluster includes porcelain that is made in the shape of an egg carton, but these other gestures include found object, a plastic bucket we found in Finland, a tin can repurposed with some existing lighting fixtures.

HaeAhn Kwon: Something to mention here is the idea of what's new, old, clean, dirty, what's valuable and not valuable. We are dealing with objects and consumerism, and I think that the idea of waste comes in often into our practice. And I think that for us, toilets almost symbolize the notion of waste and, you know, byproduct, and how there's this very binary division between the idea of production and the idea of waste.

Paul Kajander: When we found out that Suunto, this company in Finland, makes some of the most precise compasses in the world, we knew we had to include that in the exhibition.

A lot of the videos were shot on location at the Greenwich Observatory in London. We became interested in this site as a kind of symbolic terrain that is really pointing to a subsequently fallen empire's colonial and imperial desires. But this idea that globally there needed to be a fixed point from which distances could be measured and timed using chronometers became really fascinating to us, that it's a kind of artifice, it's an invention.

We decided to film in three locations at Greenwich. One was the Prime Meridian, the other was the placard that indicates the British standards of measurement, and the last was the Time Ball. We became so fascinated by the Time Ball, sculpturally, for being this big, dimpled, red orb, this sphere that drops very clumsily at one o'clock

HaeAhn Kwon and Paul Kajander (in unison): every day.

Paul Kajander: There's also something so abject about that ball, like how dimpled it is and how absurd and pathetic—

HaeAhn Kwon: And anti-spectacular.

Paul Kajander: Yeah. And the way it falls is so like janky.

HaeAhn Kwon: But I think that has to do with our expectation that the synchronization of time is like so definitive and precise. But back in the days, I think that would have looked spectacular because you're seeing something mechanically going up and coming down.

Paul Kajander: We're really interested in working with things that don't appear to make sense together. In many ways, this exhibition is the convergence of all these forms that are familiar from everyday life but have been somewhat re-contextualized for consideration in this encounter in Mercer Union.