

## **Marcin Dudek**

Energetically diverse and continually probing, Marcin Dudek's practice expands across multiple mediums. From cavernous, sculptural installations, to intricate collages, the artist has established a unique catalogue of conceptually driven work that retains a unifying aesthetic. Often employing simple, everyday materials, Dudek's output is characterized by a disarming spontaneity; a sense of objects exploding into being. Existing somewhere between organic patterns and man-made structures, amalgams of adhesive tape, vinyl and cardboard expand into abstract forms. Looked at for a little longer, though, it becomes clear that these creations are far from random acts.

Beyond the temporal vulnerability and disorder of the objects themselves, Dudek's art reveals a determination to question physical space. Harking back to the communist-era housing estates of his childhood - an environment defined by the repetitive division and subdivision of space - Dudek has developed an interest in the way we compartmentalize the world around us. In particular, his fascination with the idea of enclosed spaces has drawn his attention to man-made tunnels, from the disintegrating mining tunnels that run under the Polish city of Katowice, to those used by drug smugglers along the Mexican-US border. Drawing on such real-world structures, the installations 'Kopalina (Mine Project)' (2010), and 'I Will Eat This Sleepy Town' (2011) saw Dudek transform London gallery spaces by creating dark, winding passageways, challenging the spatial experience of visitors more used to the clean lines of white boxes.

Subterranean and claustrophobic, Dudek's tunnels generate spaces that can be both disconcerting and exciting to explore. The act of construction, though, raises deeper questions than the experience of the passageways themselves. Largely made from a profusion of adhesive tape, the visible delicacy of the installations' construction creates a record of the artist's labour, not unlike the bare-bones aesthetic of post-modern architecture. Entering the space, the viewer is fully aware they are inside Dudek's creation; a space that has reconfigured rather than rejected what was here before. Similarly, Dudek's tunnels point to the act of exploring, perhaps even mapping, the spaces that already exist around him.

The way in which Dudek delineates space through sculptural intervention can be seen repeated in his videos and works on paper, where the concepts of line and volume are intricately addressed. In an early video work, 'Biala Riposte' (2006), the subtle intelligence of later projects is already clearly present. Starkly shot with quick cutaways, the video shows a small rubber ball bouncing off the walls of the deserted national pavilions of the Venice Biennale. Desolate, yet comic, 'Biala Riposte' offers a means of gauging dimensions through the flight of a ball, whilst at the same time offering a visual record of buildings whose purpose hangs suspended. The empty spaces attest to the global art world's propensity to descend suddenly on a spot before abandoning it again to the elements. It is a point repeated in 'Fair Play' (2008) where a tennis ball is repeatedly bounced on the surfaces of Frieze Art Fair's London tent, a space that for one week each year becomes the limits of a certain understanding of contemporary creativity.

Despite their modest proportions, it is perhaps in Dudek's collage work that his personal aesthetic is most fully realized. Referred to by the artist as drawings, PVC tape is variously combined with strips of vinyl, cork and cardboard to create abstract patterns of jagged edges and broken lines. At times mimicking explosions or rays of light, the collages also reveal elements of floor plans, the attempt to organize space perpetually threatened by the kinetic energy visibly present. Looking at Dudek's 'drawings' we half expect they are about to burst into life, the patterns and segments ready to shift before our eyes. The collages appear as frames from an animation paused, frozen acts of disorder whose endpoint we cannot know.

Whatever our assumptions, the images point to a world whose solidity is more uncertain than we would like to believe.

Often alluding to the act of division, be it a national border or the limits of the family home, an important element in Dudek's spatial enquiry is the relationship between inside and outside. The flimsy barriers of adhesive tape walls that separate the dark world of his tunnels from the galleries they inhabit are a case in point. Where the structure of the tunnels suggests a light, temporal impermanence, the spaces inside evoke solidity, darkness and containment. Repeatedly in Dudek's work, it seems there is a tension between apparent opposites. Another pertinent example is 'Pumping Station' (2008). In a work that married installation, performance and video art, the artist created a tangled body of 23 interconnected bicycle tyre tubes and transported the object to 23 railway stations across Europe. In each station, Dudek then invited passers-by to inflate the tyres, their energetic actions giving life to an alien, and somehow redundant form. The undertaking led to both a mapping of the route Dudek followed - lines drawn on a continental level - as well as an intimate intervention in each location, an effect achieved by merely the flow of air.

The unconventional tactics Dudek has employed throughout his career can be seen to crystallize in a standout recent project, 'Screen House', which began life in 2010. Designed and constructed by Dudek himself, the project centers on a compact artist studio made from the simple wooden pallets traditionally used in the haulage industry. Easily assembled and disassembled, with the option to be re-made in different forms, 'Screen House' references flat-pack furniture and the idea of an easily transportable, prefab home. As such, the project sees Dudek move in a new direction, relating to themes such as economic self-sufficiency and environmental awareness, as well as the position of the emerging artist in an over-priced urban environment like London. At the same time, however, 'Screen House' stays true to Dudek's enduring concerns, allowing the studio to act as a kind of mobile cocoon for the artist, maintaining the consistency of the internal space, irrespective of the external geography of its shifting location.

More than a mere concept, Dudek has realized the mobile potential of 'Screen House' by reinstalling the studio in a variety of unexpected locations. In the first place, this new nomad of art built his shelter on the roof of a building that has now been demolished as part of the preparations for the London 2012 Olympic Games. With 'Screen House' able to be dismantled and stored when not in use, Dudek most recently reinstalled the studio in the communal gardens of an East End housing estate. Part of the exhibition *Winter Pavilion* at London's Waterside Contemporary gallery, the installation provided a neat summary of Dudek's practice, with the adhesive tape infested interior used to display video, sculpture and collage.

Where 'Screen House' will appear next may be left open to the spontaneity of Dudek's journey. What is certain, is that his unique way of looking at form and function, volume and space, as well as our modes of living in around them, will continue to inform an expanding body of vital art work.

**Richard Unwin, 2012**