

Do Over

Denver DuFay, "Do Over"

Cobblestone Air Gallery

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by Brandon Brown

I take it you've seen those big digital signs that announce how long it has been since an employee has been injured. In supermarkets, big box stores like Wal-Mart or Target, and massive discount retail compounds like Costco, they are usually perched near the entrances and exits, high on the wall so everyone in the space can see them. So-called "Days Without Injury" signs show current incident data and remind workers to think about their safety at all times. The makers of these signs suggest that they give employees a sense of ownership over their well-being, even while they make their wage at sites that carry inherent risk, if not outright danger. Updated every day, the counter ideally gives both employees and shoppers a sense of relief that no one has been hurt for, hopefully, a long time. Or that there are improvements that need to be made, immediately, to protect everyone.

Denver DuFay's "Do Over," on view at Cobblestone Air until the end of October, appropriates this ordinary market appurtenance and transposes it in the realm of the deeply personal and autobiographical in a gallery setting. Six of these ticking signs are installed on the gallery's walls, each referring to something the artist hasn't experienced in a certain amount of time. As the digits increase in value, over the space of the exhibition, we find ourselves, as viewers, lodged in the present tense of lack. Even when the activities, events, instances, and objects which have not occurred are banal, the hyperbolic stoicism of the digital clock suggests, perversely perhaps, vast quantities of affect and vulnerability. And, it goes without saying, a critique of wage-dependent obsequy in late capital.

These works are technically kinetic sculptures, reminiscent of DuChamp but wildly contemporary. They are, moreover, constantly in flux. "Without Having Avocado Toast" literally told me, upon entering Cobblestone Air, that it had been 32 days, 11 hours, 14 minutes, and 26 seconds since DuFay had eaten avocado toast. By the time I left Cobblestone Air's friendly space in Boyle Heights, it had jumped to 32 days, 11 hours, 25 minutes, and 9 seconds. Not being in the space now, I can't say with certainty whether it has now increased even more. Whether it is still making the consumption of avocado toast a more distant taste in DuFay's mouth or not. It's possible that, moments after I got in my car and found myself stuck immediately in mid-day traffic on the 405, DuFay spread soft avocado flesh onto the relatively unpliant, scratchy surface of heated bread, resetting the clock and fundamentally altering the

artwork. This mystery, this wonder I feel about the clock, is the moving and profound residue of experiencing “Do Over.”

Not all of the signs in “Do Over” have stakes this low. “Without Having a Sane President Of The United States,” for instance, which counted 584 days, 14 hours, 1 minute, and 59 seconds as I walked in from the sunny Los Angeles day and into Cobblestone Air, reminds us of the disastrous presidency of Donald Trump, the regime under which we both make artworks and write reviews of them. It slyly suggests a clean bill of mental health for Trump’s predecessor, Barack Hussein Obama. Not all of the clocks, technically, even count. The clock for “Without All Police Being Bastards,” for instance, is permanently stuck at 0 days, 0 hours, 0 minutes, and 0 seconds. It’s funny, but after further meditation, also quite disturbing.

But DuFay has a sense of humor and play in these sculptures as well. “Without Having A Life-Defining Orgasm,” which counted 2 days, 9 hours, 10 minutes, and 9 seconds when I visited, indicated that he had experienced such an orgasm moments before Cobblestone Air opened for the opening of “Do Over.” “Without Employee Injury,” seemingly the straightest piece in the installation, shows a period of time only seconds after “Life-Defining Orgasm,” suggesting that it is the employees of *Cobblestone Air* gallery itself who are being observed and evaluated by the piece. Whether or not this work gives them a sense of relief and exhorts them to think about their safety I can’t say. They barely registered my existence as a human being in the gallery space.

These works demand this kind of robust attention and intense interrogation on the part of its viewers, erecting and filling out the life of the artist at the same time as we, finally, know nothing about him. Who *is* Denver DuFay? Most of my readers will remember him only for his groundbreaking astrological columns in the *Poetry Project Newsletter* in 2011-12. Those columns paved the way for the so-called “Astro Poets” twitter (whose reputed seven figure advance might well be shared with DuFay if the authors wished to truly acknowledge their sources) and more minor associations of astrological inquiry with one’s identification as a poet. Like anonymous Berkeley artist Lutz Bacher, DuFay’s identity is carefully protected by both the *Poetry Project Newsletter* and Cobblestone Air. When I asked for more biographical information from head gallerist Dominic Marney-Pitterfutz Greene, they simply gestured to the individual clocks counting on the wall. The glaring cursive of their meaning.

They stood there, dumbly, counting. And continued to do so. Over and over. Until the batteries run out, until Denver DuFay eats avocado toast, until Trump resigns and cops unanimously resign. Or at least until October 26th. Highly recommended.