

sculpture

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Détournement, the act of decomposing and redistributing cultural value, resists literal translation but finds its closest approximation in ‘culture jamming’. Détournement is a turn, but it is also a confrontation. It is not just veering from the road, but ripping cobblestones from the road and lobbing them. As Debord and Wolman saw it, “The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through the Chinese walls of understanding.”

In “Interstice”, Dahan’s first move is to “detourn” Robert Smithson’s psychogeographic essay, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967). Smithson chronicled a bridge, a sandbox, six drainage pipes, all ersatz monuments of his suburban hometown. Critic Sébastien Marot writes that Smithson’s *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*, shows how childhood memories bubble into adult consciousness, “it is the act whereby Smithson, as an artist, reoccupies the ‘suburban museum’ that, from then on, he will basically enlarge until it encompasses the world” The text documents both Smithson’s physical birth and his artistic birth.

Dahan, in *To Have Done with the Judgement of Robert Smithson*, records his own trip to Passaic in a mirrored attempt to wed space, memory, and action. Dahan brings soil from Passaic to a London gallery in order to seat cobblestones he has stolen from his home street of Paris. Sand under cobblestones echoes the Situationist cry, “Beneath the street, the beach,” but it also calls back to Smithson’s sandbox. Dahan also removes cobblestones from a New York street, flies them back to Europe to mix with sand from his own sandbox as a child. The result is an endless relay between home, memory and artistic development.

The title of Dahan’s exhibition, *Interstices*, as well as photographs of tree roots absorbing cobblestones—the natural world both breaking through and enveloping the fabricated world—alert us to the fact that we should view all works on display with a post-structuralist rejection of binaries and that we are a process of erosion.

Beneath London streets, *Off the Beaten Track* is a road to nowhere paved with casts of New York City cobblestones. Hundreds of cobblestones await an animating breath, something to give them meaning, like buried terracotta warriors waiting for their master’s call. But the white cobblestones in this white room resist the subject, any subject. This insistence caused me to rethink the rest of the show as a collection of objects in themselves, each containing a reservoir that we will never access.

Upon entering the gallery’s ground floor with its eight sculptures of potholes, it is difficult to comprehend cobblestones as independent of place, independent of action, and independent of memory. The Yves Klein blue dripping in the channels of mortar awakens artistic historical memory, but it also reminds us that color is the perfect encapsulation of that which cannot be paraphrased. The virtue of Dahan’s work is in the unparaphrased quality of each thing in itself. Works are presented in isolated and reduced forms, allowing us to see the underlying tautology of art.

Will Chancellor