

FROM BOSTON TO LOS ANGELES, A CONCEPTUAL GALLERY SPACE ON THE MOVE:



IN CONVERSATION WITH GALLERY1993'S SEYMOUR POLATIN

Words by Jameson Johnson
Images Courtesy of Gallery1993

I met Seymour Polatin because I was eavesdropping while waiting for a lecture to begin at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in March of 2018. I overheard him say, "When I lived in Boston," which immediately prompted my interjection. Equally surprised to meet someone from Boston in the small crowd, Polatin generously shared a quick version of his story with me. He explained that he runs a gallery space called Gallery1993, which started in Boston and later moved to Los Angeles. The gallery, he clarified, exists inside his car: a 1993 Crown Victoria where he presents a robust rotating exhibition schedule. Since its inception in 2015, Gallery1993 has presented work by Ann Hirsch, Paul Pescador, Allen Brewer, and about a dozen additional artists.

The second time I ran into Polatin was this past February, when I spotted his Crown Vic parked in a storage stall at Spring Break Art Show's inaugural LA fair. We both agreed that Gallery1993 had a story to be told back in Boston. Shortly thereafter, Polatin and I connected over the phone to discuss the development of the gallery as a conceptual space for exhibiting work that subverts the white wall viewing experience that dominates commercial and institutional spaces.

Jameson Johnson: There's a very palpable act of subversion that makes Gallery1993 difficult to place. It obviously exists outside of the capitalist nature of the art market while reaching beyond institutional limitations. However, I wouldn't ever call it DIY or even alternative. How do you grapple with the different territories Gallery1993 exists between?

Seymour Polatin: From its inception, I have intended for Gallery1993 to exist outside of art's institutional context. There are many exhibition conventions that subconsciously form the public's reception of art, for example, white walls and pedestals. By working outside of these conventions, it is my job to actively reconsider how artists' work interacts with the space of the car. Even though Gallery1993 is not a traditional art institution, I work to maintain a level of professionalism in my interactions with the artists I work with and the public. Through this conduct, I hope for the artist's work and concept of the exhibition space to



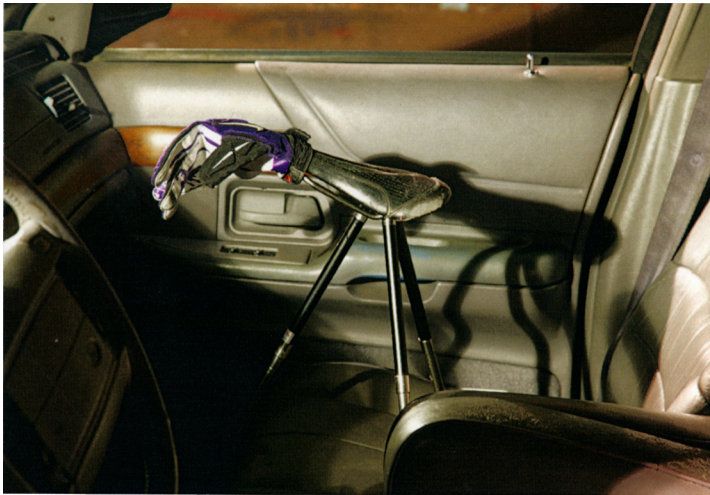
(above) Seymour Polatin with Gallery1993.
Photo courtesy of Seymour Polatin.

(opposite) Gallery1993, Installation View,
Spring/Break Art Show, Los Angeles, 2019.
Photo by Samuel Morgan Photography.

be at the forefront of the conversation surrounding Gallery1993.

JJ: All the while, you aptly employ the same vernacular as that of a commercial gallery. The website reads, "Gallery1993 is pleased to present..." or "Join us for the opening reception of..." How do these subtleties contribute to your mission with the gallery?

SP: While I actively choose not to engage with the white cube traditions of exhibition, I respect the level of engagement that some galleries maintain with their represented artists. This includes being a consistent presence in the artist's development of work, making sure that the exhibition is properly contextualized, and engaging with the public to open discourse about the artist's exhibition. Employing these exhibition text



conventions is a reflection of the positive aspects I find in these institutions.

JJ: When we first met, I was so thrilled (and honestly surprised) to learn that you had launched the gallery in Boston. Can you tell me a bit about Gallery1993's early days? There were certainly a few Boston-based artists on the roster.

SP: It is really important to me that it is known that Gallery1993 began in Boston because I feel that it opens a wider interpretation of the implications of the space. It currently resides in Los Angeles and there are a lot of connections made to other "alternative spaces" and to car culture. For me, I did not enter art discourse surrounded by exhibition spaces that were subverting institutions. I entered in Boston, where there is a very strong institutional presence. I saw many interesting young artists around me who did not have the opportunity to exhibit their work. It was very exciting to begin working with these artists through the newly formed Gallery1993 in 2015. One of my favorite exhibitions from my time in Boston was "Garrett Gould: A Prosthetic Stalemate." For one of the works in this exhibition, Garrett created a site-specific sculpture that was connected to both back seat doors and would lift off the seat when the doors were opened.



JJ: Los Angeles is inherently a very different "art world" than Boston. With commercial galleries and alternative spaces running the scene, there's less of an academic or institutional current to contend with. How has this location shift impacted your curatorial practice?

SP: In some ways, I feel that it is easier for the public to accept the mission of Gallery1993 in Los Angeles rather than Boston because it is more open to subversive art exhibitions. I think that this has opened the space to more attention than it had received in Boston, which leads to a wider audience. I feel very fortunate that I am able to provide a larger audience to the artists I work with and to present artists' work in ways that continue to challenge traditional methods of art viewership.



Danny Bryan Gonzalez: *Juvenile Infallibility*, 2015, installation view.

Garrett Gould: *A Prosthetic Stalemate*, 2015, installation view.

Allen Brewer: *Comfortable hand*, 2017, installation view.

JJ: You've also had to step out of your curatorial role at times. In your collaboration with Ann Hirsch for "The Real Artwork," Gallery1993 became the stage for a performance while you became the performer. What was that process like?

SP: Although I was performing a monologue that Ann wrote and directed, I don't necessarily consider that exhibition a collaboration any more than other exhibitions in Gallery1993. There is an inherent performative element to driving appointments, in which viewers drive with the exhibitions. I feel that Ann really picked up on the unique characteristics of the space and formed her exhibition around them. All of that said, it was a completely new experience for me performing Ann's script. When she proposed it, I was a little hesitant at first because it contrasted with every other exhibition I had organized prior. There was no physical artwork present and I was not able to genuinely discuss the exhibition during the appointments. Since I am very interested in combating traditional exhibition forms, I realized that this can be applied to traditions in my own practice as well, and I felt that the concept and format were very interesting and thought-provoking. I decided that if all it took to realize this exhibition is for me to put in the extra effort to perform the script, then that was completely achievable, and I feel that the resulting exhibition was a very strong presentation of both Ann's work and the concepts present in Gallery1993.

JJ: It's evident that Gallery1993 is really not about the car at the end of the day, but rather the conceptual space it occupies. Do you have plans to expand the gallery into other types of exhibition spaces?

SP: Yes, after four years of occupying the space of a Ford Crown Victoria car, Gallery1993 is moving to occupy one unit of scaffolding that will be presented in different locations for different exhibitions. I agree with you that although the space has been represented by the car, the intention behind Gallery1993 has always been for the exhibitions to have a meaningful interaction with their context and to address the location of the exhibition within the space. In my curatorial development, I have become increasingly interested



Sharif Farrag: *Smokeless Fire*, 2017, installation view.

Paul Pescador: *Ajar*, 2018, installation view.

in architecture and how it functions within its social and territorial context. While the car directly confronts a persistent transience of location, the one constant becomes the car itself. With the scaffolding, the exhibitions will be situated in their individual locations for the duration, and the context of their location becomes more significant. This ascribes a new value that can be addressed within the exhibition. Scaffolding is temporary architecture that is inherently transient. I wanted to give artists the opportunity to be able to shape both the work shown within the exhibition space as well as the architecture of the space itself.

For the first exhibition in scaffolding, Gallery1993 will be presenting “Garrett Gould: Puppet in an Envelope,” opening April 13 in Los Angeles.

JJ: Would you consider Gallery1993 to be a nomadic gallery?

SP: When I hear the term “nomadic” I think of transience over large territories, which I do not particularly identify with. In my work, I try to be very considerate of all the implications that my actions have. Land tenure, or ownership of land, is fraught with the political and economic implications of the country in which the land is being occupied. America has a problematic relationship to ownership of land. Since curatorial work implies a space of exhibition, these concerns are part of the practice. Considering the space that Gallery1993 occupies is a primary focus for me. I want the exhibitions that I organize to actively consider the space of exhibition and present the viewers with a complex understanding of the work shown.

JJ: In some of the press and reception surrounding Gallery1993, there is a huge focus on “car culture” in relation to the space. How do you respond to people who fixate on the Crown Victoria?

SP: I can understand how people focus on that element of the project, of course, but I feel that it is a very surface read of Gallery1993. Within conversations of “alternative spaces” there seems to be a large focus on the most unimaginable places to exhibit artwork, but

these efforts ultimately end up reinforcing the standards of the white cube exhibition model. This leads to a kind of parody of the exhibition space, which is a conversation that I am not interested in being included in. If viewing the space of the car through the lens of “car culture” leads to a consideration of the physical experience of the exhibition, then I’m fine with people making that connection. If the conversation is limited to the improbability of an exhibition space inside a car, then I am not particularly interested in being framed in that way.

JJ: What is the greatest obstacle you’ve overcome with Gallery1993?

SP: Probably the largest obstacle with Gallery1993 is shaping the conversations surrounding it. I work very closely with the artists that I exhibit and put a considerable amount of thought into the exhibitions. There is also an element of trust between the artists and myself, because most artists have not exhibited in a car before. I put a lot of effort towards presenting artists’ work in a meaningful way and properly representing their work within their larger practices. It is very important to me that there is a rich discourse surrounding the exhibitions that I curate.

(opposite top) Alexis McAuliffe:
Lex Talionis, 2016, installation view.

(opposite bottom) Julienne Fusello:
Under the Sun, Nothing Can Hurt Me,
2019, installation view.

