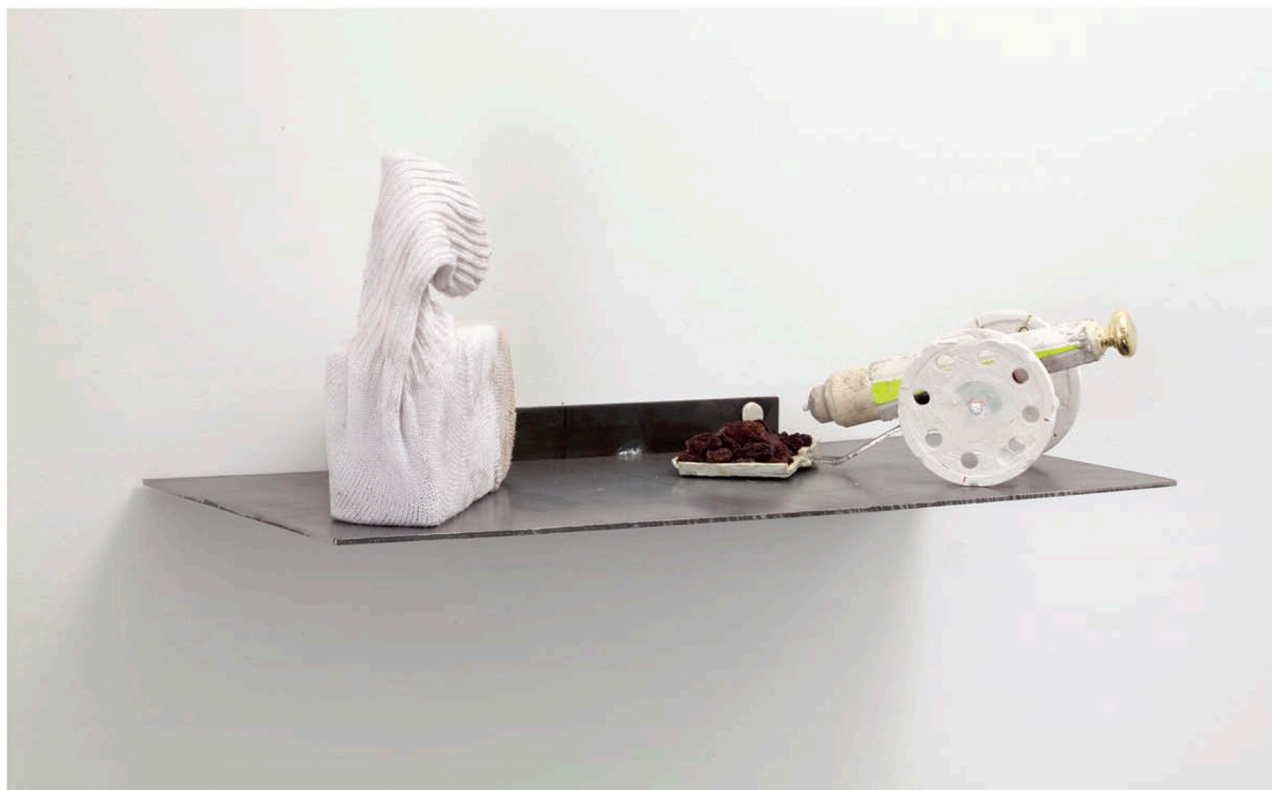


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JJ PEET

by
Sabine Russ

above: *Luxury Leader War Kit*, 2009, grapes, plaster, sock, brick, 8 1/2 x 21 x 9 1/2 inches. Photo by Jason Mandella.
right: *Shadow*, configuration 2 (interior view), 2010, mixed media, 10 x 5 x 7 feet. Photo by Adam Reich. Images courtesy of the artist and On Stellar Rays.





Still from *Skip*, 2010, video (color, sound). Total running time: 7 minutes, 50 seconds.



Cover Up's, 2010, acrylic on panel, 13 1/2 x 23 3/4 inches.
Photo by Adam Reich.

When a *Resistant* battles a *Luxury Leader*, the result could be a dead-lock. To solve such struggle in the sculpture studio, JJ Peet might surreptitiously reach into a drawer of *kernels*, grab an *equalizer* in the form of a wire or a pin and apply it to one of the dueling opponents—a sock-covered brick (the Resistant) and a home-made miniature cannon (the Luxury Leader). Decisions are made swiftly as Peet's own diktat may require the sculpture's completion within the time it takes him to eat an apple. Timers, tools, and materials (plaster, caulker, an assortment of metals, horse hair, dog hair, eyebrow hair, and larger found or stolen objects) are closely within reach. Rules are: sculptures are made with pressure, paintings with leisure; yet to reduce a sense of privilege, they are all produced in artificial light and under strict parameters within four

tiny, windowless studios in Brooklyn, each designated for only one activity—sculpture, small painting, larger painting, or video/audio.

Peet's system is radical, self-perpetuating, and elaborate, if not epic. Along with an indicative vocabulary (he might restrict himself to only *Middle Management* sculpture one week or *Sunday Painting* another), self-imposed stipulations apply to all aspects of his art making—some support efficiency (limit the time spent on an art work) and prevent wastefulness (avoid plastic and use found objects); others minimize distraction (commit to solitary confinement in the studio) and promote intuitive response (always keep brushes wet and ready to strike when a painting is calling).

Before learning all this I walked into Peet's recent painting exhibition at On Stellar Rays. The small

panels struck me as strangely seductive, yet alarming. Successions of brushstrokes evoking radio waves, abstraction reminiscent of oil spills, tiny hovering heads of Cheney and Rumsfeld conspiring within a gray expanse, a telescopic vista through a camera or gun's viewfinder—rather than me eyeing the paintings, I felt they were eyeing me! Instinctively going into alert mode, I sensed eavesdropping and surveillance all around. Only later did I find out that Peet had made the paintings in a secret mobile studio, called *Shadow*, in the gallery's basement. An ultra-functional, ingeniously designed tube, the studio felt like a cross between the Unabomber shack and a submarine's belly. And indeed, Peet likes to paint in the bluish light of an old monitor relentlessly running the German film *The Boat*. Although a personal haven, *Shadow* is not a place for Peet to succumb to subjectivity. Instead, it allows him to fully focus his mind on his task: converting subjects and objects gathered in the outside world (including info bites on military, environmental, and economic calamities) into spontaneously analytical, or analytically spontaneous paintings—in any case an attempt to comprehend.

Finally, there are Peet's suspenseful videos—time-capsule collages combining the artist's street and wider-world investigations with related, quasi-ritualistic operations in his home or studio. Helicopters, drawn curtains, search lights, cats' eyes, spinning dials, and phone recordings recur and meld into bizarre anecdotes evoking a bygone analog world, filled with moments of simple beauty but also imminent threat. You sense the objects' resistance to meaning; there are codes, there's evidence, but there's no proof. Consider all these things we use, participate in, yet do not really understand—technology, wars, or the potential outcome of our high-risk tinkering. Peet, as a blue-collar artist, makes small moves, with stuff whose workings he knows cold. His activities suggest a different type of surveillance, one that may lead to better understanding of our time's potent materials and tools.

—Sabine Russ is a writer and BOMB's managing editor.