

*artasiapacific***Kaz Oshiro: A Standard**
By Jennifer S. Li
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Known for remarkably persuasive trompe-l'oeil depictions of dumpsters, filing cabinets, suitcases and other banalities rendered in acrylic on canvas, Okinawa-born, Los Angeles-based Kaz Oshiro continues to build on his series of what he calls "paintings" with a new body of work that imitates the I-beam, a prominent symbol of the Industrial Revolution and a universal component of construction. To



understand the artist's intentions, it is worthwhile to revisit a passage in Hal Foster's seminal study, *Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (1996): "Since the Industrial Revolution a contradiction has existed between the craft basis of visual art and the industrial order of social life. Much sculpture since Rodin seeks to resolve this contradiction between 'individual aesthetic creation' and 'collective social production,' especially in the turn to processes like welding and to paradigms like the readymade." Oshiro navigated and reconciled the contradiction described by Foster by imitating the industrial, the factory-produced and the readymade through a process that uses the language and tools of both sculpture and painting.

The title of the show, "A Standard," indicated the uniformity of manufactured metal objects that Oshiro's exacting handiwork mimicked, but also referenced the musical works of John Cage. In particular, Cage's *First Construction (in Metal)* (1939) came to mind, wherein unorthodox objects, including anvils and automobile brake drums, were used in addition to classical instruments. For the exhibition, Oshiro's pieces were installed with the gallery's specific floor plan and architecture in mind; they punctuated the various rooms with a restrained rhythm and rose in crescendo to a dramatic, cacophonous fugue at the conclusion.

In the first gallery, five eight-foot "I-beams"—all works were titled *Untitled (Steel Beam)* (2016)—stood aloofly and evenly spaced against the expanse of one wall, recalling the Minimalist geometries of Donald Judd or John McCracken. The three I-beams in the center featured Pollockian splashes of pigment, perhaps an allusion to Abstract Expressionism that gave way to cold, hard Minimalism. The adjacent wall was devoted to a set of three conjoined I-beams, rising in height like Dan Flavin's "monument" works. A 40-foot-long I-

beam, complete with convincing metal bolts molded from Bondo, an all-purpose putty often used for automobile repairs, ran from the wall of the first gallery into the second, which held only one other work. Spanning 15 feet, the dramatic, brick-red, upside-down, V-shaped piece quoted Ellsworth Kelly—an artist whom Oshiro has frequently cited—and his meditations on the dissolution of boundaries between painting and sculpture, as in *Green Angle* (1970).

The third gallery hosted modestly sized works. Several smaller pieces hung horizontally on the wall at eye-level as a painting would. Carrying over the musical analogy, the creations in this room accented the white walls like whole and half rests, creating a dramatic pause before the finale of the exhibition.

The show ended in the largest room with a dozen works sprawled across the floor, intersecting and bisecting the walls, floors, and each other with a climactic, clamorous effect. The finishing touch to this new body of work was, cleverly and ironically, its own undoing. Here, the magician's secrets were revealed. Several works were displayed just slightly away from the wall, or floating inches above the floor, enough so that an unexpected peek of stretcher bars and canvas was possible. Instead of registering shock or surprise, the revelation felt more like a tidy conclusion. As a society, we have left behind the anxieties of the Industrial Revolution. Now, we no longer necessarily devalue or problematize mass-produced products to elevate the one-of-a-kind. The readymade is accepted and valued within museums and galleries as much as a canvas painting, and the physical aspects of making a work of art is no more valuable than its conceptual rigors. The only differentiation at this point might be a matter of taste, and Oshiro's meticulously fabricated, rigorously conceptual, hybrid paintings-sculptures should please proponents and admirers of all camps.