

Untitled Captures

Lucas Ajemian

Text by Julien Bismuth

What is it that holds a body of work together? The work of Lucas Ajemian is marked by his use of different materials, mediums, and means of production. What is it that sets a specific work apart? The seeming heterogeneity of Ajemian's practice is tempered by deep-seated formal and thematic connections that link individual pieces to one another, connections that are discrete, specific, or even tangential in nature. What is a point, what forms a line? Like the connections of a web, a constellation, or a network, such connections simultaneously connect and hold apart in a spatial formation. What is a path? Like objects placed in a room, Ajemian's work invites one to experiment with different paths and perspectival points, different ways of circling around a specific piece, or different trajectories to take from one piece to the other. What is a focus, and what forms or informs a scatter or a dispersion? Inasmuch as Ajemian's practice is focused and directed, it is a direction taken from several different fronts, the paths of his endeavors glancing off of one another to form a network of connected pursuits, like fractures on a broken pane of safety glass.

An example, illustration, or starting point to the discussion of Ajemian's practice can be found in *Pageant*, 2008/2010. To produce this work, Ajemian took apart a film projector, stripped the paint off of all of its parts, had them polished, and then put the projector back together. He then die-cut a strip of mirrored aluminum polymer to the dimensions of 16mm film (2) to play through it. When the projector is turned on, its light is reflected back by the mirrored film into the apparatus, sending the light bouncing inside its complex innards of polished parts. This work recalls other pieces by Ajemian in which he folds a mechanism or a medium back in on itself, or reflects it to the point of dissipation by means of another object or surface (as seen, for example, in *Untitled Capture*, 2007, whose sequential chain of interlocked projections includes scans, video, film, and drawings).

While this piece folds in on itself recursively, others drift towards forms of expansion that border on dissipation or dissolution. These include his recent *Laundered Paintings*, his ladder sculptures (which Ajemian refers to as "films"), or his pedestal pieces (which he defines as being "essays"). In these works, the material object functions less as a sculpture than it does as a lure, a stand-in, or a decorative façade. The material object stands as the residue or emblem of a process whose convolutions are only partially made available to the viewer. References or framing remarks are provided by the artist in passing, by way of glancing interjections worked into the titles, or paratextual material (performed or printed by the artist).

Yet the elusive nature of the work's intentions or meaning (its origins and ends) remains perhaps the strongest and most vocal quality of these works. Moreover, the very beginning and end of these works (the question of their finality, finitude, or even completion) is often deliberately left open by Ajemian as well. In short, the work escapes, or one could also say, the work is full of escapes, of points or moments where something of the work is allowed to escape, or where the work itself is made to escape the viewer's different attempts at grasping it. Which is not to say that the work is cryptic, or even layered, it is simply slick (slick as in hard

to grasp, rather than polished or smooth of manner). It slips away, constantly, in a very deliberate and targeted manner. It does not flee or hide itself behind layers so much as it delays, deflects, lets go, and then stays put, distractedly, or even lazily. If a work could be said to be distracted rather than distracting, it could be Ajemian's. If a work could be said to indulge in its own deferral, it would or should be his as well.

The point of all of this, to the extent that there is one, is a simple one. By doing all of this, or rather, by demonstrating its unwillingness to do what is expected of it, Ajemian's work quietly shifts the burden back not just on the viewer, but also on what the material elements of his works have to offer, in and of themselves and within the specifics of a situation. There is a quietly elegant, one could even say elegiac beauty to Ajemian's work, as well as a degree of care and attention to detail belied by the seeming casualness of many of his works. By the same token, there is a sharp sense of humor, as well as a singularly attuned poetry to his work that is more often than not concealed in the details of its conceptual armature, in the fine print rather than in the concise summary of its premise. With certain pieces, such as the ladder sculptures for example, the essential qualities of the work are best expressed in the deliberately staged gap between its manifest intentions and the actual material aspect of the work. With others, such as *Pageant*, it resides in the skew of the title's declarative tone with respect to the spiraling onanism of the work itself.

The point of all of this, to the extent that there is one, is simple yet complex. It stems simply from a desire or willingness to work against oneself, or rather, to produce works that seemingly work against themselves, not so as to get the viewer to look at the work differently, or look at a work that is in any way defined by its difference (be it that of originality or subversion), but simply to trick the viewer into looking, to trip him up into getting lost in the act of looking at the work, of letting it do whatever it is that it does, of letting it take effect. There is little in the way of cryptical concealment, subterfuge or even mystery in Ajemian's work. Rather, his works are the result of a sequence of idiosyncratically casual yet relentlessly deliberate decisions, designed to lead the viewer away from his habits of viewing into an actual engagement with the work, which, like any authentic engagement with a work of any sort, is attentive both to the ideas that it conveys and its means of conveying them, both to its overall outlines and the subtle quirks of its details and specifics, both to what it seems to say and what it actually works to do.