

№ 000580

Micah Lexier: Increment of One, 2

Canadian artist Micah Lexier's work examines the quantification of human experience through time, using media as diverse as drywall, lines crossing a sheet of paper, coins, and graphic text. Through indexical units of measurement such as minutes and years, Lexier's work questions notions of how we measure worth quantitatively and qualitatively. Many of the works are quantitative self-portraits, using the age of the artist as their numerical basis. Simple yet layered, these works slowly reveal themselves as the viewer brings personal weights and measures to bear in the process of looking.

Lexier made his first self portrait in 1994, a work titled (quite literally) "A portrait of the artist as a slide (divided proportionally between life lived and life to come, based on a life expectancy of 75 years)." Lexier then made his first volume-based self portrait, "Self-portrait as a Lucite cube divided proportionally between a (red) volume representing life lived and a (clear) volume representing life to come, based on statistical life expectancy." (According to the "Canadian Global Almanac," the average Canadian male in his mid-30's can expect to live to the age of 75.) The forms of these works—division of a surface or partitioning of a volume—continue to be a part of Lexier's explorations. In "Self-portrait as a piece of paper divided proportionally between the top area representing life lived and the bottom area representing life to come, based on statistical life expectancy" (1997), twenty sheets of paper (seven of which are exhibited here)

are demarcated uniquely (pencil line, correction fluid, knife mark, etc.) between years lived (thirty-six at the time) and years remaining (statistically speaking).

Every year there is a new number to work with, a new set of proportions. (Now the division between life lived and life expectancy is about half way.) One can imagine the progression of Lexier's exploration, the line moving closer and closer to the edge of the page, perhaps passing it, perhaps not.

In a series of drawings and related works titled "A Minute of My Time," each work marks one minute of the artist's lifetime. Working from simple rules of execution, Lexier creates small drawings, a single scribble-like mark positioning himself in time. These minutes sometimes remain drawings, or they become the templates for steel sculptures, coins, or prints. Each is labeled with the date and time in precise military notation.

Work that seems at first to be non-expressive arouses high emotion through engagement in the questions implied by the work. The works lend themselves to multiple interpretations, viewers perhaps imagining what their life expectancy would be, projecting their own questions about life and aging onto the work. The works exemplify the human urge to know, to quantify, to control and record. Days of birth and death are significant ways of marking time, and birthdays and one's exact age have acquired a high cultural status. Some birthdays have been integrated into our collective marking of the passage of time, such as the use of Christ's birth to mark the beginning of the Anno Domini or Common Era. Christianity and Judaism mark the moment when the world

began. "In One and the Same" (1995), Lexier minted coins as a way to examine these culturally defined ways of measuring time. Inscribed on one side is the artist's birth date according to the Christian calendar, on the other according to the Jewish calendar. For a child born into a Jewish family, the simultaneous presence of the two dates and the dominance of the Christian calendar in the world suggest that even time is not free of cultural assumptions.

"Increment of One, 2" at Hallwalls features Lexier's age-based, volumetric works produced since 1997. All of the works are in increments of 37, 38, or 39 (the year of passing the midpoint of his statistical life expectancy, the year before, and the year after.) As self-portraits in the age of identity politics, the amount of information present is minimal, but Lexier leaves subtle emotional and political traces. In "38 (cents)" (2000), Lexier lays out different groupings of coins that add up to 38 cents, tracing them onto sheets of paper. This series is grouped by three national currencies: American, Canadian, and Australian, a comment on Lexier's personal relationships to these three countries. Other works mix in a sense of play, as in "39 Wood Balls" (2000) consisting of 39 spheres, each incrementally one unit larger than the last, lined up in a row on a table. The work suggests growth, or a game with many sized players. In a new work that will be performed at the opening of "Increment of One, 2," a dancer repeats the same motion 39 times as he crosses the stage. At each crossing he picks up a weight—first one pound, then two, three, and so on up to 39 pounds. As the weight increases and the motion is repeated, the dancer's movements shift slightly, becoming more and more distorted over time. Time literally weighs upon the performer.

Many artists have produced works that indicate their existence in time. They are meditations on an ever present and moving "now," representing and capturing moments of the past. The exhibition at Hallwalls represents Lexier's major explorations of the past three years, including the time-based, volumetric, and life-span works. Ultimately, even the most refined and crafted works with the most mathematical of conceptual frames retain their human touch. Lexier's work has the refinement and coolness of great minimalist works and simultaneously carries an unexpected emotional and political punch.

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August 17, 2000

Micah Lexier: Increment of One, 2 was exhibited from September 16 to October 27, 2000 and is funded in part by a major grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Support for the 2000-2001 exhibitions season has been provided by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), a state agency, County of Erie Cultural Funding, Members of Hallwalls, City of Buffalo Cultural Funding, Chase Manhattan Bank, the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, and generous donations from individuals and local businesses.

This exhibition originated at I Space Gallery, the Chicago gallery of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (April 28 to May 27, 2000). Photography credit: Tom Van Eynde, Chicago. The artwork appears courtesy of the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

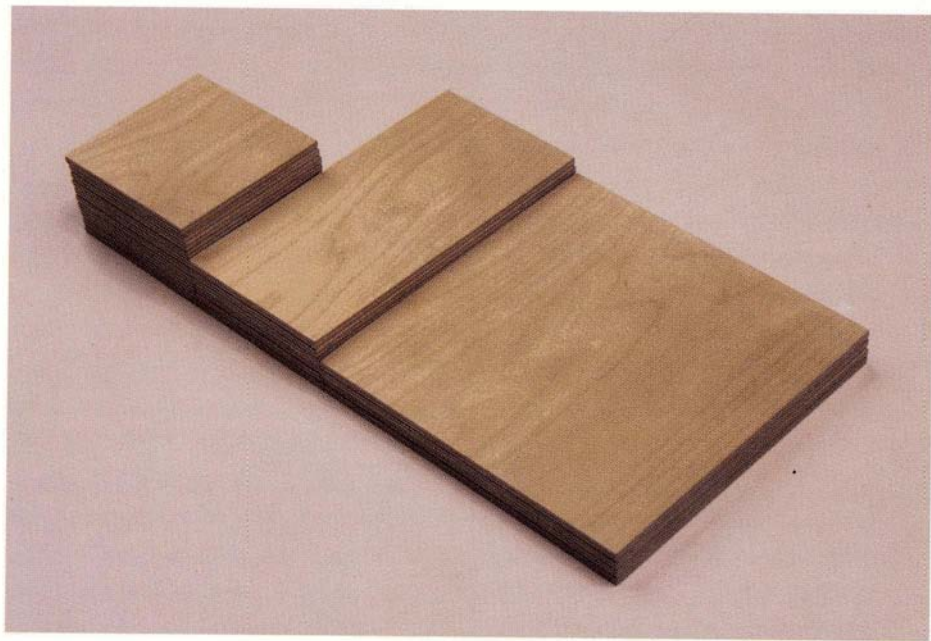
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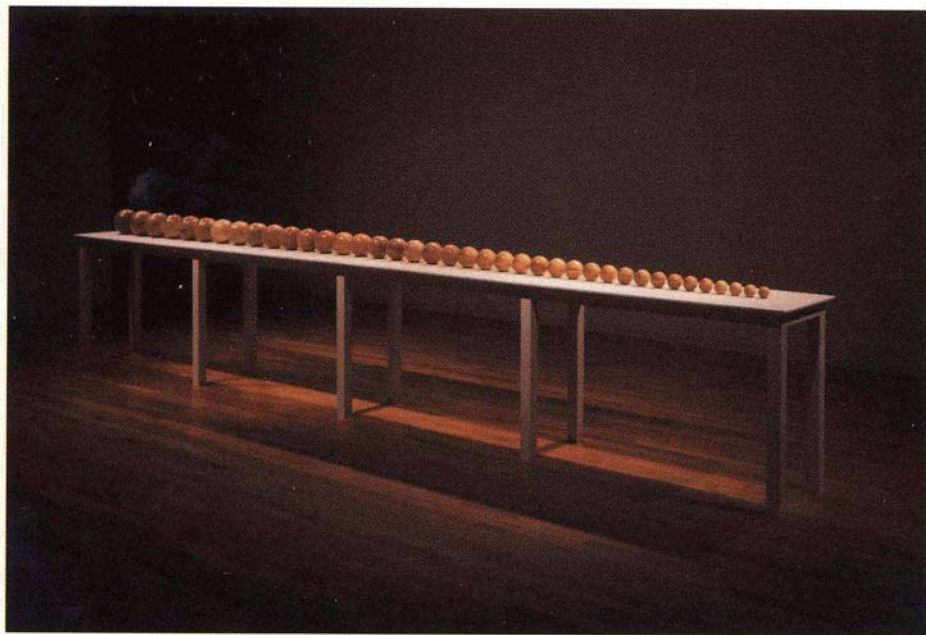
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38 Wood Units, 1999



39 Wood Balls, 2000



39 Wood Balls, 2000 (detail)