

# Tales of the Ordinary

## Reconstructing the flea market

Since graduating from Malmö Art Academy in 2005, an odyssey into the ordinary has been the main focus of Swedish artist Michael Johansson's work. His first forays with the commonplace came when the finishing line for Johansson's studies approached, and a mixture of potential regret, desire to take risks and the harsh chill of reality lurking round the corner gave the artist the courage to enter his personal last-chance saloon. In a leap, of not entirely blind faith, Johansson has taken his finds and grappled with the serious-humorous side of art in condensed and grand kit-sized forms.

text ROSE MCTIERNAN images MICHAEL JOHANSSON

Michael Johansson's recent works might appear to follow the same structure, but for the artist the 'whys' of the selection process and their context are continuously changing. Johansson belongs to that breed of flea market mavens and his meandering fascination has a particular purpose: finding doubles of seemingly unique - though often useless - objects that he has already bought at another flea market. What started as an act of inquisition has become part of his working process. Despite not having any use for most of his collection in the first place, it was the unlikely probability of finding two such objects in two different places that made their possession irresistible. Johansson engages directly with these found objects, manipulating them, juxtaposnew context. Yet after exploring the different potentials of his collections, the artist found himself increasingly interested in trying to free these objects from their function - to put them to zero.

'He ain't heavy, he's my brother', 2005, is one example. Here, the stack of bathroom scales balancing on top of each other puts measuring weight as the original purpose of a scale in connection with the force of grav-

ity, thus cancelling out the function. In the same methodological vein, Johansson has also created work that manifests itself between deliberate exaggeration and apparently accidental situation. As in 'Vi hade i alla fall tur med vädret' (At least the weather was nice), 2006, where a caravan was filled to its limits of capacity with camping equipment, all the windows fully covered with objects, with just one showing a crack from too much pressure. The work confronts the viewer with a situation that could be perceived as a very odd incident or as a carefully put together set.

#### Compressed Chaos

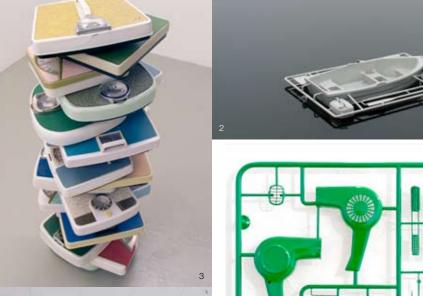
For the artist, such works reveal a strategy to increase ing them against each other or representing them in a the impact of the message through humour, but for now, things seemed to have taken a leftwards turn to 'serious'. Johansson has made a series of works suggesting that situations that might appear normal, random or even chaotic could carry an underlying structure, assembling objects connected to a certain place, for example a kitchen or a living room, into a cubic geometrical unit. This concentration of objects of different origin into one imaginary image of a fake reality is a questioning transformation that Johansson believes addresses

Studio of the artist in the process of making 'Strövtåg i tid och rum' (Strolls through time and space),

Armchair, books, bags, boxes, radio clock etc. Dimensions: 0.55 x 0.85 x 0.6m









## 1. Vi hade i alla fall tur med vädret, 2006

(At least the weather was nice) Caravan, portable coolers, ice packs, sun chairs, camping equipment, thermoses, etc. Dimensions:  $3 \times 2 \times 2m$  Installation view: Bottna Kulturfestival, Galleri 1:18, Gerlesborg (SE)

## 2. TOYS'R'US - Dinghy scale 1:1, 2006

Mixed Media: dinghy, boat equipment, welded metal frame, spray paint Dimensions: 2 x 2.6m Installation view: Besökarna, Västra Hamnen, Malmö (SE)

## 3. He ain't heavy, he's my brother, 2005

Bathroom scales Dimensions: 1.6 x 0.4 x 0.4m

#### 4. Tipi - Konsthallen Trollhättan, 2007

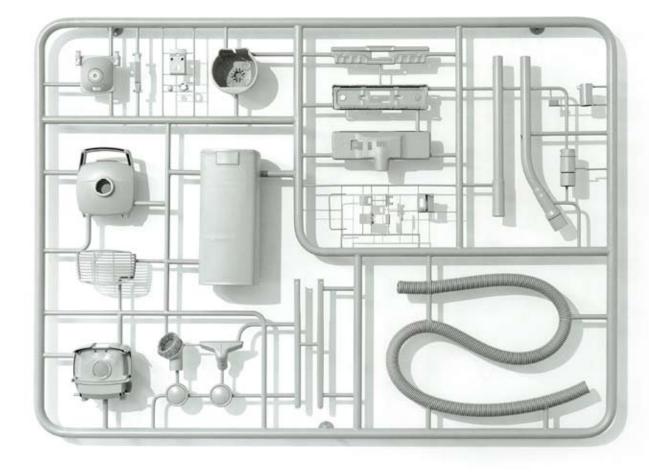
Objects from the storage room at Konsthallen Trollhättan Dimensions: 5 x 2 x 1m Installation view: Nollställt, Konsthallen Trollhättan, Trollhättan (SE)

## 5. Engine Bought Separately -Hugin 2007

Hair dryer, welded metal frame, spray paint
Dimensions: 0.7 x 0.5m

## 6. Cake Lift, 2009

Objects from the storage room at Århus Kunstbygning Dimensions: 1.4 x 5 x 0.8m Installation view: Truth or Dare, Århus Kunstbygning (DK)



Engine Bought Separately -Volta, 2007

Vacuum cleaner, welded metal frame, spray paint Dimensions: 1.7 x 1 x 0.3m

Monochrome Anachron, 2008 (facing page)
Brown furnitures, brown objects, glass objects
Dimensions: 1 x 1.8 x 1.3m
Installation view: Cuboids,
Trondelag Senter for
Samtidskunst, Trondheim (NO)

those great ponderables of history, life and space. The sculptures hold stories of compressed worlds from a time gone by, and the function has been forced into submission by notions of colour and shape.

living: displaying their function, while taking away their functionality. In the first piece from the series, TOYS'R'US, a boat and related equipment are joined together in a welded metal frame. Everything is painted

Johansson has also taken this approach to a series of site-specific works where he used material found in the back rooms of the exhibition spaces where the works were put on display. The objects that were used in the construction of the installations were morphed into the works as their elements and as such, part of the usual activities of the exhibition space was 'set to zero'. For example, the strict triangular shaped work 'tipi' made for Konsthallen Trollhättan, 2007, caused some complications the day before it opened when the ladder usually used to correct lighting became officially out of action. The series of works is a reminder to the viewer about the daily activities going on in the exhibition space that are usually hurried out of sight before the opening.

### Reverse Engineering

Another current in the artist's work deals with his aim to bring his collected objects a step in the wrong direction in the line of production. Fascinated by assembling objects from model kits as a child, Johansson transforms everyday objects into models of themselves. These lifesize kits offer a novel commentary on today's ways of living: displaying their function, while taking away their functionality. In the first piece from the series, TOYS'R'US, a boat and related equipment are joined together in a welded metal frame. Everything is painted in a unifying plastic layer to resemble the surface of a model kit. The piece was created for the Besökarna exhibition in the western harbour of Malmö, an area developed as a demonstration project to provide a model for future cities. Today, many years later, the area still feels like a model. Like much of Johansson's art it points to the role expected from the audience in finding references that give shape and meaning to the works.

www.michaeljohansson.com
A solo exhibition of Johansson's work opens at the Haninge Konsthall (near Stockholm, Sweden) on 30 January 2010

