



KYLE BUTLER • *Mortality Tantrums* • March 14 to May 2, 2014

list of works: *A glass half full is a glass half empty of ambition* (detail), 2014, wood, metal, paint, roofing felt, cardboard, porch light • *Grace vandal*, 2014, chain link fence, wood, paint • *A glass half full is a glass half empty of ambition*, 2014, wood, metal, paint, roofing felt, cardboard, porch light • *Fever pitch, trailing off*, 2013, pencil on paper • *Leisurely Confronting the Abyss*, video, 2013

Kyle Butler is an artist from Michigan currently living in Buffalo, New York. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a focus in painting from Central Michigan University in 2008 and his Master's degree in Visual Studies from the University at Buffalo in 2010. He has been included in exhibitions at the Albright Knox Art Gallery, The Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo Arts Studio, Hallwalls, Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Exhibit A (Corning, NY), and Lost Coast Culture Machine (Fort Bragg, CA). He has also been featured in *New American Paintings* (2010), and is in collections including the Albright Knox and The Burchfield Penney Art Center. He is represented by the Nina Freudenheim Gallery, in Buffalo.

<http://kylewilliambutler.com>

Kyle Butler would like to thank Chris Siano, Scott Bye, Kate Gaudy, Marc Tomko, Adam Weekley, Tim Noble, Mark Snyder, Gary Sczerbaniewicz, Litelab, and the Hallwalls' staff and crew.

Hallwalls' visual arts program is supported by generous grants from Erie County Arts & Cultural Funding, the City of Buffalo, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Major grant and underwriting support for Hallwalls' 2012-2013 programming season has been provided by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

HALLWALLS 341 DELAWARE AVENUE BUFFALO, NY 14202 www.hallwalls.org



The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

Kyle Butler
Mortality Tantrums

Architecture and urban structures have been such recurring elements in the work of Kyle Butler, it would be easy to describe his practice as a rumination on the pining aspirations—both physical and psychological—of a Rust Belt landscape yearning to be more than its desultory reputation. A resident of Buffalo originally from Michigan, Butler is hardly unaware of this perennially-unresolved urban predicament. Yet, Butler is not making statements about specific locations, urban blight, or even urban renewal. Which is not to suggest there are no pining aspirations in the work, but they reside at a more ambiguous and humanist level.

From the gossamer lightness of his drawings; to minimal sculptures displayed on clean pedestal platforms; to a life-sized front porch installation;

to a quixotic performance-on-video, Butler's works may reference the urban landscape, but less as a specific location than as an imagined condition. Consider how much negative space there is in the works, as though we are being given some leftover wisps of the built environment. His fence sculptures are expectedly aerated, but Butler's drawings make similar use of blankness as a formal device. The gargantuan presence of a full-sized porch is presented as a minimal remnant—no house behind, just porch and its roof, buttressed by the familiar site of constructed supports. And even his video piece is largely devoid of people and plays off a sense of urban emptiness and ennui.

Some of this use of negative space is a formal

device, enabling the transformation of somewhat familiar forms into more mysterious objects and images, the representational thing that demonstrates abstract aspirations. Butler's gestures display a real comfort with his various material approaches. His repeating waves of chain link fence section are so languid they seem to be reclining upon their base, evoking the epic presence of a Henry Moore sculpture. That sounds easy, in that "let's make sculpture from refurbished industrial detritus" kind of way, until you notice that his other fence sculptures use sections around which tree forms have grown. Suddenly, you wonder if the organic landscape is struggling to exist within a built environment, or whether the

apparent accommodation between the organic and the industrial elevates both to some new, unexpected space.

Butler's pencil drawings, which make particularly elegant use of negative space, also use a subtle organic/urban set of references, as blank swaths whose edges are fringed with drip-like detailing lay atop a field of topographic patterns. There is the immediate sense of a complex natural world being impetuously and carelessly whitewashed out of existence. Indeed, in one of the drawings, both pictorial planes fade away into nothing as the image moves to the right. And yet, there's a contemplative beauty to the blankness, particularly as it's set off against the more active side of the drawing. Is this a field of emptiness or zone of renewed possibility?

And what of the elephant/porch in the gallery? Is it a grim reminder of urban blight to construct a life-sized porch sculpture with no house behind it? Is it some strange symbol to evoke the multitude of empty structures in a struggling environment? The lost dreams of homeowners? Well, maybe. It is a sculptural form with emphatic presence, despite the fact that its most prominent volume is empty space. But there's nothing desultory about this yawning gap or the form itself. Originally intended to reference a roof in mid-repair, it is constructed and "propped up" with greater certainty than many of the real porches to which it alludes. It exhibits a dynamic confidence in its own form. And, if you're drunk on buffalo, that might credibly be perceived as a statement about the plucky gumption of a urban landscape that refuses to give up.

Or, if you see the prevalent examples of negative space in Butler's work as dreamy, imaginative allusions towards more ambiguous directions and possibilities, then the porch may not be a porch at all. Physically accessible, it includes a floor upon which the audience can

move through it into the gallery. A portal. In the history of symbols, portals and doorways are entries into new spaces and dimensions, into that which we do not know but, at least at the instant of our passage, are imbued with possibility.

We need that dream of an alternate world, a re-imagined space, an affirmation that our environment will not define us or predetermine our dreams. It's a question of how we define our sense of persistence in the midst of what are not always encouraging environments. In a none-too-subtle Sisyphian gesture, Butler's short video work with the none-too-subtle title *Leisurely Confronting The Abyss* asserts the underlying frustration of a Man vs World paradox through the heartwarming tale of a man and his recliner.

We see the artist exiting his studio with a reclining easy chair, dragging it down to the street and, serving as his own pack mule, hauling the chair through the city streets and down to the waterfront. Curiously, the streets our Everyman traverses are largely empty so Butler's trope of negative space continues to function in the video as well. Finally arriving at the water's edge, he quietly sets up a table, pours a drink, and lets out a short but emphatic yell.

A tantrum, if you will, about mortality in the face of everything else—an indifferent environment, tired materials and structures, emptiness, the rising tide of the void. The only choice, really, is to transform and invert all these cues. Make negative space your friend. Open a portal to new lands. Persist and endure.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

