

REVIEW / COLORADO

## The Broom of the System: Trey Duvall's *RETURN/SWEEP* at Rule Gallery

SEPTEMBER 14, 2023

Denver artist Trey Duvall combines digital, mechanical, manual, and natural tools in order to explore a multitude of concepts in his durational installation *RETURN/SWEEP*.



Trey Duvall, *RETURN/SWEEP*, 2023, installation view, RULE Gallery, Denver. Photo: Joshua Ware, August 19, 2023.

A small motor powering flanged wheels rolls along a metal track screwed into the drop-ceiling panels of Rule Gallery in Denver, Colorado. Affixed to the underside of the motor, a white cord descends several feet with its terminal end tied to the top of a cheap, plastic broom handle. The cord suspends the broom just above the floor so its bristles touch the floor's surface. As the apparatus moves back and forth, slowly, from one end of the track to the other, it pulls the broom gently across the concrete floor and over a pile of sand that the conceptual artist Trey Duvall situated in the center of its path. Over the course of two months, the broom will

displace sand from the pile, sweeping granules along the linear trajectory of the apparatus. What the precise, final arrangement of sand will look like cannot be known until early October when Duvall's show *RETURN/SWEEP* concludes. But regardless of the visual outcome, the form produced will be a result of systematic, deterministic, and repetitive movement.

In addition to the durational installation which the artist created, there is a series of clear, eight-inch Plexiglas cubes spaced ten inches apart that line the entirety of the gallery. Each cube contains a small, meticulously sculpted pile of sand, harkening back

to the larger pile on the floor. They offer a static and hermetic counterpoint to the kinetic and spatially expansive installation.

Rule's press release for RETURN/SWEEP frames Duvall's show as a conceptual project that explores "purpose and futility through repetitive tasks, material,



Trey Duvall, RETURN/SWEEP, 2023, installation view, RULE Gallery, Denver. Photo: Wes Magyar, August 18, 2023.

and form," as well as the "relationships between tool and task, intent and yield, effort and purpose." Likewise, it references the motor/broom apparatus as an analogue for "the saccadic movement and fixations of the eye while reading."

No doubt, RETURN/SWEEP is all of these things, but the beauty of a strong work of art is its conceptual openness and ability to catalyze a variety of interpretations and arguments. To this extent, the conceptual and binary tensions produced by Duvall's show are not limited to those listed in the press release for RETURN/SWEEP; it also examines the hermetic versus the public, static versus kinetic, miniscule versus large, and digital/mechanic tools versus manual tools. The list of possibilities is only as short or as long as an audience member's intellectual curiosity will permit.

But more than opening up a field of conceptual possibilities predicated upon binary relations, Duvall's artwork succeeds because it erodes or challenges the very binary constructs it proffers as entryways into the piece.

For instance, the hermetic or protective aura fostered by the Plexiglas encasements (in contrast to the open

and intentionally displaced sand pile) is undercut by the fact that the opening and closing of the building's doors, the rumble of trucks and motorcycles passing by outside, or the errant bump of a clumsy gallery attendee inevitably will jostle the meticulously arranged piles within the Plexiglas. To echo a sentiment from Thomas Nail's Theory of the Image: "There is no work of art in a vacuum; there is only the work of art in motion."

Conversely, when the gallery closes and attendants turn off the building's power at night, the motorized apparatus will shut off until the gallery re-opens. The perpetual displacement machine ceases to displace. Ceases to move. Ceases to embody the false binary upon which it spuriously rests. It is, rather, an intermittent machine indebted to the specific contingencies of gallery employees.

Yes, the strength of RETURN/SWEEP is not found in the multitude of conceptual binaries that it invokes, but revealing and reveling in their inherent weaknesses.



Trey Duvall, RETURN/SWEEP, 2023, installation view, RULE Gallery, Denver. Photo: Joshua Ware, September 12, 2023.