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Darryn Doull on Brian Groombridge



In *Time Enough at Last*, Lyn Venable introduces poor Henry Bemis. Henry's lasting ambition was to read a book from cover to cover, despite his myopic eyes. In the end he cried, when after a cataclysmic event, he found his glasses had broken into a pile of blurry shards. His ambition was irrevocably thwarted, in spite of his escape from the tedium of normal life. A truly abysmal denouement.

After the explosion, Henry fumbles up a formerly familiar staircase, now disfigured into a foggy memory by the force of the blast. The ascent marks a transition between Henry's former life and his current reality. At the bottom of the stairs, before the event, Henry had been stifled by unknown potential. He was unable to see a book through to its end before life's clutter diverted his attention in so many other directions. At the top, he was struck by a definite conclusion in a post-apocalyptic void with no opportunity to reclaim his sight as it was before. His point-of-view – of the world, of himself, of his literary ambition – was decisively shifted by a single discovery, like a greedy explorer bumping the hull of their boat into an otherwise unknown rock amongst unmapped terrain.

Henry's climbing of the stairs echoes the journey of another protagonist (this time a fictionalized version of Jorge Luis Borges) returning from Carlos Daneri's basement cellar in *The Aleph*. Within

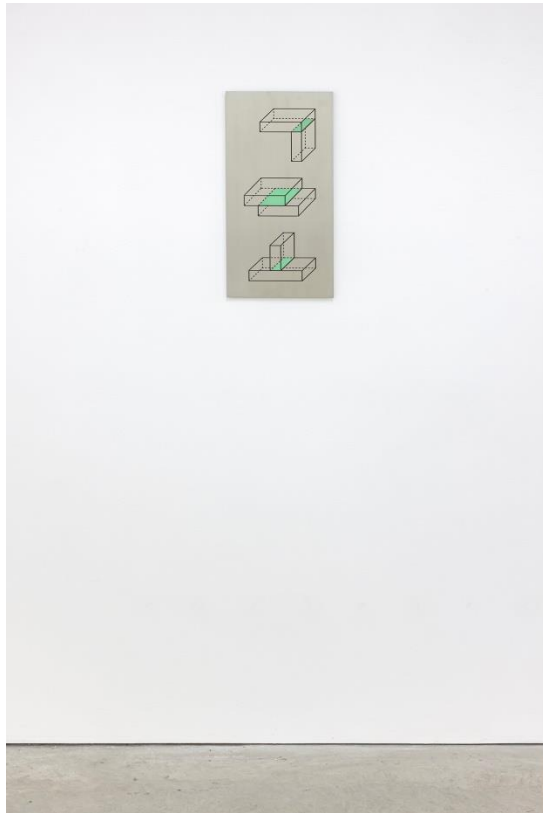
the basement, Borges observes everything in the world within an impossibly brilliant, tiny sphere of light. Total clarity. After returning upstairs, he falsely tells Daneri that there was nothing special to behold in the dark cellar. Borges' ability to see was limited in scope, but not limited in quality as poor Henry's was.

There, then, them.



A case study is both a process and a result; an origin and an interpolation. Here, Groombridge offers us six of them – a consistent title for each object tells us as much. Most often, case studies are excerpts from reality to be used as examples, guidelines or as circumstantial evidence. *As demonstrated in the following report, vehicular accidents are not more common during a full moon.* The process of study is both observational and investigative. It can include qualitative and quantitative information.

The case studies gathered here point in various directions. One *Case Study* (above) highlights components required for a structure to achieve some purpose. Perfectly painted bright orange lengths of steel mark the sawhorses' vertical support, horizontal brace and work surface. These are edges and limits – a set of minimum requirements and wholesome fulfilments. Another *Case Study* (below) notes several possible relations of two rectilinear volumes and their overlapping faces. Stack, slide, share. A mutual support or dependency. I question if any of these possibilities are correct. My own unknowing casts doubt upon my reading. I am pushed further afield and distance myself from the object of study to better see it in relation to other things both inside and outside of the gallery. It is a move toward the totalizing view of an imagined Archimedean point wherein the object before me might snap into some greater logic. If only I could visit Daneri's cellar.



Yet another *Case Study* (above) is more introspective, perhaps. Three painted aluminum panels hold onto the architecture of the gallery. Floor, corner, edge. The thing being defined by the object is its container and the surface holding it up. At first, the lines on each panel appear to be perfectly straight. Then, I begin to question my own eyes as the lines seem to bend under the pressure of my scrutiny. The lines in this *Case Study* start to read as cartographies, meridians and trajectories. I recollect previous works, like *52° 02" 31' N, 02° 02" 44' E*, from 2005 (below). Charles Reeve writes in *Il Milione* (2008): *a spare gesture that appears contained and self-sufficient, but turns out to be a placeholder for an impossible range of ideas*. Is this new *Case Study* pointing toward a specific geospatial coordinate or even some other pre-existing object? Could we map some other terrain beyond the architecture of the gallery if we could uncover the secretive inner logic of the work? Is the terrain ours to invent? Meld, weld, abut.

Another previous work (*Untitled* from 1997, below) realizes a similar spatial arrangement as the aforementioned *Case Study* but uses text instead of line. Intersect, divide, union. These are relations between surfaces that define the spaces we inhabit. A challenging route leads us right back to where we started, and sometimes even further away from where we intended to go. There is value to be had in the journey, though, for each direction manifests any number of other discoveries. A journey taken only to arrive back at the beginning is not a journey lost. Similarly, working with the information provided without an overly pre-determined destination lets an object continue to resonate. Or, as the artist says, continue to bloom.



Flat, sharp, natural. The orchestra pulls at their strings and gives life to cold metal and dry wood in a soundcheck before the show. The dissonance holds an ambiguous space of seemingly infinite expectation and anticipation. A conductor waits at the ready, essential and mute. At times almost invisible. I listen to the individual components, knowing that within the collective sounding body are all of the ingredients required to produce something powerfully harmonious. Until that future imagination becomes a past experience, there is the potential for any number of things to go wrong, or fantastically right. It remains to be determined. Each player marks their presence and there are no extra components. In another room across town, Vera Brandes assuages a dismayed musician to play an undesired instrument. Without her youthful persistence, the *Koln Concert* would have been nothing but a lost opportunity. A ticket to refund.

Behind every paradigm is a supporting lattice. Rotraut, Vareilles, Paschini.



I have previously experienced the way that Brian Groombridge observes and appreciates the peripheries of daily life. Earlier this year, his work was included in a group exhibition that I co-curated. The exhibition centered on the art of wireless imaginations and included a bunch of *stuff*. Artworks, of course, but also a wide-range of archival documents and various objects dragged out from dark museum storage vaults. Of these, certain objects found value along oblique paths. For example, two plastic radio consoles designed for play in a child's dollhouse sat alongside stamps, magazines and coins. Things taken from the world, framed for consideration. Things you've seen, owned and exchanged before.

I remember Groombridge enjoyed the juxtaposition of his work alongside *non-art stuff*. It was a simple comment, but one that stuck with me. And, of course he does. Many of his objects quiver and tremble along the boundaries of utility beyond the art object (notwithstanding the impeccable quality of their construction). They almost always point back out into the world; out toward other people, relations, and stories. In this most recent exhibition, some works appear to be light parenthesis around older ones, inviting quotation, historical sampling or cyclical revisiting. At times frustratingly slippery, the objects are like actors prodded onto center stage, even though they are perhaps better cast for supporting roles. They portray characters that only need one line to shift the entire plot. The ones that people either love or hate at the end of the play.

Perhaps that is too quick of a thing to say, for each work is also straining under its own specificity. Each form is suspended, like Borges emerging from the cellar, in a state of unknowing. They offer us so many openings, bringing us down barely lit paths. To be suspended in unknowing requires an initial site of grounding. A connected place of clarity from which to begin, even if it becomes obscured and distracted by the mischievous offerings of memory. Like reading a tattered instruction manual or a muddled set of coordinates, we must intuit the gaps and seek order from fragments,

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reaching like Henry on his foggy staircase, to grab hold of something more reliable.

The most fantastic beasts tend to dwell along the undefined margins of a map, and producing space for unknowing amongst declarative index can spur the most beautiful imaginations.