

## DROP UNIT Essay

In her latest exploration of cardboard as a raw material, artist May Tveit creates a series of works that apply her refined sense of craftsmanship to an ordinary industrial material, transforming layers of corrugated cardboard into large-scale sculptural designs with mesmerizing spaces, surfaces, and voids.

Tveit, an associate professor of industrial design at the University of Kansas, began working with cardboard in 2017 during her unofficial residency at the Lawrence Paper Company, a corrugated packaging plant in Lawrence, Kansas. Working from a prototype-cutting table used by the company's designers and a nearly limitless supply of corrugated cardboard, Tveit initially created works based on the standard box template frequently used in packaging design. These works culminated in her Universal Boxes series, recently on view at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (2017-2018).

The two sculptural wall pieces of Drop Unit employ the same regimented and labor-intensive process as the artist's Universal Boxes series. Each work is composed of machine-cut cardboard layers, hand-glued by Tveit in increasingly smaller scale to create nested, geometric forms. The largest work, *more people love you than you know*, consists of 108 layers of corrugated cardboard stacked and glued in 1/8-inch increments.

The Drop Unit sculptures not only follow the same process as their predecessors—they also utilize their companion parts. Inspired by the surrounding cast-off cardboard from the host template, or the “drop” in manufacturing terms, Tveit created new works that make use of this typically discarded material. Building the drop silhouette in successively smaller layers, the final shape of each piece becomes an exact inversion of its mother form. The precision of each added layer creates the illusion that her works have been carved into, rather than painstakingly assembled. This additive process builds layers of space into the work, both real and implied, as the lines composing each central cut seemingly converge in the background, suggesting a far greater depth than the works' physical form allows.

The inclusion of five monoprints, created by Tveit during a workshop at Anderson Ranch Arts Center, further signals an exciting new direction for her artistic practice. Tveit's series of prints use the cardboard template of her sculptural designs as a printmaking matrix for more intimately scaled renditions on paper. Similar to her wall pieces, each print utilizes progressively smaller versions

of the same form. Each layer of cardboard is coated with black ink with a transparent base, then pressed on to paper, leaving behind an impression of the cardboard's shape and corrugated texture. The transparency in each application of ink builds depth and density as each successive layer is printed, resulting in a series of receding surfaces of luminous monochromatic tones.

The spaces created in Tveit's sculptures and prints open up a larger consideration of time, place, and memory. Underpinning much of the artist's practice is a consideration of how the language, materials, and processes of modern industry find parallels with human experience. By incorporating the cast-off material of her previous works, Tveit's sculptures reference not only the physical materials left behind in the artistic process, but they also evoke our own memories and experiences, those external conditions that shape who we are. Her works ask us to consider what is left behind as we move forward. What do we take with us and what is let go? What might be salvaged? Tveit's works suggest that not all that falls need be forgotten. What drops from us is still there, waiting to take shape in ways we can't even imagine.

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