Manny Krakowski’s exhibition, Material Anamnesis: the subversion of routine objects, will open at the Robert Madsen Gallery this Saturday, October 13, 2012. Manny is a Los Angeles based sculptor who found a temporary home in rural Stanwood, Washington, working at the Pilchuck Glass School. I asked him why he was leaving the Northwest for LA, and what it was like working on campus in the offseason. He told me stories about living in the woods, working at Pilchuck, and where he plans to go from here.

Manny’s artwork focuses his personal connection and dependence on inanimate objects and obsolete technology. He works methodically, re-imagining scissors, cameras, and measuring tapes as projections of light, and he carefully replicates lemons and cassette tapes in hot pink rubber.

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LP: Let’s talk about your hot pink rubber cassette tapes.
MK: That color seems to be an attention getter; people’s eyes are attracted to it. I think they have a fleshy quality, which takes it out of context.
LP: Have you made any glass tapes?
MK: I have not. I've thought about it. I'm excited about the level of detail I can get with rubber. I'm working on this piece about the degradation of technology, and these tapes are disintegrating and falling apart. I really love how the rubber captures this falling apartness and even though it's different from cold glass, I think they have a lot of similarities when glass is hot. Glass is very flexible when it's hot, and I like how the rubber is flexible, so it captures the same energy as glass.

LP: I was on your website and you have a lot of text about the Key sculptures, have you been making them the longest?
MK: No, the keys are the first real study into making sculptural work. It was something I could work on by myself, and that gave me the time to investigate the form I was going for, and some of the intricacies of the shape, and learning the techniques to get where I wanted to go. I have been working on those for a while. I made an installation with them, and I felt like it was time to stop. It represented spaces of a calendar with a key on each day of the week, representing opportunities that we might take for those days. My new work is kind of a balance between making glass, which can be a production based material, to make work out of glass to make a living or an idea, for me, once the idea is finished, or I learn how to accomplish something aesthetically, I get a little bored with it and want to move on. The newest work I've been doing is the Chairs, and I'm trying to incorporate those with some other materials. I'm trying to stay away from making the same object over and over again.

LP: Are you done with the Keys?
MK: For now. Unless I need to revisit it for another project.

LP: On the website, you talk about the keys being keepers of culture. Are your chairs as resolved as the keys?
MK: All of my work has been based on inanimate objects, and I'm interested in the chair because my relationship with objects, whether it be the key or just something I have with me all the time, it kind of becomes a burden where I'm checking my pockets when I leave the house, 'where are my keys?' 'have I lost my keys?' I make sure I lock my door when I left. I'm a little bit obsessive compulsive, where I'll be out at my car in the mornings and I'll go back to see if I locked my door.
The chairs are also something I come into contact with during the day, but I don't feel like I really think about what kind of relationship I have with these objects. What kind of role they play in my life. The idea that I'm working on with mixed media is the idea that these chairs might represent people. Maybe I've seen a chair at my parents house that's been there for 20 years, or a chair that my son used to sit in, or a chair at a glass school – chairs have been part of my life, and I'm thinking about how that object could be a memory for me.
LP: The chairs and the keys, do they play a similar role in your life?
MK: In a sense, although, the key to me was more about the object as a burden, because I always have to have them, whereas the chairs are a place where I sit down after work to think about things, or where I draw or sit at the computer, so it’s like a different time than being up and being active. To me it’s tranquil; it’s a time where I’m not physically active but more mentally active. Same thing with this series of watches and light; I’ve been working on this idea of the watch as an object, this thing that keeps track of time, and that time becomes a burden. Like, we both had to be here today, and I was taking a nap, and woke up and showered thinking ‘alright, I don’t want to be late.’ These objects dictate our lives and they may not even be physical, like, time as an object.

LP: You’ve been talking about having the watches draped over the chairs, are you still thinking about doing that?
MK: I’ve been thinking about doing that, but I don’t know if it will all be glass. I’ve been working a lot with rubber, and I love the idea of process and the idea of process replicating something that already exists or even replicating glass objects in rubber.

LP: When did you first come to Pilchuck?
MK: I first came to Pilchuck in 2004 as a student; I took a class with Davide Salvadore. I was living in California at the time, and I hadn’t had much exposure to a lot of skilled glass making at that time. I’d gone to community college after high school, and then wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. I was playing a lot of music at that time, and then I enrolled back into school at Cal State Fullerton, and my teacher was Joe Cariati, and once I came to Pilchuck I realized I wanted to dedicate my time to glass making. People say ‘Pilchuck changed my life,’ and it happened to me too.
LP: Did you work for Randy Walker or Ross Richmond the following year?
MK: No, since 2004 I came back to Pilchuck every year as a staff member, in 2008 I applied to be a teaching assistant for Randy Walker, and it was one of those magical stories you hear about Pilchuck. I’d never been a teaching assistant at Pilchuck before. I wasn’t sure I was ready, even though I was getting more comfortable in the shop, I applied to TA for him, and I got selected. Randy and I had never met before.

LP: Not even while you were on staff at Pilchuck?
MK: No, never. I had studied with Karen Willenbrink at the Eugene Glass School, and I had met Ross Richmond in Preston Singletary’s class in 2006. 2006 was the last time I was student, and I’m ready to be a student again.

So I met Randy, and we got along great we both were able to talk about the material in a similar way, and in a way that I could relate to and understand. I really liked the way he thought about glass as a material. The following winter in 2008, I came up to start helping Randy, and I lived on campus for the next two winters.

LP: All alone.
MK: No, the first year I lived there Jamie Randall lived there, and the following year Megan Stelljes lived there. But pretty much all alone.

LP: I need to hear more about living at Pilchuck in the winter because I am scared of the dark, and the thought of being up at Pilchuck alone all winter terrifies me.
MK: You know, some of the scariest times were when I went to town, like Stanwood or Mt. Vernon. I had to open and close the gate which is halfway up the road, sometimes there would be cars parked there because it’s a hiking parking lot. It would definitely get really dark. Knowing John Reed is there is comforting, knowing that someone else was on campus watching over.

LP: Would you ever see him?
MK: Not late at night. During the day I would see him at the office, but not very regularly. [Campus] was definitely really quiet, and the first year I would have thoughts of an ax murder in the forest. Before I moved there I was living in Long Beach, California. But I really like the quietness of Pilchuck. I got to really focus on work, and focus on myself a little bit more, not being so distracted by everything going on. And it gets really cold. It’s a lot colder than in Southern California. The first year, I think I wore two pairs of socks every day, and now I don’t have to do that anymore.

The snow can be pretty treacherous too. The first year I lived up there, I got snowed in for four days. And I got stuck at Kelly (O’Dell) and Raven (Skyriver)’s house. And, not really having much experience with the snow, I thought I was going to hike back up to Pilchuck in 3 feet of snow.
LP: You would have needed snowshoes.
MK: I was wearing a pair of coldworking boots, and I was wearing a silver-loading suit.

LP: Why were you wearing those things?
MK: You don’t want to know.

LP: Did you get to your cabin?
MK: I did. It took me a really long time. It was still one of the hardest things I ever did. I think it got to 6 degrees, the water in the toilet bowl was frozen, and the power was out. I couldn’t stay in the cabin, so I lived in the hotshop... with the chipmunk, with the generator on for four days.

LP: You lived comfortably in the hotshop office?
MK: Well, no, I had to drag the big bench that people sit on to watch demos, into the office, and I slept on there with my sleeping bag. Finally someone plowed to road, one of John Reed’s friends, and I was able to make it to California for Christmas.

LP: You’re not tired of being at Pilchuck?
MK: This is the first year I’m not working on staff in about 7 years; I’m working as a gaffer. I started working on maintenance, and then continued working as the hot shop coordinator, and now that I’m moving back to California I’m trying to spend more time with my family. I’m trying to apply for school this year, and this is a good time not to be so immersed in glass.
LP: Graduate school for sculpture?
MK: Yeah, It’s been exciting to make more work outside of the glass studio.

LP: Are you feeling good about that work?
MK: I really am! I think it’s fresher to me. I am definitely more excited about some of my newer work. I have a more interactive installation that I have some video documentation of, and I’m slowly starting to move away from the object. I’m looking at my work as a visual experience – still dealing with a lot of properties of glass like optics and light.

Opening Reception, Saturday, October 13th, 6pm – 9pm.
Robert Madsen Gallery is located at 5448 Shilshole Avenue Northwest, in the Ballad neighborhood of Seattle, Washington.
madsengallery.carbonmade.com/