

Abstract

The use of found objects is evident in a range of contemporary artmaking practices. The use of found objects can, however, no longer be understood as a rupture from tradition as they were in the early decades of the twentieth century when they were first used by Picasso and later by Duchamp, because found objects have become part of a longer genealogy in art making. A new approach is needed in order to understand the significance of the use of found objects in contemporary art. This study explores the significance of the use of found objects in selected contemporary South African artworks in order to move beyond an understanding of the use of found objects as the anti-art gestures like those of the historical and neo-avant-gardes. I propose that a shift in focus, from the idea of the found objects as anti-art, to an exploration of the changing ontological status of the found object as it moves through different social fields is one such new approach. Chapter one introduces the study, while chapter two outlines the research methods and theoretical frameworks used. Chapter three explores the meanings that objects accrue in everyday practices, while chapter four focussed on the difference between artworks and more quotidian objects. Pursuing the question of the manner in which the ontological status of the object shifts as it enters into and becomes part of the field of exhibition, chapter five considers the ways in which meanings are constructed for objects in the field of exhibition through the conventions of display. I explore the ways in which artists make use of or invert these conventions as a means of challenging the field of exhibition. Acknowledging that the objects are also active agents within this process, in chapter six I explore the manner in which the materiality of found objects contributes to the meaning of the artworks, and by extension, I consider what new possibilities of meaning a focus on the materiality yields. In the final chapter, I use the concept of the everyday to draw the themes that have emerged throughout this study together. I conclude by situating the contemporary South African art practices within the genealogy of the avant-garde.

Key words: Found objects, Siopis, Alborough, Seejarim, Materiality, The Everyday, Contemporary South African Art