

You may have noticed that the gallery appears somewhat empty. There are a few objects around the space, and they don't even appear to be made by the artist. Rest assured this has nothing to do with ability or willingness on Chris Boyne's part; indeed, it is an absence he himself had no hand in constructing, but it fills the space. You see, the objects he has assembled here are the remaining ephemera of something that seemed too large to disappear.

You can appreciate their cold functionality and industrial specificity on a formal level if you wish—as they are, technically speaking, basically readymades. But the formal signifiers aren't exactly what the artist himself was invested in. The artist quite literally went to great lengths to retrieve these items, all the way to the town of Alang in the state of Gujarat, India.

The principle character in this installation, a sturdy, piston-like component, was apparently some sort of fuel injector for an enormous ship's engine, though its role isn't particularly crucial. It happens to be the only fragment Boyne could find that—if the tags and packaging of the object are to be trusted—had been scavenged from a hulking container ship that had been beached and laboriously deconstructed, recycled, scrapped, annihilated.

This ship was not chosen at random from one of the thousands of dots teeming across the globe's oceans, but was a specific ship, the *Atlantic Conveyor*, that regularly called at the Port of Halifax, in Nova Scotia, where the artist grew up. He personally witnessed the ship slowly ambling toward the horizon on what would be its final voyage before its owners, the behemoth multinational logistics

group Grimaldi, surreptitiously (and likely illicitly) sent it to be “retired” at the catastrophic breaking beaches of South Asia, which many of us know from *National Geographic* photo essays. Boyne was not after such images through his project.

His task was to find the real thing, the impossible relic in the cataract of destruction and waste that accumulates as the dark matter of global shipping. Alan Sekula and Noel Burch's documentary *The Forgotten Space* was thus titled because of the invisibility of the maritime transport industry, in spite of its accounting for the overwhelming majority of international trade in goods. The objects Boyne recovered are tokens of the informal economies that maintain this invisibility, away from the hazardous waste and safety regulations and shiny PR of the open market of the North.

Now, facing these objects far removed, double-removed, from their contexts, what are we to make of Boyne's treasures? One of the whirlpools these objects inhabit is the black hole of value. Boyne's purchase of the unusable if handsome steel object was made possible with a grant and, rescued from the void of raw materials salvage, art seems to be the only place the object in itself could be valued. Next to it we are free to imagine ourselves deep in the bowels of a ship larger and higher than the city block in which the gallery is located. But in fact we are in a small gallery, mostly empty.

- Michael Eddy is an artist and writer who lives and works in Montréal.

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Photo : Johan Nordendorph

In 2019, Chris Boyne gave himself the task of finding a single object from the ship *Atlantic Conveyor*, and traveled to Alang, India, in search of that piece.

The *Atlantic Conveyor* crossed the North Atlantic serving ports including Halifax, Baltimore, Rotterdam and Liverpool for 30 years before being decommissioned and sent to the infamous ship-breaking beaches of Alang in 2017. The breaking process for ships like the *Atlantic Conveyor* is meant to be absolute. Boyne endeavored to reverse this reality by following a specific ship through the process. This reversal perpetuates the existence of the *Atlantic Conveyor* drawing attention to the humanitarian and environmental reality of shipbreaking in South Asia.

Through his work, Chris Boyne pushes the idea that task can be the basis for conceptual visual work. As a project, *A. Conveyor* asks practical and conceptual questions: is it possible to track a ship through the breaking process? When did *Atlantic Conveyor* cease to be a ship/cease to exist? Can this cessation be slowed or reversed by preserving a single object as an art-object? To what extent can a single object embody the artist's task, the breaking process and the ship itself?

Chris Boyne (b. 1984. Halifax, Nova Scotia) is an interdisciplinary artist who uses task to explore ideas and generate content. His work has been presented across Canada and in the United States. He holds a BFA from Ryerson University and an MFA from Concordia University and has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. He currently lives and works in Montréal.