

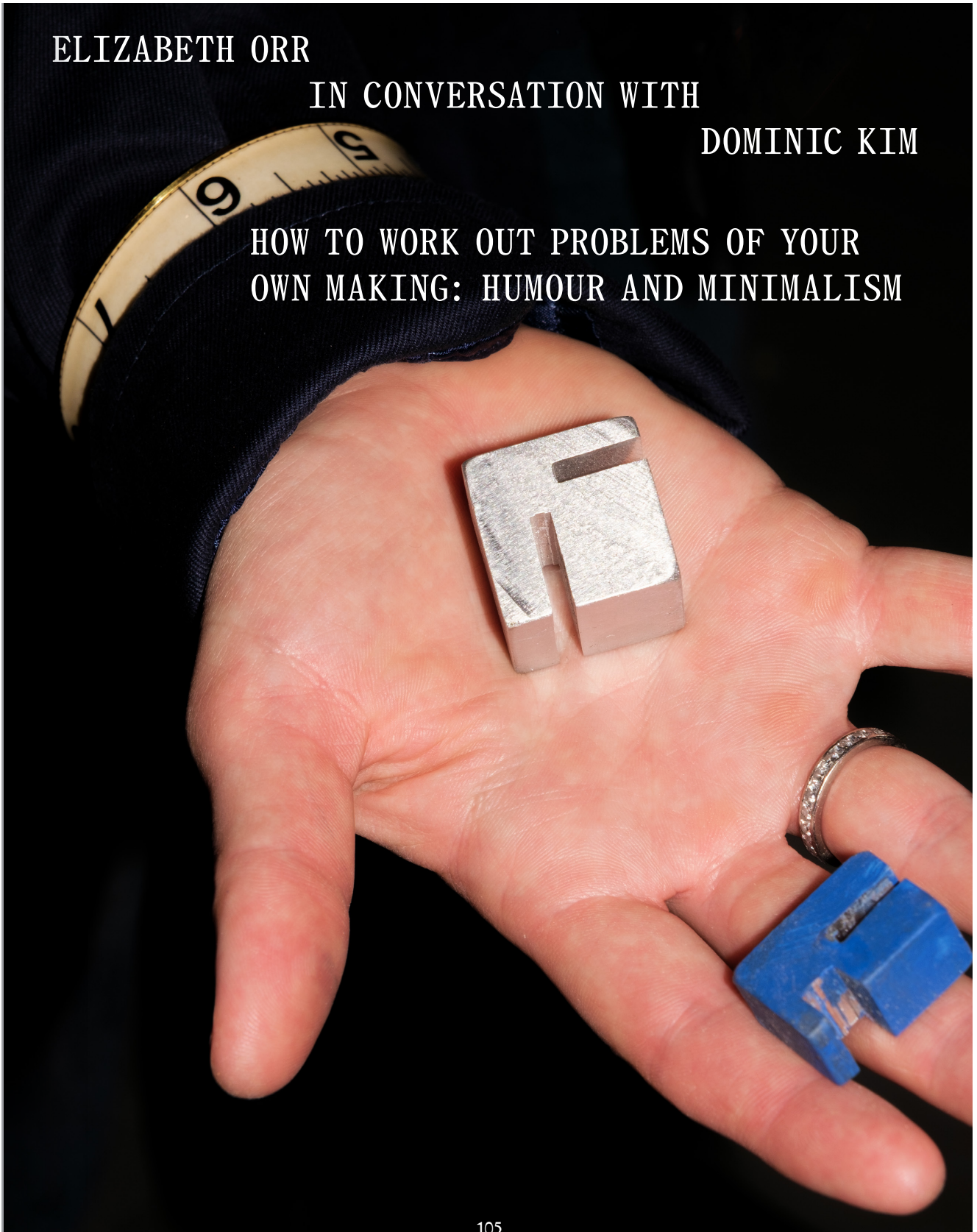
SUPERPOSITION

ELIZABETH ORR

IN CONVERSATION WITH

DOMINIC KIM

HOW TO WORK OUT PROBLEMS OF YOUR
OWN MAKING: HUMOUR AND MINIMALISM



DK It's been quite a while since we last talked. What has happened since, and what are you busy with now?

EO Last time we talked, I was preparing for a residency in Napoli, making work for Vin Vin in Vienna. Napoli was wild and busy. After that, I have just been in New York, and now I'm working towards my third solo show at Derosia, opening in January 2023. Yesterday, I moved from Williamsburg to Fort Greene in Brooklyn.

DK Has anything developed from your idea to collaborate more with architects?

EO I'm now interviewing my friend Pierre de Brun, who works for an architecture firm in New York City. My show is based on a saying, 'the code builds the building, or the code makes the building.' The interview was videoed and will be included in the show. Pierre talks about how as an architect, you can't always do everything you want, which we both think is a beautiful thing. I begin by asking him about constraints in his work with public housing and how those constraints lead him to make design decisions. As an artist, I work within my own rules, which I invented. A sculpture and building code.

It's the dynamics of rules and breaking those rules that I'm interested in, I guess, but there is also always the ruler that rules me. Measurements are central. I also like to think about abstraction, finding room for abstraction within measurements. What does it mean to choose different sizes and so on?

DK It's interesting how these disciplines work within a chosen or given framework. Even if the work is not physical, we must rely on common rules and dimensions. In this context, let's talk about your recent works. They seem larger or is that just an impression?

EO Some are still the same size as the earlier works, and a few are larger, but the smaller works are often perceived as large. I think, partially, this is because of a precedent set by minimalism. The smaller ones measure just 25 inches, and the bigger ones are big.

DK In the older works, there have been much smaller elements that remind me of blinds or household objects, but now they are less, and with these larger elements, I feel like they're getting more abstract. But it's moving away from those household objects and becoming something new. It becomes harder to relate to a familiar scale. Then your work interests me in reference to the city and its relation to the scale of the urban structure. You grew up in Los Angeles and now live in New York, so do you notice differences in that relationship?

EO 105%, It's night and day. California has expanded on all kinds of levels, energetically, spatially, etc. In New York, you feel like you're inside something, and in California, you feel like you're without something. It's much more free fall and outdoors. It's funny, I often wonder why I live in NYC. I don't want to get into the LA vs New York discussion because it's overlapped. I see these works as very

internal, very much about fixtures, what I'm calling architectural attributes: wall plates for light switches, blinds, grates, and shutters, are all attributes. They're not necessarily structural, but they are attributes of architecture. They're a sort of addition or an appearance of architecture. They are an attribute, something that can change, that can be interchangeable, or that can shift, easily replaced.

The blinds are very internal, and windows are a subject in art history. It's the perfect metaphor for looking outward; there's nothing that gives me more pleasure than seeing one of those windows on a wall. It's a façade and, at the same time, an art object. It doesn't necessarily have a use in architecture, but it has a relationship to architecture.

I'm very invested in contradictions. It's important for me that things are not so clearly spelt out in art, film, music, or anything. I like it when there's room for some nuanced meaning and where clarity isn't the goal. With my work, it's exciting to me how contradiction leads to a meaning outside of hierarchies and moral and value-based judgments. I feel this when people talk about a 'third' in art. I lean away from using the 'third' to describe my work.

I always loved how in algebra, if you have a negative, then a closed parenthesis, and another negative, it makes a positive. Twists and rules which break other rules are very exciting, especially in the graphic quality of integers in algebra. The window on the wall is like a shutter that opens to nothing and does nothing.

DK You were talking earlier about these codes or rules that you've created yourself. How did you develop them? Was it a process that evolved over time, or was it a theme to which you stuck to certain elements?

EO That's a good question. It's probably comparable to how you see 'Superposition'. Sometimes it feels like working on it is tedious, but other times it's amazing because you invented a problem to solve: it's your fault. When you ask how I developed this thing, I see that the decision to do something outside of a purely capitalist way of working is so inherent that it's purely on its own trip. I'm working for the project, it's not working for me. I developed my own codes or rules that I wanted to work through. I'm not entirely clear on when or how it happened, but it happened.

DK So, it's intuition.

EO Exactly. And it was influenced by my late father, light and space artist Eric Orr (1939–1998). He worked with measurements as part of his language of abstraction in his sculptures made of metal, using water, fire, etc.

My sculptural work also has a lot to do with my video editing practice and how I work with technology. As a person, as an artist, and as a worker, I first used the internet when I was in kindergarten. I'm a true Millennial, but I like to think I'm a Millennial Cusp. Major queries for me are:

How has minimalism influenced the design of technology, and how has that design of

technology influenced art? We are in a specific period right now where we've developed a lot of prosumer devices. Attainable devices and software are being used to create professional content. We're very prosumer-focused right now. We're prosumers of technology, not just consumers anymore. So I'm interested in the relationship between art and technology, particularly how minimalism influenced the design of technology in the 1960s, and now in 2022, how art is influenced by technology or the design of technology, and technology itself.

DK Last time we talked a little about man versus machine and the use of technology in your work, I was surprised that you do almost all the elements by hand. Especially those joints that connect the elements together. Material-wise, we talked about that contradiction, for example, in the use of metal paints.

EO I work mainly with aluminium, glass and Plexiglass. All the materials are flat panels, and my project is to make them all fit together. All my measurements are either 1/8 or 1/4 inch. The sculptures are modular.

For future projects, I want everything to snap together. That's my goal. Most of it, I cut myself on the table saw. I have the slots cut with the laser, but I make a model first. I sand all the aluminium with an orbital sander, which creates this finish that's not even, but it removes all the scratches, and I like the texture.

Going back to your statement about the handmade and the machine-made, it's a very fruitful part of this work because it leads to contradictions; I don't believe in a rivalry between machine and handmade. When you talk about it, I think we're much more connected to machines and more adaptable. In Jean Baudrillard's 'Simulacra and Simulation', he goes on and on about this disconnect between nature and technology, using Las Vegas as an example. I don't think it's that strange. I don't think there's a force there. It gets a little sketchy when he comes to mega-powers, greed, wealth, and capitalism. Technology is weaponised by superpowers. The baseline is cumulative; we are using each other's tools. It's a tool situation. Anyway, I'm getting off-topic.

DK Is it strictly an economic aspect of cutting things by hand, or do you want to do it by hand? Do you want to do it yourself, or is it part of the process? Does imperfection create a quality?

EO Yes, let's come back to that. It's economic. I'm an artist living in New York City in 2022. I sell my work when it sells. I would like to do more ambitious projects, for example, snapping is something which will happen once I get a museum exhibition that will give me some production funding. Or I will find a way to work with some engineers. I'm American. I'm Aspirational.

In an old artist talk, I spoke about reading artists' work once you find out how/if they make money outside of their artistic practice. This person works in advertising or as a nanny, a carpenter, a bartender. Now, I'm working in fashion advertising,

Derosia

Dominic Kim, Superposition, Issue 2, Autumn 2023





specifically in a post-production house. I'm the Post Production Coordinator. I work remotely from my studio. It's an employer's worst nightmare. I get all the work done. I'm fine, but it is economical.

DK Do you choose the angles freely and intuitively? I think it's about composition,

E0 Exactly. It's amazing to use the language of the blinds as a starting point for that. Sometimes the blinds are all closed or open, for example. When I first moved to New York, my blinds were all messed up, and the landlords couldn't be bothered to fix them. They were these wooden blinds, with some open and closed and others broken. So that was the first idea that came out of that window.

DK I like that they're not 100% perfect.

E0 A gallerist I work with came into my studio and said: "You know, a difficult part of your work is thinking about perfection. And the handmade, that's difficult because the work is begging for perfection. It's also about negotiating the desire for perfection. That's part of the art. It's so wild." For example, I'm now using distressed Plexiglass discarded from a shop in Long Island. The supply chain has emerged as a significant global concern. Often when looking at large-scale sculptures, I think about the supply chain. When I see a huge metal sculpture or something, I think, "man, how much money did that cost? What is that thing? What resources did it take to get this where it is?"

DK Do you mean upcycling?

E0 Sort of. I love upcycling. In my practice, I often look for ways to upcycle, but not in just a symbolic way.

DK I have a technical question. You said that the sides of your sculptures are laser cut, and I'm wondering if those are the only parts and if the others are done by hand?

E0 Exactly. I used to do the sides with a jigsaw but luckily abandoned that challenge. Both sides have to be perfect, or the whole thing is screwed up. You have to be exact, or it's a nightmare.

DK I'll come back to the colour. The green and the blue remind me of a green screen and a blue screen. I don't know if that has anything to do with it, but I'm wondering if you've tried other, more industrial finishes like anodising, or if you're mainly concerned with painting it yourself?

E0 Usually, I use a compressor and a spray gun to paint, but recently I've been trying to emulate a technique that creates texture, usually used for interiors called a French Wash, sort of like Venetian Plaster. You paint a lighter colour. You let it dry, and then you apply a darker colour. After that, you take muslin, scrunch it up, and pat it down. It's like wallpaper. It's inevitably kitschy, but I like it when you can see it that way. I'm also interested in bringing in this weird language of strange interiors or wall applications, but it's also beautiful. I also treated the surface of my piece 'Central

Rounds' for Celine's collection; the work is in one of their stores in Tokyo.

DK You sent it to me, and I think I've seen it somewhere.

EO It's aluminium; I sand it down, put salt water and a little bleach on it, wrap it in used plastic bags and put it in the sun. I let it bake there, and then this patina develops on its surface; it's reassuring not knowing what will happen. I treat the surface multiple times.

DK I remember you telling us about transporting the works to Italy in a suitcase. How did that go?

EO It was great. It worked, and I transported stuff back that I didn't end up using. Since my logic for constructing is modular, and as I'm working with eight and quarter-inch sheets of aluminium and glass, I can use wood pieces that I cut. I can use all of my pieces for different works.

DK When did you develop this modular way of working?

EO I was interested in using the language of architectural models and frames. Also, I wanted to make a sculpture that was working within its own construction language, developing a language of construction through and through. I also want everything to slide together, to fit just so, and to be able to be taken apart. Some people say it's sexy, but who knows: they are just a slit in the wood. The way the pieces are held together creates frames, but it's little pieces holding things together, fragments of an A-frame. I also chose the colours based on video language. The bright green is the same as a green screen that you can chroma key out.

DK That's what I guessed, and I assume the same is true for the blue.

EO Yes, some blue but also yellow, I wanted to do something yellow, but for some reason, no yellow colour appealed to me; I had the idea to colour it with turmeric, a spice that represents the essence of yellow; it was sacred to me, I couldn't approach it another way, but I am also obsessed with mintgreen; I love that colour. It's like Kelly green. I also wanted it to look like a princess cake or Wedgewood, with an interior decorating strategy. I love interior design choices. Interiors fall under the architectural attribute category. Not *structural*. The shades of blue that I sometimes use seem utilitarian to me. I think to myself, "let's make it a colour's colour," and that's a utilitarian blue.

DK I feel that continuity is becoming more important in your work, but you spoke about a discontinuity between all your different kinds of work; how do you decide what to make for a particular exhibition, and how are your shows connected to this idea of conflict and interaction?

EO Very connected. I'm obsessed with having a very concise conceptual premise for exhibitions. My first solo exhibition was

called 'Lost Lead'. It's funny being an emerging artist in New York, as you might not sell anything, but 'LossLead' was an idea used in marketing. For example, when the bank gives you a pen with their name on it, the price of the pen is a loss for the bank. To make the pen and then give it away to you is a loss to the bank, but as a loss leader, it might lead to other things. My whole show was like a loss leader. I used a kind of formica for the sculptures in 'Loss Lead', a laminate surface you may see in a more institutional setting like a big university or as a diner countertop. In America it often flags some sense of unease, a cheap way to have a smooth, easy-to-clean surface. Formica spoke to this idea of a *lossleader*, a decision made by a corporation or an institution; a decision.

Similarly, I'm thinking about building codes and discovering how they relate to my own codes as an artist and their relationship to what I'm producing. I'm interviewing Pierre de Brun, a French architect based in NYC, about architecture and how building codes influence architectural decisions.

Now, I'm very focused on my January 2023 show with Derosia. I will soon be saying, "OK, buckle up, *this* is what I want to do in the show." I'm still asking myself questions like; how do I want to frame it? Am I *allowed* to do it? What book do I want to write? I'm starting to work with the ready-made; rulers and wall plates for lighting switches. I want objects in the space that you are not desirable in the art space; to subvert the precious and commercial quality of the gallery space.

DK I know from friends and painters that every once in a while, they have shows where they have a certain number of hours, along the lines of, "this is how much I can do in a year. I can paint about six paintings", or something like that. And they need to be invested in these things. So when you have a concept for a work, how many variations of that work do you make during the process? As an architect, you have this crazy range of iterations through circumstance and decline. Different parameters determine how you have to proceed, and there are choices to be made with considerations like the economic aspects. But when there is a strong idea at the beginning, it's about the survival of that idea with all these messy things that dictate that. How fast do you get to a finished piece? How does the process look? I feel like you're comfortable with those elements, but that's maybe just my imagination. You're fast.

EO The process of deciding how to do the work is strange, as it's both slow and fast. I don't know how to explain it. I'm good at working under deadline pressure. I thrive on it. I've been thinking about this work since March. It's been really slow, but then it'll wash over, and I can be fearless. It's hard for me to put a time frame on the different works, as though I'm monetising my labour in capitalist time, which of course, is nearly impossible to ignore.

DK Do you do sketches?

EO Yes, I sketch; I use Plexiglass and a lot of cardboard for that as well.

DK There is a 1:1 model. When you work on that scale, there's so much more to it than the finished piece. I think that process is super interesting, the sketches, those construction drawings, the unfinished parts, and the assembly; that's the actual artwork. But I think that's something that you don't show. It's just the perfect artwork that you would end up showing in a gallery.

EO Yeah, it seems like it came out of nowhere, but it didn't. It went through a huge process. It's crazy.

DK I was reading something about humour, which is a difficult subject in architecture. There have been periods that some would say failed because they were based on humour. Is there a humorous aspect to your work, and how is that connected to you?

EO Yes, humour is important to my work and my life. The way it operates, with people getting it sometimes and other times not. Some people are more amused by my artwork, and some will be repulsed or bored, saying it is serious. I'm open to all of it: please give me the range of human responses. Manipulation is overrated; for example, using French wash is funny but equally beautiful. I need all the meanings, all the contradictions. All of the green pieces do this as a perfect-looking object on the wall, which is kind of funny, but on the other hand, it's a green screen that looks good. I think it's exciting when both aspects coexist, especially for minimalist sculpture. It's a contradiction, but that's also what humour is. Funny to some and not to others.

DK Yes, I agree.