

JAMES HARRIS GALLERY  
4829 GRETNA ST #102  
DALLAS, TX 75207  
T(214)272-8427 M(206) 903-6220  
JAMESHARRISGALLERY.COM

**PRESS RELEASE**



Austin Lewis “What”  
January 24 to February 28, 2026  
Gallery Hours: Thu to Sat 12:00-5:00PM  
and by appointment  
Reception: January 31st, 4-6PM

Left:  
Austin Lewis “Untitled” 2025  
Plastic Bin, Found Plastic Objects, Found Metal,  
Bags of ice, Rubber Bands, Coal, Twigs, Carrot  
96” x 38” x 22 ¼”

James Harris Gallery is pleased to present our first solo exhibition with Dallas based artist Austin Lewis entitled “What” Lewis’s practice is defined by his relationship with materials, process and sculptural form. The show features three distinct works in which each sculpture is defined by its medium and location in the gallery. Lewis approaches the formal constructs of sculpture through his use of found or discarded materials. His innovative sculptures explore the interplay of space, volume and color and the boundaries between high and low art. The resulting works offers a new vernacular and a theoretical framework through his honest treatment of his material. Each of works on view creates an aesthetic dialogue that investigates sculpture’s historical roots while also reflecting contemporary issues of mass production and materialism. The results are non-objective works that reveal something about the potential of his material as well as the nature of the artistic interaction with it. Lewis’s practice is therefore in direct dialogue with contemporary sculpture and current process-based art.

While some of Lewis’ sculptures begin with a source inspiration, much of it is developed without preconceptions or initial reference and emerges out of the additive nature of his creative process. The first piece upon entering the gallery is chest high with larger voluminous biomorphic shapes connected and held together by thin tendril-like forms. The visible weight of the larger shapes in comparison to the more delicate connective structures adds tension to the overall composition. Lewis has severed the ends of the larger forms to reveal a cross-section of the sculpture’s internal anatomy. The cuts expose layers of foam, cardboard, wood, and plastic that have been bound together to create a structural core. The overall resulting three-dimensional form draws references to biomorphs. The surface skin echoes the patterning marbling or woodgrain. This has been achieved by gluing multiple layers of found paper to the sculpture and then sanding it to create a variegated surface treatment. There appears to be a push and pull effect between the more voluminous dark colored shapes in contrast to the light toned connecting tendrils; like synapses traveling between the larger nodes. The overall sculptural form harkens back to mash up between Jean Arp’s work and the frenetic work of Judy Pfaff’s.

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The next sculpture on view is totemic in shape and size. Mass produced containers are stacked in a rhythmic form creating a work that towers over the viewer. This work not only references the formal structure of classical Roman sculpture but also the systemic history of public monuments. A found suitcase becomes a plinth for two columnar sets of stacked plastic containers. On top these two columns sits a storage bin in the shape of a tub. Inside the tub are stacked milk crates which form a single column. A snowman made of 6 bags of ice is placed on top and becomes the crowning element. Over time, the room temperature will melt the iconic form slowly, dripping through the milk crates and pooling into the commercial plastic bin. Keenly aware of the historical roots of the classical public sculptures and fountains of Europe, Lewis's work becomes a monument for America's fast paced society and the disposable nature of it.

Tilted and leaning on the gallery wall in our second gallery is Lewis's largest work for the exhibition. Made from scrap wood, plastic tableware, the cardboard hollowed cores of packing tape and other found material, the sculpture appears as if it has precariously collapsed. The viewer soon discovers the meticulous construction that reveals a deliberate language of sculptural form where overall geometric shapes come together creating hierarchical relationships that address weight, volume and surface color. These formal constructs are the foundation for Lewis' artistic practice. He radically redefines the relationship between the art object and the viewer by shifting from traditional geometric shapes to multisensory experience through his choice of materials. This monumental, scaled piece invokes one to consider the temporal nature of its appearance and therefore the temporality of all things.

The works in this exhibition in many ways are contradictory. They demonstrate the potential of form and its relationship to scale. The potential of discarded materials to be transformed into something new again, a fluidity between materials and ideas. A sculpture has power because it refuses functionality, it is silent, and its context is part of its content. Sculpture has a potential to bring us back to real things and real work and firsthand physical experience. Artists who chose to use unconventional media are in essence explorers of their generation and operate in a territory that is often a mirror on contemporary society and the history leading up unto the present day. Lewis' use of cheap, plentiful cast-off debris informed by their histories allows Lewis to transform the recognizable into something magical. In Lewis's hands we see the beauty in the mundane.

Austin Lewis (b. 1996, Dallas) lives and works in Denton, TX. He received his MFA in 2025 from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Lewis' work was selected by White Columns curator Matthew Higg's for the exhibition "Open University" at the Dallas Contemporary last spring.