

# The Art of Packing

A curatorial proposal by  
Lois Schklar + Andrea Lacalamita

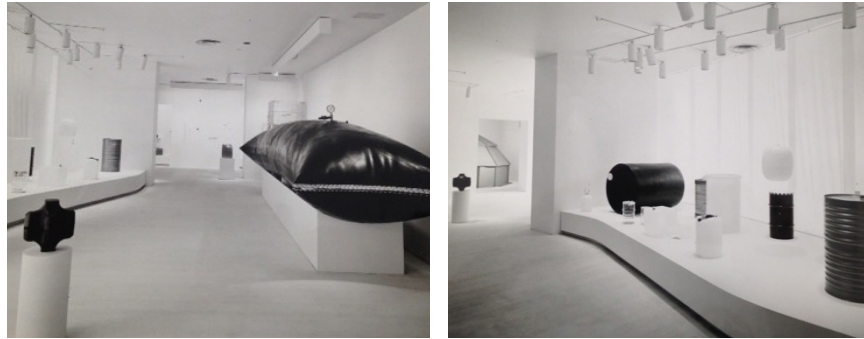
## The Art of Packing

Throughout history, diverse cultures have devised methods for packing and moving their goods. Early nomadic hunters and gatherers used woven sacks, animal skins and other improvised items to contain, store and transport the items needed for their existence. In the Nara period (710-794 AD), the Japanese combined function and craft to create packages that reflected their aesthetic and ritualistic proclivities. It was as if “the box were the object of the gift, not what it contain[ed]”<sup>1</sup>. The invention of the cardboard box and the aluminum can in the early 19th century, and the advent of plastics and polyethylene in the late 19th century, led to the mass-production of a variety of packaging options. People no longer needed to rely on found or available materials. This opened the door to numerous possibilities for package design, branding and packing methods.

In 1959, The Museum of Modern Art (New York) organized an exhibition, *The Package*, a comprehensive survey of almost 200 disposable and reusable packages. A number of these were ‘working packages’ that performed a specific function. Packages, ranging from primitive baskets to perfume bottles to envelopes, were selected for their quality of being well-designed packages that “protected and preserved the things they contained, sometimes facilitated their use, and were often beautiful objects in themselves.”<sup>2</sup> The exhibition emerged at a time when consumer culture was just taking off, when package design was a budding field, and when the sales potential of the package was being exploited. The primary intention of the exhibition was to “re-examine and broaden our ideas of what actually does

1. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982; Monoskop), [http://monoskop.org/File:Barthes\\_roland\\_Empire\\_of\\_Signs\\_1983.pdf](http://monoskop.org/File:Barthes_roland_Empire_of_Signs_1983.pdf)

2. *The Package*. (New York, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959) Final Wall Label. MoMA Exhibition 647.7 from the Museum of Modern Art Archives.



constitute a package”<sup>3</sup> while de-emphasizing its commercial value. The discourse begun at MoMA formed the foundation for an examination of packages within the context of exceptional modern design. But in their efforts to convey familiar and everyday packages as extraordinary from an aesthetic point of view, the exhibition’s curators omitted the examination of packages explicitly considered from an artists’ perspective.

In *The Art of Packing*, we examine the work of six contemporary artists: Sandra Rechico, Yael Brotman, Tegan Smith, Micah Lexier, Michael Johansson, and Adad Hannah. Like their early historical predecessors, these artists use idiosyncratic materials to pack, protect and relocate their goods. It is clear, however, that practicality is not their only concern. This exhibition continues the discourse MoMA began by posing the question: are packages artists create and packing methods they devise purely the utilitarian by-products of an artist’s practice or can they constitute the artwork itself?

3. “Packages From U.S. and Abroad in Museum Exhibition”. The Museum of Modern Art press release, no. 73, September 10, 1959.

### Packaging:

- a. To utilize the technology of enclosing or protecting products for distribution, storage, sale, and use.

### Packing:

- a. To put into a receptacle for transporting or storing: pack one's belongings.
- b. To fill up with items: pack one's trunk.<sup>4</sup>

4. Wikipedia contributors, "Packaging and Labeling," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Packaging\\_and\\_labeling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Packaging_and_labeling) (accessed May 31, 2015).

## Sandra Rechico

Sandra Rechico's *Wall Drawing* series follows the documentation of her daily travels during various periods from 2003-2006. To construct each drawing, she makes precise, hand-written notes of her routes and destinations. She then translates them to map-like sketches that are then projected at a larger scale onto the walls of an exhibition space. She traces her routes with thin black tape and denotes destinations with pins. All of these works are temporary, and eventually disassembled. As works are uninstalled, Sandra asks curators and gallery assistants to return her work without giving any instruction about how to do so. She documents the returned materials, inevitably reduced to a mound of tape and pins, and uniquely influenced by the hand of each 'packer', in a series of photographs called *Remains*. She refers to these works as collaborations.



Sandra Rechico, *Remains*, 2012

Tape, pins

4" L x 3" W x 1" H (approx.)

Top: *Collaboration with McCavour*

Bottom: *Collaboration with Sally and Jean McKay*

## Yael Brotman

Yael Brotman's *Shipping and Receiving* series is born of necessity. Concerned with the fragility of her pieces, she creates custom cases with foamcore to protect her work from breaking in transit. Created intuitively, without tools for measuring, the packages take on the abstracted forms of the pieces inside. Delighted by the thought that curators might take pleasure in unpacking her pieces, Yael adds whimsical accents like gold paint and oddly-shaped appendages. A labelling system she devised from coloured tape demarcates the number of times a piece has travelled. In this way, Yael embeds her packages with the same sense of displacement and nostalgia that characterizes the work contained inside. The packages, which can be arranged in different configurations, resemble small-scale architectural structures. Yael exhibits these colourful cases alongside the pieces they contain.



Yael Brotman, *Shipping and Receiving*, 2011  
Foam core, gold leaf and tape  
Various dimensions



## Tegan Smith

Tegan Smith's sculptures are three-dimensional works (*The Pharaoh's Forearm and The King's Foot*) that disassemble into parts. They explore her long-time fascination with scale and measurement systems in relation to the human figure. An important part of Tegan's process is to figure out how her work will be assembled for the installation and disassembled for its return.

Tegan provides curators with instruction booklets and containers that are as integral to the art as the pieces inside. She documents the exact process to be undertaken by gallery attendants with meticulous written and illustrated instructions. As the project travels these instructions can be updated and the packages reconstructed. Tegan's intense attention to these details transforms the requisite packing, shipping, and unpacking of an artwork into a ritual process. She brings into question the ability of packages to not only indicate the value of the things contained, but to become valuable objects themselves.



#### 5. Attach Triangle

- Attach the bracket to triangle.
- Put the nut through top of elbow and attach the bolt from underneath the silhouette.
- Tighten with screw driver.



#### 6. Attach Protractor

- Slip nuts through 2 holes in chest areas of silhouette.

- Line up holes on protractor with nuts under the silhouette.
- Hold protractor while tightening the bolts.
- Tighten with screw driver if necessary.



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Tegan Smith, *Installation instructions for The Royal Cubit*, 2014  
Laser-jet print, page 6 (of 39)  
8-1/2" x 11" multiples

## Micah Lexier

Micah Lexier is a collector. Obsessed with the creation and recreation of order, Micah frequently uses boxes and folios to sort, store, and file the items he collects in his studio. In his piece *39 Cardboard Boxes*, Micah imposes the rigorous order he typically reserves for the organization of a container's contents upon the boxes themselves. Arriving on site flat-packed, each box is stamped with directions regarding its placement within the larger piece, allowing the installer to assemble the artwork without any assistance from the artist. Though each box is identical in form, the stamps indicate that there is only one possible arrangement.

Micah's instructions for shipping and assembling *39 Cardboard Boxes* are as minimal as the work itself:

- 1) I do not need to be there to install or to take it down. It is very simple to install and take down.*
- 2) I do not have written instructions, images or a video but I could write out how to install it. There is really only one way it can go together and it is just a question of filling each box with something for weight and then closing the lid.*
- 3) The work folds down flat into 39 cardboard boxes, but you would have to use an art handler to ship it or else you would have to have a crate built for it if you wanted to use a regular shipper.*



Micah Lexier, *39 Cardboard Boxes*, 2000  
Custom-printed cardboard boxes, felt marker, folded closed  
260" L x 26" W x 16" H each

## Michael Johansson

Michael Johansson utilizes the architecture in an exhibition space as a starting point for his work. Drawing from his collection of objects, which he finds at flea markets and consignment stores, Michael packs seemingly unrelated objects together in one space. Inspired by his transient days as a student and his move to Berlin, he is interested in the hierarchy of objects and the way their meaning changes once removed from their original context. As he fits objects into a chosen space, he considers their physical qualities (colour, shape, size) and whether they might belong together based on their purpose.

There are no instructions for Michael's work: objects can be packed by his hand only. His process is simultaneously deliberate and spontaneous. On one surface, objects appear perfectly fitted, flush and aligned with one another; on the other, the chaotic nature of the objects is exposed. Michael acknowledges this dichotomy in his work.



Michael Johansson, *Tetris*, 2007  
Objects from a storage room: door, mattress, bags, boxes, etc.  
3'-11" W x 4'-11" D x 6'-6" H

## Adad Hannah

Adad Hannah is interested in the “self contained project that integrates both the artwork and the production of the artwork.”<sup>5</sup> One such project, *Two Views* (2011), is Adad’s attempt to reconstruct a moment he observed but did not photograph while living in Vancouver. Two videos, each documenting the reimagined scene from opposite perspectives, were filmed inside the two crates in which they are displayed. These same crates contain the work and everything required for the installation. In theory, the work could be transported in its own container. The self-sufficiency of this work is especially reminiscent of MoMA’s ‘working packages’, for instance “a slide projector, which forms the lower half of its own carrying case.”<sup>6</sup>

5. Adad Hannah, “Two Views,” [http://adadhannah.com/projects/show/two\\_views/](http://adadhannah.com/projects/show/two_views/) (accessed May 30, 2015)

6. 1959. “The Package.” *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 27 (1), 4.



Adad Hannah, *Two Views*, 2011  
Mixed media  
10' L x 4' W x 7' H



## Curator Biographies

## Lois Schklar

Lois Schklar's work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions throughout Canada and the United States. Her sculptures are included in the Bronfman Collection, Claridge Investments, Cambridge Art Gallery and the Key Corporation.

Lois' installations have been chosen for juried and invitational exhibitions: *Drawing at the Aird Gallery* (January 2013), with Noah Gano, *Boxed In*, The Rooms, St. John's NL ( January –April, 2013) and *Art Spin* 2013. Lois has received numerous Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Assistance Grants. In 2007 and 2008 she was awarded the Toronto Arts Council Grant to Individuals, the Ontario Arts Council project Grant and OAC Exhibitions Assistance Grant for developing her drawing installations. Most recently (2014) she was awarded an Ontario Arts Council Multi and Integrated Arts Project Grant for *Collective Memories*, a sound, dance and wire collaboration/ installation in Toronto.

Lois is a facilitator, keynote speaker and curator. As an educator, she designed and delivered a variety of workshops and courses on creativity for adults and children. In 1997, Lois curated *Dolls: Reclaimed* at the Ontario Crafts Council and in 2008 she organized the exhibition, *Drawing On*, at \*new\* gallery in Toronto. In 2014 she received an Ontario Arts Council Project Grant to research and develop a project on packaging.

## Andrea Lacalamita

Andrea Lacalamita is an graduate architect and freelance writer with a special interest in curation and exhibitions design.

As a graduate of the University of Waterloo, Masters of Architecture program, Andrea was awarded the 2011 AIA Henry Adams Medal for her M.Arch thesis, Packing: An Architect's Guide, a catalogue of images and essays that investigates the spatial operations of packing in relation to architecture. Andrea was also awarded the Canadian Architect Nominee Award, and made the 2012 RAIC Honour Roll.

Andrea has written for Canadian Art Magazine and has worked at architecture firms in Toronto, Vancouver, and New York. Her work has been exhibited at the Cambridge Riverside Galleries, Toronto's Brookfield Place, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery. She has taught as an adjunct studio professor at the University of Waterloo and has been a guest critic at Ryerson University.

Recently (2013), Andrea launched In-Context, a web-based video documentary series and online multi-media platform supported by the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada (RAIC) and the Canada Council for the Arts, that profiles contemporary Canadian architecture and urban design. The series premiered at Toronto's Bloor Hot Docs Cinema in January 2015, and will be presented at the London (UK) Festival of Architecture in June 2015.

Andrea is currently working at Toronto-based architecture and design firm Cindy Rendely Architecture.

## Artist Biographies

## Sandra Rechico

[www.sandrarechico.com](http://www.sandrarechico.com)

Sandra is an installation artist who lives and works in Toronto, Canada. Her work has been exhibited across Canada and abroad. Exhibitions have been featured in Canadian Art Magazine, Parachute and Flash Art International . Within the last five years she has had a residency and exhibition at The Institute of Modern Art in Australia and two projects in Holland. Rechico has long been active in the Toronto Art community through her involvement with Open Studio, Mercer Union and as the co-founder and past-president of the Red Head Gallery. She is an Assistant Professor in the School of Fine Art and Music at the University of Guelph.

## Yael Brotman

[www.yaelbrotman.com](http://www.yaelbrotman.com)

Born in Israel, Brotman's earliest years were spent on a kibbutz. She arrived in Winnipeg as a child and eventually studied Honours English followed by Fine Arts at the University of Manitoba. She moved to Toronto after traveling in Europe for a year. Brotman received a Master of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto. Her drawings, prints and paintings have been featured in solo and group exhibitions in public galleries, museums, commercial galleries and artist-run centres across Canada, and in the US, Peru, Ireland, Bulgaria and China. She is represented in the collections of the Canada Council Art Bank, The Universities of Alberta and Toronto, Ernst and Young, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Canada, the Toronto Stock Exchange, and the Sanbao Museum, P.R. China, among others.

## Tegan Smith

[www.tegansmith.ca](http://www.tegansmith.ca)

Tegan L. Smith is a multimedia artist whose research-led installations include drawing, mapping, photography, video and sculpture. Smith's artistic practice engages auto-archeological and materialist ideas, such as explorations of found objects as emblems of social practices, and digital or physical measurement as statistical truth. The Pharaoh's Forearm and the King's Foot combines drawn silhouettes and found measuring instruments, and builds on previous work quantifying physical traces. Smith's works on collaborative and community projects as well as maintaining long-term online projects about her relationships with material possessions. Smith has a BFA from the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon and MFA from York University, Toronto. She has exhibited work across Canada, as well as in Italy, the USA and Japan.

## Micah Lexier

[www.micahlexier.com](http://www.micahlexier.com)

Lexier's Toronto-based multimedia artist whose many-tiered practice includes sculpture, installation, photography and text-based work, as well as curation. Lexier graduated with an MFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1984. His practice is consonant with the sensibility of that institution, revolving largely around conceptual acts of enumeration and demarcation. Lexier has had more than 100 solo exhibitions, participated in some 200 group exhibitions and produced numerous permanent public commissions.



## Michael Johansson

[www.michaeljohansson.com](http://www.michaeljohansson.com)

Johansson was born in Trollhättan, Sweden in 1975. He attended Malmö Art Academy, receiving his MFA in 2005 after receiving his BFA at the Art Academy in Trondheim in 2003. Solo exhibitions include Värmlands Museum, Karlstad (2014), RAKE visningsrom, Trondheim (2014), and Shades and Variables, Galleri Galleri Andersson/Sandström, Stockholm (2013). Johansson currently lives in Berlin.

## Adad Hannah

[www.adadhannah.com](http://www.adadhannah.com)

Born in New York in 1971, Hannah spent his childhood in Israel and England, and moved to Vancouver in the early 1980's. He lives and works between Montreal and Vancouver. He has been longlisted three times for the Sobey Art Award. Adad Hannah is represented by Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain, Montreal and Equinox Gallery, Vancouver.

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