

ARTFORUM

**500 Words: Glenn Kaino discusses his latest installation for Prospect New Orleans
As told to Paige K. Bradley
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Glenn Kaino is a Los Angeles-based artist whose work addresses social and political histories while prioritizing individual subjectivity. His latest installation Tank, comprises seven saltwater-filled vitrines in which clear resin sculptures cast from a disused tank are submerged and covered in corals. It will be displayed at the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans as part of "Prospect.3: Notes for Now," the third iteration of the Prospect New Orleans biennial, which is taking place across fifteen venues from October 25, 2014 through January 25, 2015.



In my work, I attempt to reconcile irreconcilable materials as a way to generate moments where the impossible or improbable is given form. I think of my practice as conceptual "kit-bashing," which is an old model-maker's term for using the parts of different model kits to make something new, sans instructions. I draw from a diverse set of materials, ideas, and systems of knowledge, putting them together in ways that should not succeed but somehow do. For *Tank*, I worked with Grand Arts in Kansas City, the Prospect organizers, and a team of scientists and designers across the country to create seven translucent casts of a decommissioned US M-60 military tank and to grow living coral formations on each sculpture.

I have been interested in using living organisms to understand behaviors and ways of existing. Years ago, I discovered that the US military was dropping retired tanks into the ocean, where they later eroded and were colonized by algae and coral, becoming artificial reefs. I saw a poetic contradiction in the notion that some of the smallest organisms in the world were reclaiming the instruments of much larger organisms. Corals are fascinating to me because they are reactionary and survive by responding to need but also to instinct. They have an embedded memory and programming that requires a battle with other corals for territory. Fighting is in their nature, but one would not see this unless they were trained to.

Growing corals on this piece of artillery was a way for me to visualize a combination both beautiful and violent and to explore an urge at the most basic level to conquer and occupy in order to sustain life. My piece is an attempt to raise meaningful questions about our nature, the relationship we have to the space we occupy, and the systems and social constructions

within which we reside. There are scratches and marks on my cast pieces that the tank had from combat, but others came from the original manufacturing of the tank—which also required a type of casting—so it was already both a sculpted object and a weapon before I made this work. As the corals on the work grew and touched each other, their interactions became combative, resembling territorial divisions and creating a living map. They sent out stinging tentacles and chemicals, attacking and then subsequently advancing or retreating. In this case, as with nations, encroachment correlates to a recoiling. What's also similar is that without a capable witness, the conflict would be invisible, and the struggle would have no meaning. I see *Tank* as a way to ask questions about how we might assert empathy over a perhaps instinctive colonial impulse and also to suggest a new way of being together where progress does not come at the expense of others.