

*Text by Chris Sharp, Knight's Move exhibition catalog, SculptureCenter NY 2010:*

### **Matt Sheridan Smith**

Pregnant with silence and absence, the work of Matt Sheridan Smith is no less full of language and a sense of loss. Such melancholic motifs are largely the byproduct of an interest in the erosion of the self and agency in an increasingly administrative, template-based culture, in which identity is organized according to models such as Facebook and Linkdin. These concerns are played out in a practice that comes to resemble kits, which are conceptually and formally predicated on the readymade. Here, however, the readymade functions not as an end in itself, but rather as a hypothetical point of departure, which, like all kits, comes replete with a set of (implicit) instructions. And any sense of loss engendered by the above-mentioned erosion is immediately countered by a latent, if ultimately unrealizable potential.

Consider for example *Neon sculpture (unbent)*, 2009. This aggressively banal-looking work consists of a collection of unbent neon tubes, partially sticking out of a box lying on the ground. The fact that one of them is illuminated signals their general anxiety to quite literally get bent -- to be relieved of their muteness and conform to language, any language, regardless of content. A stark and risible sense of surrogacy is foregrounded in other works such as in Smith's collaboration with Nikolas Gambaroff. Entitled, *Nowhere for Nothing (New York Stoop)*, 2007-10. This makeshift, portable wooden stoop, whose presence outside an exhibition is always complemented by a sculptural element inside the exhibition and a photocopied booklet of a history of the stoop, speaks to the disappearance of neutral urban spaces ungoverned by protocols of consumption. Other works, such as *Referencing materials (no more incandescent friends)*, 2009, fulfill a more discreetly elegiac function. Initially mistakable for a 'kit,' this piece is comprised of a neatly organized collection of packaged 75-watt incandescent light bulbs placed on a rectangular sheet of black velvet. It refers to the European ban on incandescent light bulbs (fully effective as of 2012), and the threat this poses to exhibiting art like that of Felix Gonzales Torres. Here, in an administrative twist of logic, legislation quite literally and indiscriminately proscribes artistic expression. And yet this piece is deeply affecting. Packaged and unused like this, the indifference of these bulbs to the art they will soon be forbidden to represent becomes incontestable, and a whole human drama seems to be unceremoniously trivialized, thus encapsulating a pathos and harried sense of agency lodged deep within Smith's practice.