

## How to get your art into the biggest art museums in the world

Oliver Cain is an English/ New Zealand artist living in Auckland. His artworks: ceramic sculptures, and installations, bare a certain physicality, and push the boundaries between conceptualism and post-pop art. The creative process behind Cain's artworks is the most important thing and therefore his artworks can be made of anything and take any form. Appropriated everyday objects transform stereotypes and famous art historical references become twisted. As a proud member of the queer community, Cain uses his work to examine, question and criticize the relationships between gender, (homo)sexuality and societies' misconceptions about those themes.

Much of his work focuses on the banana form, drawing from its popular phallic connotations as well as exploring its relation to the body. Both having a skin which is prone to aging, bruising and decay. As well as focusing on queer identity and exploring ideas about masculinity, using objects like urinals and toilets to link to queer history of cruising/club culture. *'You can't get a more masculine object than a urinal.'* Says Cain. *'When you take it and fill it with other objects it suddenly becomes a vase and is now used to display a thought or concept.'*

During a recent trip to England and United States, he took the opportunity to visit some of the most well know art institutions in the world. Visiting and seeing some of the most famous artworks in our modern age. He was inspired by the many great artists exhibited throughout these art museums and galleries.

Before he left on this artistic adventure, Cain planned a way in which he could leave his mark on each destination he visited.

One of Cains most well know works 'Fruit Bowl' is a ceramic urinal filled to overflowing with ceramic bananas. He used this work as the base idea for the guerrilla type art project while on his travels. (Guerrilla art, is a technique where the artist leaves anonymous art pieces in public places. It is often an installation in an unauthorized location. It is a way for an artist to express their views and opinions to a large audience in an anonymous way. Many examples of guerrilla artwork revolve around alterations to ordinary objects, tweaks that at first may not register as passers-by catch glimpses of them out of the corners of their eyes — but that upon closer inspection call our everyday environment into question.)

Cain used the bathrooms in some of the most well-known art institutions in the world as a temporary gallery to showcase his work. He visited the toilet, placed a ceramic banana in one of the urinals, took a photo and video, and then left it there. They were left to be found by visitors of the museum or cleaned away by the gallery staff.



*"While I was doing this fun project I would often think about who would find them, other users of the bathroom and cleaners. What they would do when faced with such an unusual object in this setting? Would an individual go up to the urinal and see that it had a ceramic banana in it and move or just not be bothered and continue to use the urinal. The idea that people would continue to use the urinal with my artwork in it was quite thrilling."*

Once placed the banana in the urinal became an interactive artwork, the viewer who most likely wouldn't think twice before urinating on the work had unknowingly become part of the artwork.

*'It was quite strange waiting around till the bathroom was empty enough to place the banana and then take photos of the artwork. I did quiet enjoy the performance aspect of installing the art works.'*



‘The public restroom does not, upon first glance, appear to offer fertile ground for sociocultural analysis. But maybe the inattentive observer never went to a club in Berlin where the music still played through the night and into the next. Or never heard of the ground breaking sculpture of Marcel Duchamp and Sherrie Levine’s, Maurizio’ Cattelan’s and other artistic appropriation of the urinal as a sign of breaking artistic and social taboos. Apart from the pisspots artistic stardom, socially the comfort station is an all-male arena, a latently and even patently queer space. A place seminal for gay culture and the public’s branding image as confronting, radical and questionable. With Cain’s Fruit bowl, consisted out of a ceramic urinal filled with ceramic bananas, the spectator is invited into the world of homosexual males and their sexual indifference, guilt, and anonymity.’ **Aurthur Buerms**

Throughout the trip Cain placed ceramic bananas in 8 art institutions. London: National Gallery, Tate Modern & Tate Britain. New York: The MET, Guggenheim & MOMA. Los Angeles: Getty & Hammer Museum.

The well know Guggenheim Museum in New York doesn’t have urinals so Cain had to find another solution to present his work. The gallery has a small shallow fountain in the foyer and so he installed a banana there.

*“I found it quite fitting as Marcel Duchamp’s famous urinal work was named ‘Fountain’”*

This little art project was a way of having a bit of fun while traveling as well as sharing something different with a select few individuals who would have come upon it. They might not have thought anything of it or they might have thought that’s weird and moved on. This work “through this provocative yet charming lens, bears witness to the result that is poignantly, profoundly human. It reconfigures the limitless longing of the human person to be seen and accepted, while questioning the concept of ‘enoughness’ and the need of having that primary self-worth fulfilled. It is offering complexity while primarily reflecting on political conditions of our desire in the contemporary society. It’s a reminder that we are all part of this social criteria that either privileges or excludes, offers marginalisation or protection, love or loneliness. This affinity of juxtapositions is reflective of Cain’s practice that advocates for safe exposure of queer communities and a voice within the pop culture narrative.’ **Dina Jezdic**



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Photos:  
‘Fruit Bowl’  
Urinal at Tate Modern  
Urinals at The Hammer Museum  
Urinal at The MET