

Erin Shirreff is not a photographer, she would tell you, even if the photographic image lies at the center of her practice. Known primarily for her photo- and video-based work, Shirreff is part of a generation of young artists whose reflections on photography have revitalized the medium, but who eschew thinking of themselves as photographers in the classical sense. And whereas in her work it often appears that art historical references abound (for instance to Donald Judd and Tony Smith, in two pieces in her Kunsthalle Basel exhibition, or to Medardo Rosso and James Turrell in previous works), her resultant still and moving images are not really about such seeming references. Instead Shirreff mines the vexed questions of how images mean and matter to us, and how we negotiate the distance between an object and its photographic representation, or between a photographic representation and our memory of what it shows. To do so, she often focuses her gaze on historical artworks because of the nebulous quality known as “aura”—a distinguishing specialness—that they seem to possess. This is everywhere evident in *Halves and Wholes* at Kunsthalle Basel, the Canadian artist’s first solo presentation in a European institution.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a new video, *Concrete Buildings* (2013–16). Each of its projections is devoted to one of the (only) two pieces of architecture that Donald Judd entirely designed and built in his lifetime; Judd intended them as ideal spaces to house and display his artworks as well as those of several artists close to him. Shirreff’s video in two parts, each with a different temporality, endows the imagery with a heft and presence best described as sculptural. Each is composed of a decidedly layered and labored combination of moving sequences and countless still images, made by the artist and then re-photographed in her studio. On the surface, nothing much “happens”: we see the two concrete prototype structures (ten buildings in all were originally planned) in their current state, at once halted and ruinous in the landscape of Marfa, Texas, having failed to stand up as built structures. And yet in filming and photographing them in varying light and

Still (no. 8), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 1), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 4), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 6), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 5), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 3), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 2), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

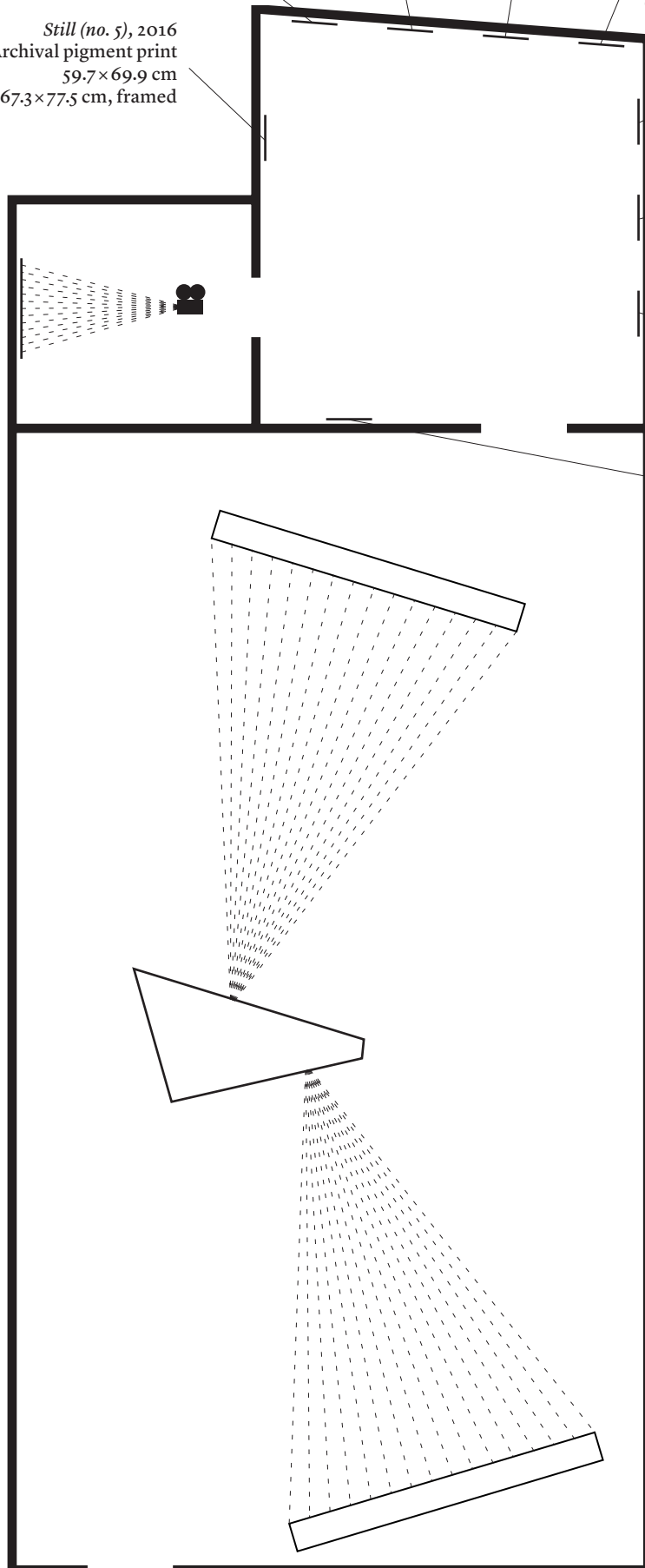
Sculpture Park
(Tony Smith, Amaryllis),
2006/2013
16mm film, color, no sound
8'43", looped

Still (no. 7), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Still (no. 9), 2016
Archival pigment print
59.7×69.9 cm
67.3×77.5 cm, framed

Concrete Buildings, 2013-16
2 HD films, color, no sound
73', 46', looped

All works
Courtesy the artist and
Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York



weather conditions, watching, tracking, almost caressing them—with the tenacity of a private detective and the tenderness of a lover—Shirreff turns them into emblems of time, mortality, and maybe even folly, as they reveal the possibilities and limits of one man’s (built) vision.

Shirreff’s work, here as elsewhere, suggests a persistent concern with what happens to us when we look at something. She admits to being haunted herself by the physical and emotional affect of duration: not necessarily the temporal length of a video, for instance, but the everlastingness implied by the art objects she is drawn to. In Judd’s case, this is felt in his constructions—conceived, built, failed, aborted, and then left to the elements—which in Shirreff’s hands become a cipher for the onlooker watching them, equally subject to the passage of time. This preoccupation with the temporal determined for her the (long) duration of her two-part video, and we might understand duration as its true subject, more than Judd or Minimalism or architecture per se.

Time is arguably also the subject of *Still* (2016), a series of nine new black-and-white photographs. Demonstrating the elegant stillness of a Giorgio Morandi painting, Shirreff’s images are the result of extraordinarily extended exposure times, revealing assemblages of simple, almost Platonic forms and surfaces evocative of “sculpture,” bathed in light and shadow. Shirreff is aware of the legacy of artists before her, like Rosso and Constantin Brâncuși, who insisted on being the photographers of their own sculptures because they understood well that the spaces between objects and their representations are witchy interstices, loaded with meaning. In her case, Shirreff reverses her predecessors’ sculptural logic: the graphite-pigmented plaster objects were built for the express purpose of being photographed, and whether they will continue to exist beyond that is uncertain. They enable explorations in photography—its ability to translate a three-dimensional object into a two-dimensional image—but also explorations of physical scale. Shirreff likes thinking about how looking at something blown up or reduced in size plays on our imagination.

In the final gallery, the 16mm film *Sculpture Park* (Tony Smith, *Amaryllis*) (2006/2013) is devoted to Tony Smith’s outdoor public sculpture *Amaryllis* (1965), an iconic piece of Modern art. Shirreff makes her subject’s quiet presence felt, and snow flurries seem to collect upon it. But the film is a piece of crafted fiction: she built a reduced-scale maquette of the Smith work in her studio based on an image she found on the Internet, re-creating the picture’s inevitable distortions of angle. The “snowfall,” for its part, is actually finely shredded Styrofoam dropped from above the camera’s view. Any understanding of the Smith sculpture gleaned from her film must thus be skewed and partial, reminding us of the gaps that sit between a thing and its representation, or, in the age of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram, the inevitable gaps between our experience of something and the Internet’s version of it.

A critic once claimed that Shirreff’s art advances a veritable “theory of the object.” If it does, her work suggests that any such theory must admit to an object’s essential unknowability. In an era when the proliferation of images, and the immediacy with which we access and consume them, is ever expanding, Shirreff reminds us how much of our relationship to the world is mediated through representations. She also offers a way of working (and a way of looking) that runs counter to the quickly snapped and just as quickly forgotten. Through this tight selection of works in three different media (film, video, photography), all operating at varied scales and timeframes, Shirreff’s art offers itself as a meditation on encounter—our encounters with things, including sculpture, but also with art in the broader sense, art history, photography, loss, and longing. Her art asks us to take time to experience it—or, you could say, to encounter it, all the better perhaps to “unknow” the things she pictures in it.

Erin Shirreff was born in 1975 in Kelowna, Canada; she lives and works in New York, USA.

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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German

4.9.2016, Sunday, 3 pm
curator's tour, in English

22.9.2016, Thursday, 6:30 pm
guided tour, in English

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Children's tour *I Spy with My Little Eye!*

11.9.2016, Sunday, 3 pm

6.11.2016, Sunday, 3 pm

A tour and workshop for children,
from 5 - 10 yrs., in German,
by registration only

Presentation of *copy copy paste*

27.10.2016, Tuesday, 6:30 pm

Art education project inspired by the
exhibition of Erin Shirreff and dealing with
images - from photographic reproductions
and cyanotypes to photocopies - with pupils
of Gymnasium am Münsterplatz, Basel,
in German.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find an
associative selection of publications related to
Erin Shirreff and her artistic practice.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

Kunsthalle Basel

Erin Shirreff

Halves and Wholes

2.9.-6.11.2016

Erin Shirreff ist 1975 in Kelowna (CA) geboren, lebt und arbeitet in New York (USA) /
Erin Shirreff is born in Kelowna (CA) in 1975, lives and work in New York (USA)

AUSBILDUNG / EDUCATION

2005 MFA, Yale University School of Art, New Haven (USA)
1998 BFA, University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C. (CA)

EINZELAUSSTELLUNGEN / SOLO PRESENTATION

2016 - *Erin Shirreff*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y.
2015 - *Erin Shirreff*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (USA);
- *Arm's Length*, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York (USA)
2013 - *Concrete Buildings* Artpace, San Antonio (USA)
- *Day is Long*, Lisa Cooley, New York (USA)
- *Inside the White Cube*, White Cube, London (GB)
- *Pictures*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (CA)
- *Lake*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (USA)
2012 - *Available Light*, Carleton University Art Gallery and
Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Ontario (USA)

GRUPPENAUSSTELLUNGEN (AUSWAHL) / GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

2016 - *El intruso / cabos sueltos*, Heinrich Ehrhardt, Madrid, Spain
- *Zabludowicz Collection*, Kunsthalle Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
- *L'image volée*, Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (catalogue)
2015 - *Photo-Poetics: An Anthology*, KunstHalle Deutsche Bank, Berlin (DE)
- *A kind of graphic unconscious*, Susan Hobbs, Toronto (CA)
- *Part Picture*, MoCCA, Toronto (CA)
- *Form Regained*, i8, Reykjavik (ISL)
- *Partial Presence*, Zabludowicz Collection, London (GB)
- *Picture/Thing*, Wesleyan University Art Gallery, Middletown (USA)
2014 - *Allegory of the Cave Painting. The Other Way Around*,
Extra City Kunsthall & Middelheim Museum, Antwerpen (BE)
- *I know not to know*, Galerie Georg Kargl, Wien (AT)
- *The Fifth Season*, James Cohan Gallery, New York (USA)
- *To continue. Notes Toward a Sculpture Cycle: Vision*, Nomas
Foundation, Rom (IT)
- *Never Enough: Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Art*, Dallas
Museum of Art (USA)
- *Trieste*, Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam (NL)

Kunsthalle Basel

Erin Shirreff

Halves and Wholes

2.9.-6.11.2016

PRESSEBILDER / PRESS IMAGES



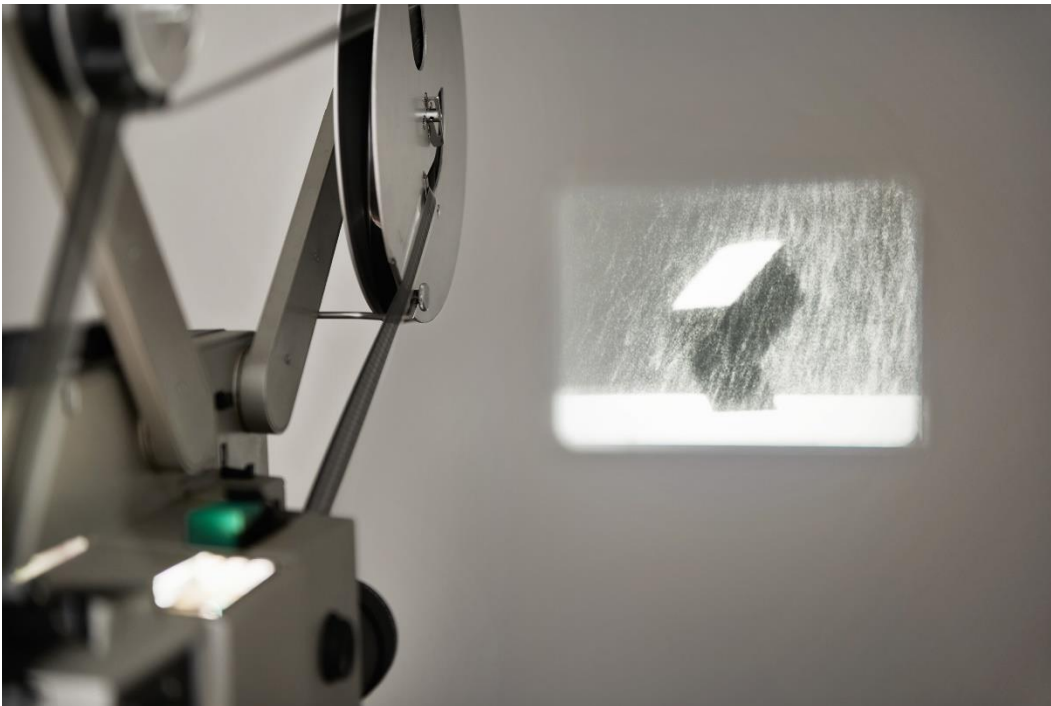
Erin Shirreff, Installationsansicht, *Halves and Wholes*, Blick auf *Concrete Buildings*, 2013-16, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Erin Shirreff, installation view, *Halves and Wholes*, view on *Concrete Buildings*, 2013-16, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Erin Shirreff, Installationsansicht, *Halves and Wholes*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Erin Shirreff, installation view, *Halves and Wholes*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Erin Shirreff, Installationsansicht, *Halves and Wholes*, Blick auf *Still (no. 3)* und *Still (no. 2)* und *Still (no.7)*, 2016, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Erin Shirreff, installation view, *Halves and Wholes*, view on *Still (no. 3)* and *Still (no. 2)* and *Still (no.7)*, 2016, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Erin Shirreff, Installationsansicht, *Halves and Wholes*, Blick auf *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith, Amaryllis)*, 2006/2013, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger / Erin Shirreff, installation view, *Halves and Wholes*, view on *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith, Amaryllis)*, 2006/2013, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger



Erin Shirreff, *Still (no. 5)*, 2016
Archiv Pigmentdruck / archival pigment print



Erin Shirreff, *Still (no. 7)*, 2016
Archiv Pigmentdruck / archival pigment print





Erin Shirreff, *Concrete Buildings*, 2013-16 (Video Still)

All Arbeiten Courtesy die Künstlerin und Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York /
All works courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Download-Link

kunsthallebasel.ch/presse/

Pressekontakt / Press Contact

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REFLECTED LIGHT
Cathleen Chaffee

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Antonio Canova applied a wax coating to his sensuous marble sculpture of 1808 depicting a semi-nude Pauline Bonaparte Borghese posing as Venus, victorious after the judgment of Paris (fig. 3). A “privileged few” were invited to view the reclining life-size figure after dark, when the dramatic play of candlelight on wax heightened the aesthetic experience.^[1] The sculpture’s base also contained a mechanism that slowly rotated the Venus, revealing it to the viewer from every angle. If the theatrical scenography around this wax-coated marble seems unusual, it is only a particularly scopophilic example of the way late-eighteenth-century viewers corresponded with the classical ideal.^[2]

The high-contrast chiaroscuro that delighted Canova’s admirers had been prized since the Renaissance, when Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci encouraged students of art to draw sculpture by candlelight to better understand relief, a practice that became a key part of academic art training for centuries thereafter (see fig. 4).^[3] In her writing on the display and representation of Roman antiquities, Mary Bergstein has described how, well into the nineteenth century, the Vatican’s collection of antiquities would be opened after nightfall to connoisseurs and royal visitors.^[4] As one viewer described the play of light over the Vatican collection in 1870,

The statue seems as though it’s on the verge of speaking or moving. The eyes seem to sparkle, the lips to tremble, even the blood seems visible under a soft and transparent flesh. Our torches turning around the stupendous Laocoön group made us see it in different ways, discover the most recondite parts, spell out the beautiful passages, and understand their significance.^[5]

understanding of Erin Shirreff’s approach to sculpture, and, significantly, to charting the phenomenological experience of her work.

Since the nineteenth century, sculpture has been installed for one relatively immediate audience but mainly encountered, and its existence made known to larger numbers, through photography. A sculpture’s path from object to presentation and then representation is usually murky, however, whether by the often undocumented process of installing and staging it, the dodged and cropped photographs that illustrate it, or the contemporary transmission of its digital images. In an age when the ubiquity of smartphones has effectively collapsed these distinctions—between firsthand viewing of art and the creation of its representation—Shirreff most often approaches three-dimensional forms through their depictions in photography. As she noted in a recent interview, “Sharing the same space as the object was somehow difficult . . . It was clear that I wasn’t able to let myself be as absorbed by the physical encounter as I was by the experience of the image. The remove offered by the reproduction opened up a contemplative space.”^[6]

In this, Shirreff commits a kind of heresy against the idea of the unique and auratic artwork, violating the truism that firsthand viewing is always superior. Her observation—that reproductions allow her the space to see, if not more clearly, then with a productive difference—may seem to result from her age: drowning in photographs as we are, she makes a virtue from necessity. However, Shirreff’s belief was shared by one of the great connoisseurs of the modern era, Bernard Berenson. Remarking on the probability of inadequate lighting and the guarantee of memory’s fallibility when observing artworks in situ, Berenson wrote that he relied on photography “not for capturing, but for improving upon the actual experience of art.”^[7] After a lifetime of study, he admitted in 1948, “I am not ashamed to confess that I have more often gone astray when I have seen the work of art by itself and alone, than when I have known its reproductions only.”^[8]

The way selective illumination highlights pregnant detail is particularly relevant



in an age of rapid image dissemination: sculptures are ever more in danger of simply being recognized rather than experienced. And while the flash of recognition is inherently pleasurable, it filters our observations through the snapshot's flat and totalizing lens, and it risks shortening encounters with, for example, the symphonic sculptures of the Laocoön group to mere identifications, or boxes on a checklist. The photography of three-dimensional artworks always risks such reductiveness, but it can also direct our gaze, draw out our temporal experience of the object depicted, and help us see detail in the darkness—like torchlight.^[9] In their accounts of special nighttime tours, the Vatican spectators described not only an exceptional communion with relics of the past, but also their experience of seeing well-known artworks *as if for the first time*.

It is this potential that Shirreff systematically harnesses in her varied and interrelated bodies of work: her video studies of individual, illuminated photographs; her cut-metal and poured-plaster sculptural assemblages; her interruptive and overlapping photographs and collages; and her photographic canvases, which depict forms related to her sculpture. Rather than encouraging others to analyze her work, Shirreff has stated, “I mostly just want it to be felt.”^[10] With her early video *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith)*, 2006, she invented an approach that would thereafter become central to her practice: developing processes that enable her audience to feel, through time, sculpture's very emergence into the visual realm. To create that work, Shirreff first made a group of cardboard maquettes based on images documenting Smith's far-flung



Fig. 4 Joseph Wright of Derby (British, 1734–1797), *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candlelight*, 1764–65. Oil on canvas, 40 x 48 inches (101.6 x 121.9 cm). Private Collection



Fig. 3 Antonio Canova (Italian, 1757–1822), *Pauline Bonaparte Borgese as Venus Victrix*, ca. 1808. White marble, 63 x 75 1/2 inches (160 x 192 cm). Collection Galleria Borghese, Rome

sculptural oeuvre.^[11] Deliberately grainy and lo-fi, *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith)* begins as a black screen, and only as fake Styrofoam “snow” begins to accumulate on the tabletop-scale cardboard maquettes does the sequence of Smith's familiar forms slowly and successively come into view: *Die*, 1962; *Amaryllis*, 1965; *The Keys to Given!*, 1965; *Spitball*, 1970; and *She Who Must Be Obeyed*, 1975. Such low-budget models and special effects have been used in movie production since the 1890s, but the scale and material of Shirreff's diorama also echo the genesis of Smith's own work. He famously crafted his first sculptures from the small cardboard boxes in which medicine was delivered during his childhood confinement to a tuberculosis isolation ward. A black metal stove, the only source of heat in his seclusion, became for Smith a symbol of mystery and a kind of divinity; he studied it for hours: after enough time with any object, he observed, “that object becomes a little god.”^[12] The stove inspired Smith's use of black-painted aluminum for his own large-scale sculptures, and he experimented with cardboard models throughout his career.

Shirreff filmed *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith)* with almost no light. To find an image in the shadows, the video recorder adjusted the contrast and overexposed the image, adding grey digital noise to the Styrofoam dust. Instead of driving viewers away, as precipitation would in a winter sculpture park, these veils of interference prolong looking. The Styrofoam snow reflects minute amounts of light, so the very flakes that “hide” the copies of Smith's sculptures are also exactly what make them visible. In

another, related film, Shirreff filmed only her maquette of Smith's *Die* (fig. 5). Instead of waiting for it to appear, we watch it slowly rotate for seven minutes, as if we are walking around it, or observing it on a turntable. Smith's iconic six-foot black cube is, among other things, a volumetric representation of the Vitruvian man, and Shirreff presents it in the darkness like Canova's rotating nude, worthy of twilight discovery from every angle. Awaiting the emergence of form in these videos, we engage in a drawn-out encounter with mediation itself: a video recording of cardboard re-creations of photographs of sculptures.^[13]

Shirreff took a similar approach to that of *Sculpture Park* in *Medardo Rosso, Madame X*, 1896, 2013 (plate 10). Her departure point for that video was a photograph of Rosso's “portrait” head from an edition of a 1937 book on sculpture.^[14] Shirreff scanned and enlarged the image, and altered its aspect ratio before printing it on four different kinds of paper stock and translucent plastic. She used a digital camera to repeatedly photograph these prints while adjusting lights over and behind them in her studio, introducing shadows and highlights. Some images underline the paper and others practically hide the photographic intermediary. Finally, Shirreff narrowed nearly 900 unique digital images down to 132.^[15] She ordered them, and used animation software to fade them into each other. The resulting twenty-four-minute video is a slow burn.

In Rosso's *Madame X*, figuration simultaneously emerges and disintegrates; the proto-abstract sculpture seems to moot the representational function of art itself.

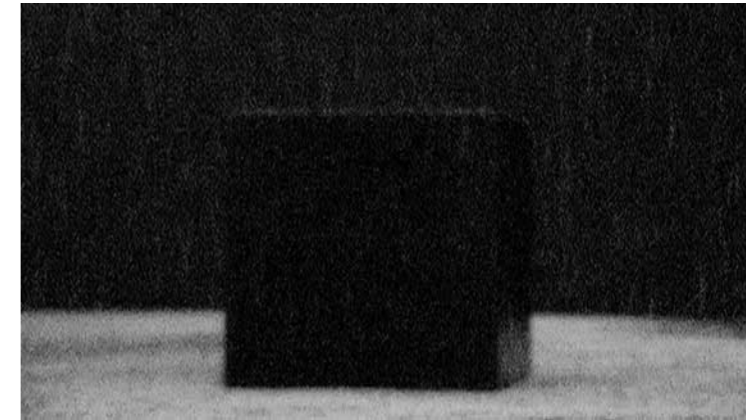


Fig. 5 *Sculpture Park: Tony Smith, Die*, 2007. Color video, silent. Edition 1/3 and 2 AP. Loop (7:16 minutes). Collection of Dr. Paul Marks, Toronto

Rosso produced few original sculptural compositions. Instead, he revisited and recast clay models and often arrested the lost wax method of bronze casting mid-way through the process, keeping the wax shells for new versions of his works. And along with Auguste Rodin, he was one of the first artists to oversee the photography of his sculpture, occasionally allowing the images to be exhibited as surrogates for the objects themselves.^[16] The somewhat grainy 1937 image Shirreff chose to work with is less anthropomorphizing than those Rosso produced himself; it shows the sculpture on a simple, functional base against a neutral photographer's background. In a recent exhibition in Milan, curators installed *Madame X* in front of a mirror, demonstrating that the sculpture is actually a shallow frontal relief, more of a shell than a work in the round. Yet nearly every photograph of *Madame X*, including all of those by Rosso, seems designed to hide that fact. As Rosalind Krauss describes them, Rosso's photographs of his work gesture "toward the unseeable side of objects."^[17]

At no point in Shirreff's video are we allowed to feel we have "seen" Rosso's sculpture as we would in a mirror or a flatly lit documentary photograph. Instead, the film's animated, flickering passage between light and darkness takes hold of our attention, and as the illumination successively dwells on potential moods and modes of Rosso's sculpture, we follow, studiously considering what the changing qualities of the photograph might convey. In her essay about Rosso and Rodin's engagement with Pictorialist photography, Geraldine Johnson writes, "There are no two identical versions of a Rosso sculpture. There are, however, variations of the same sculptures which acquire a completely new status in the passage from one material to another. The photographs emerge as the last variation in this series of transformations—after the plasters, the bronzes, and the waxes."^[18]

The subject of Shirreff's video is a photographic representation of Rosso's sculpture, rather than the sculpture itself, but it shows how a single image can contain the iterative evolution of the artist whose very work it represents. It implicitly

acknowledges the impossibility of taking in a sculpture like Rosso's in a single glance, and the dangers of thinking the sculpture and its photograph are interchangeable. At first encounter, it may appear to belong in the category of real-time single-shot durational films such as Andy Warhol's eight-hour meditation on the Empire State Building (*Empire*, 1964). However, like all of her videos, Shirreff's *Madame X* is instead a narrative film that takes viewers on a tour, reintroducing duration into the experience of sculpture. Were they not so phantasmagoric, Shirreff's films could also be described as didactic; they teach us to look closely.

In his research on the photography of Minimalist sculpture, Alex Potts developed a rule of thumb: the more minimal the work, the more likely that spectators will be absent from the frame. In documentation of outdoor installations, for example, "the absence of other people within the field of vision suggests that the work exists entirely within the individual viewer's own space, just as the work itself seems to dominate and take possession of its immediate surroundings."^[19] And in the case of works installed in interior spaces, "the interference of other figures is systematically edited out and the arena of viewing left empty."^[20] In both cases, we may presume that the photographers (and the artists who selected their images as illustrations) believed that viewers of such sculptures via documentation were more ready to feel a relationship to such works if their viewpoints were identical to that of the photographers'—standing alone in the presence of art.

If this is the approach that dominated catalogue and art magazine photography in the 1960s, it remains a far cry from most photographs of sculpture. For the installation at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Shirreff has dedicated a gallery to a group of historical photographs from the museum's archives. Her choices, a number of which help illustrate this volume, document the interaction with and presentation of sculpture from the early 1900s to the late 1960s (see page 108). Rather than showing isolated artworks, they catalogue a wide range of possible interactions between humans, photographers, and modern art objects in

a museum setting: well-dressed viewers drinking at exhibition openings, staff holding small sculptures for the camera, visitors peering into vitrines, conversations alongside which sculpture becomes an afterthought. Even today, large-scale sculpture must often be photographed in situ, without the benefit of neutral backgrounds, and Shirreff was also drawn to how these photographs became functional objects—marked up with crop marks and Wite-Out to isolate the details desired for publication.

Shirreff's selection from the archives highlights what happens when art is posed and lived with instead of being isolated from the fugitive. With this, she takes a risk because, as theorist Siegfried Kracauer observes,

Photography is bound to time in precisely the same way as *fashion*. Since the latter has no significance other than as current human garb, it is translucent when modern and abandoned when old. . . . The effect of an outfit which was still worn only recently is *comical*. The recent past which claims to be alive is more outdated than the past that existed long ago and whose meaning has changed.^[21]

In Shirreff's choice of images we see the "timeless" art object alongside compelling evidence of temporality: tuxedos at openings, palm tree décor, quirky exhibition design. These adjacencies do not undermine the historical importance of the sculptures nearby, but they do place them in the realm of lived experience, in time that stutters and starts along with fashion.

Art's risky relationship with fashion also motivated Shirreff's long-standing fascination with remaindered books, especially those assembling photographic representations of modernist sculpture. As Shirreff has recalled,

It was incredible leafing through these books looking at these massive works, often made by artists no one talks about anymore, the whole point of their efforts—to work on the viewer's body through scale

and materiality—now translated into a yellowing, black-and-white print in a dog-eared book.^[22]

The collages, called *Pages* (plates 7, 14, and 15), that Shirreff has made from such catalogues of disappointment are usually simple juxtapositions of one individual plate cut from a book and pinned to partially cover another. Much like her use of snow in *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith)*, this simple act of obscuring part of an image directs our attention to the details Shirreff wishes us to see. In *Pages*, it also creates cohesion, giving her fragmentary source material an improbably rational appearance, like an exquisite corpse. In a related way, Shirreff assembles her recent cyanotypes by pinning collage elements to photosensitized fabric (plates 16, 22, 28, and 29). While these works are made by exposing them to light, Shirreff's composition metaphorically takes place "in the dark"—she cannot know the layered visual compositions until they are developed at the end of the process.

To make photographic series such as *Monograph* (plate 8), *Signature*, *Signatures*, and *Relief* (plates 23–27), Shirreff creates small objects from plaster, foamcore, and cardboard that share morphological characteristics with modernist or Minimalist sculpture. She photographs the objects and enlarges the images, giving the toothy miniatures a paradoxically monumental presence. The artist then processes the photographic material: she poses and abuts the images; she introduces blank space, like jump cuts; and she folds, tents, and otherwise manipulates the prints themselves, evoking the spread pages and gutters of a book. Here, too, there is a temporal shift: in an era dominated by rapid-fire online image absorption, Shirreff distills and prolongs the fleeting juxtapositions and occlusions that occur when one flips through the pages of a book of photography. In an instantiation of the time-based poetics of "reading" visual images, our minds go to work on such artworks. We cannot stop conjuring their missing pages or tracing matches for separated pairs. Depending on their experience with modern and Minimal abstract sculpture, viewers may also mentally add hyperlinks



Fig. 6 *Drop* (no. 10), 2014. Hot-rolled and Cor-ten steel, 86 x 29 x 20 inches (218.4 x 73.7 x 50.8 cm), installed. Collection of Gerald and Jody Lippes

to certain forms, connecting Shirreff's fragmentary photographs to the absent artworks that inspired them, from Calder to Caro, Hepworth to Hare.

Shirreff's own sculptures revisit and transform this almost unconscious game of cut and paste. They currently fall into two bodies of work: *Catalogue* (plates 9 and 17–20) and *Drop* (fig. 6 and plates 11, 12, and 21). Each *Catalogue* is an assemblage of modestly scaled cast-plaster sculptural elements, alternately arranged on pedestals, tables, or shelves. The elements themselves range from objects in the round to shallow reliefs. While those few elements cast from real objects, like a bottle or a vase, seem deliberately lifted from a Giorgio Morandi painting, the majority are geometric. Their arced curves and hard edges gesture toward protractor and compass drawings rather than still life. And the discrete elements in a *Catalogue* sometimes bear more than a family resemblance to those objects she makes for photography in a series like *Monograph*. Indeed, Shirreff has photographed elements from a *Catalogue* sculpture to make *Relief*, her most recent photographic series. Much like the images in those series, *Catalogues* appear to offer their beholders an inventory of sculptural possibilities.

This is also true of Shirreff's *Drop* sculptures, which are strongly related to drawing; their forms are traced discards of paper collage. The first *Drop* sculptures

were varied shapes cut from thinly rolled steel and then punched with a hole that allowed them to be hung from a wall-mounted bar. Looking at a suspended *Drop* from the side is akin to peering into the pages of an open book. Strong breezes cause each element to sway slightly, evoking a massive mobile or a wind chime. A few *Drops* lean against the wall instead of hanging, their thin metal sheets spread out like a deck of cards (see plate 21). In their translation from paper into steel, the *Drops* come to evoke Minimalist gestures like the *Prop* sculptures of Richard Serra, even as their hard-edged organic forms seem closer to Ellsworth Kelly's perfectly imperfect curves. As much as these works suggest change and interaction, they are also clearly composed; there is no other way these odd elements would have found their way into such precarious configurations.

Each element of a *Catalogue* or a *Drop* could be a small, independent sculpture in itself. Paradoxically, however, each element also appears from certain angles like a detail from another modernist sculpture. Looking at them, it is worth remembering the Vatican visitors, circumnavigating the Laocoön group in the dark. Their torch might have first illuminated an elbow, then an unrecognizable cluster of muscles, then a bulbous form, part of the snake slowly killing father and sons. A nighttime wanderer in a modern sculpture park might come across the welded corner of a Mark di Suvero I-beam, a sharp-edged round fragment of a David Smith boiler tank, or a blocky bronze wrinkle—the face of a monolithic Henry Moore figure. Seeing one of these abstract sculptural parts would be like looking at a photographic detail illuminated just for the camera. Assemble them and you have an analogue for the experience of looking at Shirreff's work; it is a guided tour of modern sculpture's history, not absorbed through straightforward photographs in the time it takes to turn a page, but as a collection of details. And over time, Shirreff nurtures in her viewers an expectation of such discovery. This is the reward that keeps us circling her sculptures, reading the spaces between her images, and lingering in the light she casts on the work of others.

NOTES

- [1] See Mario Mraz and Giuseppe Pavanello, *L'opera completa di Canova* (Milan, 1976), 111–12 (no. 165). Cited in Eugene Dwyer, "The First Plaster Casts of the Pompeian Victims," in Paul Bonaventura and Andrew Jones, *Sculpture and Archaeology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 57.
- [2] *Venus Victrix* (*Venus Victorious*), like all of Canova's neoclassical sculptures, offered viewers a vision of the past that was seamless and "whole," as opposed to the often-fragmentary nature of antique statuary.
- [3] Arthur Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 30.
- [4] See Louis Delâtre, *Ricordi di Roma* (Florence: Gazzetta d'Italia, 1870), 163. Cited in Mary Bergstein, "The Mystification of Antiquity under Pius IX: The Photography of Sculpture in Rome, 1846–1878," in *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 45. I would like to thank Erin Shirreff for drawing my attention to this practice.
- [5] See Delâtre, 163. Cited in Bergstein, 45.
- [6] "Mediated Objects: Jenifer Pappararo in Conversation with Erin Shirreff," in *Erin Shirreff* (Ottawa, ON: Carleton University Art Gallery; Kingston, ON: Agnes Etherington Art Centre; and Vancouver, BC: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2013), 64.
- [7] Bernard Berenson, "Isochromatic Photography and Venetian Pictures," *The Nation* 57:1480 (November 9, 1893), 346–47. Cited in Frederick Nathaniel Bohrer, "Photographic Perspectives: Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History," in *Art History and Its Institutions*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London: Routledge, 2002), 248.
- [8] Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 204.
- [9] Gregorovius, *Roman Journals*, April 21, 1866, 251. Cited in Bergstein, 50.
- [10] "Mediated Objects," 67.
- [11] These were drawn from numerous sources, including the Internet and Tony Smith, et al., *Not an Object, Not a Monument: The Complete Large-Scale Sculpture of Tony Smith*, (Göttingen and New York: Steidl in association with Matthew Marks Gallery, 2007).
- [12] Cited in Robert Storr, John Keenen, and Joan Pachner, *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art in association with Abrams, 1998), 12.
- [13] When she made *Sculpture Park* (*Tony Smith*), Shirreff had known several of Smith's sculptures (*Amaryllis*, for instance) only through photographs, and therefore her maquettes
- [14] Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Moderne Plastik, Elemente der Wirklichkeit, Masse und Auflockerung* (Zurich: H. Girsberger, 1937).
- [15] Jeffrey Weiss describes the elaborate process to which Shirreff then subjected the photograph in "Close Up: The Absent Object, Jeffrey Weiss on Erin Shirreff's *Medardo Rosso, Madame X, 1896, 2013*," *Artforum* 52, no. 2 (2013): 254–57.
- [16] Geraldine A. Johnson, "All Concrete Shapes Dissolve in Light": Photographing Sculpture from Rodin to Brancusi," *Sculpture Journal* 15, no. 2 (2006), 199–222. On Rosso's photography of his sculpture, see also Alessio delli Castelli, "From This to That," *Frieze Magazine*, April 2012 (available at www.frieze.com/issue/article/from-this-to-that/). Among Rosso's images of *Madame X*, there is at least one hand-colored black-and-white photograph of another photograph in which Rosso perched *Madame X* on an object wrapped in burlap; this makes the sculpture appear like a puppet with a blanket around its shoulders.
- [17] Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 290.
- [18] Castelli, "From This to That."
- [19] Alex Potts, "The Minimalist Object and the Photographic Image," in *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, 186.
- [20] Ibid.
- [21] Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 55.
- [22] "Mediated Objects," 67.



The Absent Object

JEFFREY WEISS ON ERIN SHIRREFF'S *MEDARDO ROSSO, MADAME X, 1896, 2013*

IN “WHY SCULPTURE IS BORING” (1846), Charles Baudelaire seeks to diagnose the modern condition of the sculptural object. His chief claim, however, concerns the elementary nature of the object across historical time. In contrast to painting, Baudelaire writes, sculpture in the round is plagued by certain crucial “disadvantages.” A painting is “despotic”: In its flat frontality, it demands to be seen from one position alone. Conversely, a work of sculpture, which we are apt to view from many perspectives, cannot control the way in which it is beheld. Despite its identity as an autonomous object in the world, a sculpture, Baudelaire claims, is therefore “elusive.” Contingency of viewing is further heightened by sculpture’s susceptibility to circumstance—to the chance occurrence, say, of a flickering lamp, which may create an unintended impression.

Baudelaire’s formulation of the status of the sculptural object is framed by a variety of sociocultural values that limit its application to later art. Yet it remains a foundational text. In that he identifies sculpture as constitutively susceptible to the physical conditions of beholding in actual space, Baudelaire’s concerns are with both the ontology of the object and the basic terms of looking. Moreover, the implications of his argument remain peculiarly relevant to the technologized conditions of beholding that pervade aesthetic experience within a culture of the electronic image that so often displaces the “actuality” of that experience where objects and object making are concerned.

For Erin Shirreff, sculptural beholding is inseparable from the mediating function of photographic representation. While Shirreff’s tools include techniques from digital imaging, her primary “object” of interest has long been the camera’s role, as recording device, in the sculptural imaginary. One might describe her work, in light of Baudelaire, as being devoted to a staged intensification of the complex circumstances of encounter and memory as they pertain to the unstable identity of the aesthetic object.

Take *Medardo Rosso, Madame X, 1896*, a new video that was on view in Shirreff’s shows at Lisa Cooley in New York and White Cube Bermondsey in London this past spring and summer, respectively. This work addresses Rosso’s sculpture through the distancing effects of photographic—and videographic—representation. Its terms, however, connote a paradox:

that, in the context of sculpture, photography is a medium through which fullness of perceptual apprehension (and, reflexively invoking Walter Benjamin on the autonomy of the aesthetic object, “aura”) can be said to correspond to one’s *diminishing* contact with sculpture’s material presence. Shirreff’s *Medardo Rosso* represents a theory of the object. As such, the indelible impression it leaves is a haunted one.

The video, which runs for twenty-four minutes, is presented as a roughly seven-by-four-foot vertical-format projection against the flat surface of a shallow white box that juts five inches from the wall. It shows a single photograph of Rosso’s sculpture *Madame X*, which was reshot to produce multiple images that were then subjected to the effects of

changing light. Shirreff discovered the photo in the third edition of a book about modern sculpture by the art historian Carola Giedion-Welcker (first published in German in 1937). Rosso is an important yet somewhat obscure figure in the history of sculpture, having produced work around the turn of the century that would come to be identified as a precursor of modernist form. Indeed, *Madame X* is a specifically controversial work of Rosso’s: Because of its extreme reductivism, which was thought to have been impossible before the example of Constantin Brancusi, Giedion-Welcker redated the sculpture, from 1896 to 1913. During the 1910s, Rosso’s work exerted a strong attraction on the Italian Futurists, who extolled his attempts to approximate the tran-

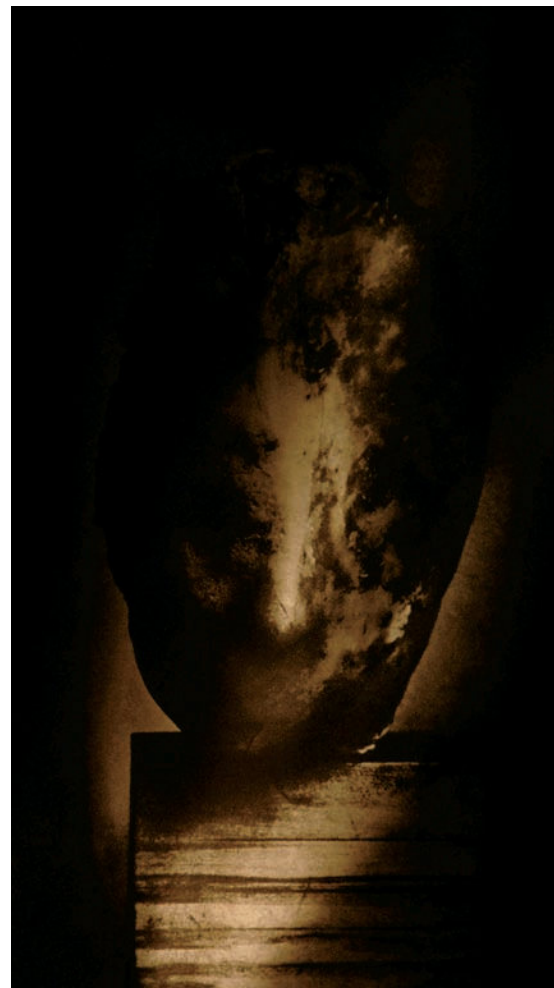
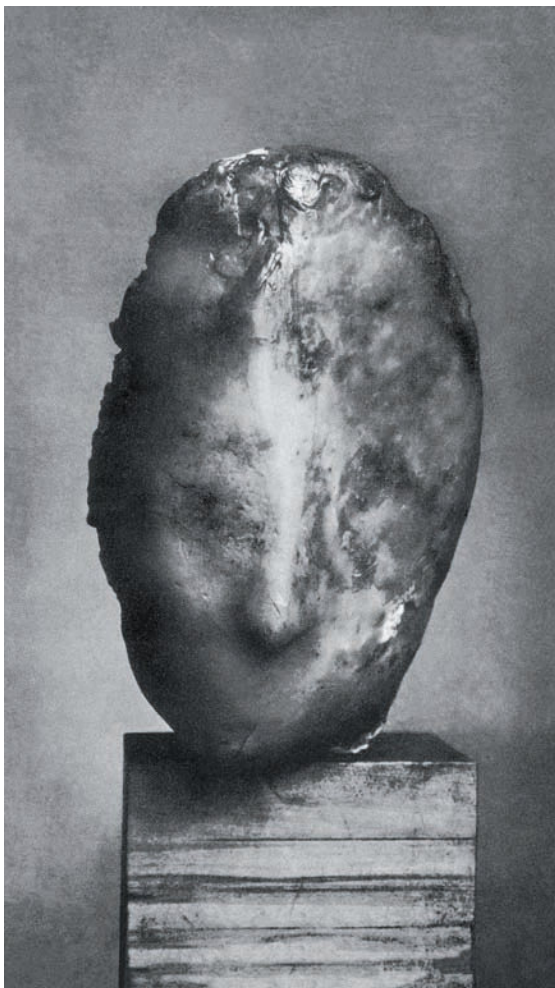


Opposite page: Erin Shirreff, *Medardo Rosso, Madame X, 1896*, 2013, digital video, color, silent, 24 minutes. Installation view.

Left: Medardo Rosso, *Madame X, 1896*, wax, 11 3/4 x 7 1/2 x 9 1/2”.

Below: Exhibition announcement for “Erin Shirreff: Day Is Long,” 2013, Lisa Cooley, New York. Depicted: Source image for *Medardo Rosso, Madame X, 1896, 2013*.





This page and opposite:
Six stills from Erin Shirreff's
Medardo Rosso, Madame X,
1896, 2013, digital video,
color, silent, 24 minutes.

***Medardo Rosso* asks us to remain transfixed. By staying, we allow the work to function, to intensify through light and time our material apprehension of an object that is not there.**

science of optical perception (which led him to develop plastic equivalents for the cloaking effects of darkness, for example, or for the indistinct impression that results from motion or the fleeting glance).

Contingent seeing in Rosso's work was supported not just by reductive form, but also by contingency's apparent opposite: a thickening materiality of means. This included unusual combinations of materials, such as plaster and wax, as well as a strikingly unorthodox approach, in the very late work, to the process of casting in bronze. The casts were allowed to retain, and thereby expose, the conventionally unwanted material residue of the process of their making, such that they became—despite the intrinsic nature of casting as replication—unique objects. Further, a significant aspect of Rosso's practice involved the camera. He can almost be said to have produced sculpture in order to shoot it under multiple conditions of light and display. In this way, he pictorialized the sculptural object, controlling the vantage from which it is seen and thereby heightening its optical effects. Rosso also engaged the photograph itself as an object; through mounting, developing,

and cropping procedures, he used material variability to compromise the dependable mechanical sameness of photographic reproduction.

The photographic image Shirreff has chosen to address is not Rosso's own, but may have been commissioned for Giedion-Welcker's book (in which it is credited to Venezia Ferruzzi). For her video, Shirreff subjected the photo to a process that was labor-intensive, and this process conditions the significance of the final work. An abbreviated account is revealing: The "original" photograph was scanned and then reformatted to fit the 16:9 aspect ratio of high-definition video. This new, cropped image was then printed on four types of paper with different finishes, from matte to glossy, as well as on translucent film; the original was enlarged in this process in order to achieve greater detail. The four prints were then digitally reshot hundreds of times while being subjected to hits of light from various sources. (The translucent-film image was mounted on glass so that it could be both spotlighted and backlit for this purpose, too). Finally, 132 of the resulting 878 images were selected and reformatted, and then, with editing



software, “cross-faded” into one another. In the resulting video, *Madame X* is exposed to what looks like a continuous ebb and flow of illumination; our vantage on the object is fixed while changing light serves to index the movement of elapsing time. Shirreff means to produce an illusionistic space within the frame, so that at first we believe we are seeing light model the object itself. As we watch, it is repeatedly made clear that the light is revealing the textural surface detail of a flat image instead.

Shirreff’s moves are not technically complex, and she deliberately emphasizes material means over digital ones (printed images and actual, rather than virtual, effects of light). Taken together, the very procedures of producing the video can be said to enact a shifting proximity of encounter. In its elusive sculptural form, Rosso’s *Madame X* is a *representation* of contingent optical experience, even as the object is also susceptible to its own optical contingency—the “deficiency” of sculpture as identified by Baudelaire. Yet in Shirreff’s video, the photograph itself is subject to circumstance, to variation through reprinting and to the distortions of light. The size of the projection

creates a larger-than-life impression that commands the gallery space (the experience would be quite different were the image contained by a monitor). As we watch the image of the object move through time, the sculpture’s very topography appears to change. At times its appearance is almost obliterated. Indecipherability is induced by both darkness and light: Veiled in one sequence, the head flares up in the next, where it is glaringly overlit and thereby consumed, as by fire. Further along, low light from a new direction lends the sculpture the form of a death’s-head. It is startling to grasp that a shifting sensation of the identity of the object can derive from the simple manipulation of an image of it.

Shirreff’s video is also a contingent object: Within the space of the gallery, it, too, is framed by circumstances. Indeed, in that it is time-based, our experience of the work is influenced by the point at which we enter and exit the room. This is often true of video, of course: Few are the installations of long-form video that most spectators stay and watch from beginning to end. Nonetheless, *Medardo Rosso* seems to solicit extended viewing: It asks us to remain

transfixed. By staying, we allow it to function, to intensify through light and time our material apprehension of an object that is not there. It is in this way that the work indirectly reflects on the status of the aesthetic object in a post-Conceptualist age of virtual representation, simulacra, and commercial manufacture, as well as on the periodic resurgence of medium specificity and craft. That is, according to the ethic of her work, mediation for Shirreff is less a device than an acknowledged condition—a cultural given. Processed and reprocessed, the photograph in *Medardo Rosso* is many times removed from both the early image and the crafted object it depicts. The mechanical image possesses its own ontology: The camera permits the object, in the form of a trace, to be held. Contingency and material substance are simultaneously acknowledged. Once the video comes to an end, the spell is broken and the sensation undone. What remains is distance, a metonymy of loss. □

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Mediated Objects

Jenifer Pappararo in Conversation with Erin Shirreff

JENIFER PAPPARARO: Almost automatically I consider you a sculptor, in part through your own suggestion, but when I think more specifically about your practice, this classification seems limiting. You work in a number of media; I have experienced your work as photographs or videos more than as objects you've made, and understand that your relationship to photography grew from your interest in the mediated object. Why do you situate yourself within this discipline, and how do you see the principles of sculpture transmitted in your work?

ERIN SHIRREFF: I guess I think of myself as a sculptor because things and our relationship to them are so primary to my work. For the last few years I have been thinking about the differences between how we come to understand a thing we share space with—the physical experience of an object—versus a mediated encounter with something depicted in an image or video. It's a very basic difference of course, but I think the nuances and implications are endlessly interesting: the complicated process of looking and recognition, the quality of attention in an encounter, the range of affect created by mediation.

But maybe I also think of myself as a sculptor because it's a discipline that can be so open and unformed. A very conventional understanding of sculpture brings to mind a process of discovery through exploring material, or creating something by additive or subtractive means. I relate to these processes in a more metaphorical way, meaning that my studio habits are intuitive: I build in a direction but try to let myself be carried by a lot of improvisation and not-knowing. It's a process of making, and finding what I'm making, and then making some more.

JP: It seems that when you do venture into making objects, you are formally undermining their conventions, like preventing a viewer from engaging with an object in the round. A series of sculptures from 2009–11—the ash pieces—appear to be antithetical to traditional ideas of sculpture. They cannot stand on their own; they lean, appearing to have been bent in half.

ES: Yes, those works are sculpture in name only. They are very frontal—in a sense just a series of conjoined fronts; there are no backs, which makes me think they function, physically, more like photographs than sculpture. They are very pale and lean close against the wall. It's as if they're trying to subtract themselves from the space. Like you say, their properties undermine their claim to objecthood: the surfaces appear rock-like but they're made from a composite of plaster and ash, very delicate; from some angles they seem fully dimensional, but from others it's revealed that they are only an inch thick—just shells. The forms are discrete but seem like fragments. When they are installed, they're lit from a bright single source in order to create a geometrically precise shadow that continues or completes the form. They become whole, but only by suggestion.

JP: I see three primary considerations in your work: the importance of the object, the object's mediation and the notion of duration. In terms of the object, whether you present it physically or as an image, you seem to address its limitations. In your mediation of the object through photography or video, or even in your disabling of actual forms, I feel that you are working through a kind of disappointment—that, experientially, the mediated object has more potency for you.

ES: A while back I was thinking a lot about my experience of looking at art, about how much time I unconsciously give myself to have an unarticulated experience with it. And I was considering how the level of patience I have or the quality of my attention is affected by the medium. Around this time I came across an image of Tony Smith's sculpture *New Piece* in a catalogue, and something about it really resonated. The picture is casual—there is a chatting couple off to the side and fragments of landscape and a building around the edges—but then right in the middle is this very large, dark void that totally dominates the frame in a factual, almost graceless way, indifferently straddling the book's gutter. It's a pretty intense image of a sculptural presence. It made me curious to experience the piece in person, to see whether the thing itself would carry the same charge. So I went to check it out, and it really didn't. I couldn't figure out, and I still can't, if I was the cause of the disappointment or if the object itself was. The sculpture was degraded and rusty, sure, but it wasn't that it didn't live up to some ideal I had projected. It was the quality of the experience that was so radically different. It left me wondering whether the physical encounter, sharing the same space as the object, was somehow difficult—perhaps intimidating, complicated or somehow overwhelming, and that I wasn't equal to it. It was clear that I wasn't able to let myself be as absorbed by the physical encounter as I was by the experience of the image. The remove offered by the reproduction opened up a contemplative space.

JP: In your work it seems like the object is the focus of the viewer's attention, but the real goal for you is to understand the mediation of the image and how that has an impact on our understanding. Or is it to name how the photograph holds your attention?

ES: I suppose both. I am curious, as artists have been for a long while, about how our understanding of ourselves and the world is shaped by the primacy and ubiquity of images. It is impossible to articulate all the different ways this affects us—even our perceptions mimic the language of images—but it certainly lets languish other ways of knowing and experiencing the world.

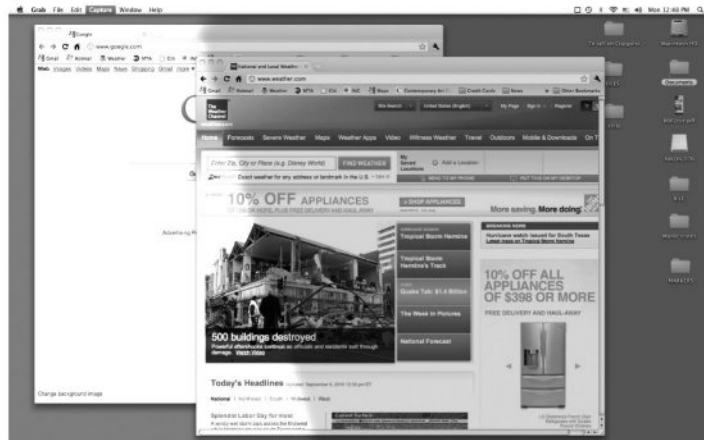
Most curious for me is the emotional dimension of all this mediation. I've come to understand the experience of an image as paradoxical: it is obviously flat, and often smooth or uniform, and so it literally circumscribes the experience of what it depicts, but an image can also somehow *permit* an engagement, the way the psychological aspect of seeing something out of your present time and space can be, in a basic way, really open and permissive.

JP: Is this where the object disappoints—partly because as a viewer you have to encounter it in the present moment? The object has to be approached, and that approach is a limitation because it exists within a particular time.

ES: Yes, maybe that is the crux of it. By re-presenting something you are taking it out of a specific, shared time. A historian friend of mine suggested that I'm drawn to what he calls the diachronic quality of objects—the way things exist through time rather than within a specific moment. This seems right when I think about the objects or images I've come to use in my work, and how I've treated them. It may also get at my interest in photography, because in a sense reproductions work both ways. They freeze a specific moment but then are carried forward



Shadow, Glare, screen grabs



in time (both as images and things themselves) and accrue these different meanings and relationships. I think in some psychological sense that duality mimics an experience I have of myself, my body—of being both in time and somehow outside of it. I think all of this connects to my interest in duration and the quality of persistence or indifference that I find so compelling in objects.

An example of this is the series of photographs I made in 2008 called *Knives*, which are portraits of generic knife-like things that I modelled and carved from clay just to the point that they could be recognized as “knife” but without much elaboration. I wanted them to exist outside of a specific reference or time period, more as an idea despite being these handmade, physical things. This same dynamic, of being both in and out of time, is I hope active in my videos. In *Moon*, the thing itself is an ever-present contemporary spectre, and yet it is also a rock that carries this unfathomable age. It is animated in the video to appear as though it is waxing or waning, but the sequence is artificial and the images derive from a set of photographs of the moon that were taken who knows when. I am drawn to things and methods that evoke this ambiguous sense of both immediacy and time having passed.

JP: Which you enhanced. In *Knives* you made many different objects that you’ve represented uniformly. They are each centred on a blank background and are presented as black and white photographs. Within this formal composition you seem to be intentionally referencing historical records. The composition mimics archaeological or botanical documents, presenting a taxonomy, in this case, of knives.

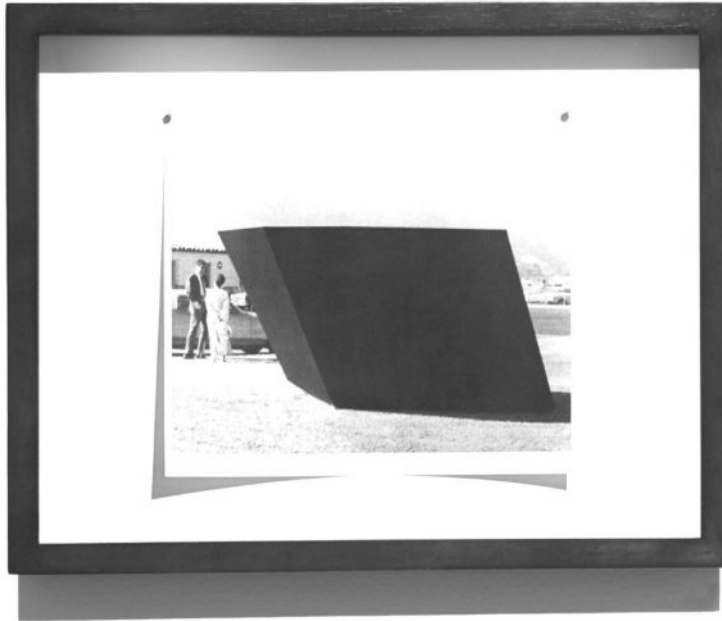
ES: I began making some of the objects for *Knives* and for subsequent series like *Untitled (Series 1)* (2009) from water-based clay, but they dried and cracked, and in my photographs the forms appeared very artifact-like. They seemed too obviously artificial or contrived. So I started working with Plasticine, a wax-based clay that never dries. The suppleness and malleability of the material comes through in the photographs. Of course, the black and white documentation and some of the carved markings make the collection of objects look like a classification of sorts, but the waxiness and pliability of the objects speak to this process of making; they read as newly made.

JP: The objects in *Knives*, as the title suggests, are representational. In subsequent photographs, your clay objects are more abstracted or at least more ambiguous. Can you speak to the thinking behind this change?

ES: For *Knives* I wanted the focus to be on the space between the viewer and the object. We recognize the forms as knives and then think, so what? What else? There are no real mysteries to decode in the images or forms themselves, so the focus becomes the encounter between you and the form. With *Untitled (Series 1)* I was more interested in drawing out the process of recognition, so the objects were kept indeterminate. Their identity can only be resolved by an agreement in the moment of looking, but whatever sense you’ve made of one form gets undermined by the next in the series. As a group they kind of leave you hanging. I guess I want all of my work to hinge on these kinds of moments, from drawn-out encounters.

JP: Your work *Shadow, Glare* (2010) points to this encounter—that a photograph or video has its own surface with distinct properties, which can come in and out of attention. One moment you are looking at the thing being represented and the next your attention shifts to the glossy and dusty surface of a computer screen.

ES: Yes, *Shadow, Glare* is very much about how attention shifts and changes within an encounter. Triple Canopy commissioned me to make a project that would live online, so I started to think about the kind of attention we have when sitting at a computer. I tend to go back and forth between being absorbed by whatever I’m working on and remembering that I am a body sitting in a chair. It is those moments when the sun shines on the surface of my laptop that I’m jarred back into my body. *Shadow, Glare* is about, and aims to re-create, this fluctuating state of attention. It is software you can download, and it operates like a non-stop screen saver on the top-most visual plane of your computer desktop. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, shadows move and form over open windows or documents. People have told me they often don’t even notice it operating, until they do, which is what I want. The shadows register as natural until they don’t. Shadows are something I come



Marker, installation view, 2010, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia

back to in my work pretty often—a trace or the presence of the thing, but not the thing itself.

JP: In that sense, the shadows are a bit like your photographs. When looking at a photograph of an object, the object no longer exists in that state, just like the shadow can't exist on its own. Are you working toward changing our understanding of the properties of sculpture?

ES: What are you thinking of in particular?

JP: I think you're positing the image, the photographic representation of a sculpture, as another property. That the image has to be considered when you're talking about sculpture.

ES: Yes, definitely. The image can establish an imaginative space, or even a sense of imaginative touch. Like looking at an image of a Robert Morris installation from the 1960s and imagining what it would be like to be in that room—that's all you can do. The specifics of the materials and the light and the feeling of the space—all the elements that were obviously considered with an extreme degree of precision by the artist—are lost. Instead you are at the mercy of the gallery photographer. It is obviously a completely different affective experience, but it's all that's left. In this sense I'm not changing any of the terms of sculpture, I'm just acknowledging that they are changed and always have been. People make things and time passes, and the things they've made aren't current but they're still hanging around. It lends sculpture in particular a kind of melancholy, I think. Or vulnerability. In sculpture I feel it more acutely than in painting, because a sculpture is a body in space. I can look at a Giorgio Morandi painting, and it translates into my time pretty effortlessly in a way that a sculpture often doesn't because its material age is so evident.

JP: This seems a good place to talk about your use of references to artists and their artwork, in particular Tony Smith, whom you evoke in several works: Sculpture Park (Tony Smith) (2006); Sculpture Park, Tony Smith, Die (2007); and your recent public work Sculpture for Snow (2011).

Direct references to historical artists seem particularly prevalent today. In his recent essay "Radicalism as Ego Ideal: Oedipus and Narcissus," Dierich Diederichsen discusses the use and appropriation of historical figures as a new kind of radicalism that is more about the search for a father than a rejection of him. For me it seems a strategy that can function on various levels. It is an efficient way to address a complex set of ideas while also paying homage to a figure or body of knowledge. So in Diederichsen's terms it is inserting yourself in a history that you define for yourself.

But I think your use of the reference functions differently—more like you are addressing the terms of your engagement with the works in question and to a certain extent how history is conveyed. It also seems to me a critical stance, such as in your video of Roden Crater, a piece of land that since the late 1970s James Turrell has been transforming into a massive earthwork. Your video is so subtle and tranquil compared to Turrell's grand gesture. Your video captures the properties of light by tracking its movement over a photographic image. In a way, you seem to refine his gesture into something more precise.

ES: I've been asked questions in the past regarding appropriation or quoting. I just don't understand my work as having a critical conversation with any of these artists' practices per se, and I'm not critiquing their projects or questioning their legacies, or even paying homage. Questions of authorship or intellectual property are not what I'm interested in. Really my use of these artworks is what you suggest—a way of thinking through how I engage with them as a viewer and as an artist. The particular dialogues that come up with Smith (I guess I'm

thinking of Michael Fried, or more contemporary criticism of Smith's brand of monumental sculpture and modernism in general) or with Turrell (land art circulating as image, a problematic claim on a supposedly blank canvas of land that ignores its specificity)—these are ideas that feed into an interpretation of my works, I realize, but they were never part of my impetus to make them.

Another example of quoting in my work would be the *Signature* (2010), *Signatures* (2011) and *Monograph* (2011–12) photograph series, which depict maquettes of mid-twentieth-century sculpture that I made myself. I bought armloads of old sculpture anthologies and short-run gallery monographs and really ingested the forms of that era—Calder, Caro, Smith, Gabo and a host of artists I'd never heard of. The maquettes I made were an amalgam, a suggestion of the kind of work that hinged on mass, volume and bold, graphic shapes. It was incredible leafing through these books looking at these massive works, often made by artists no one talks about anymore, the whole point of their efforts—to work on the viewer's body through scale and materiality—now translated into a yellowing, black and white print in a dog-eared book. Anyhow, these photographic series try to revisit this kind of work and to consider its contemporary mode of presentation—the book. None of the forms I made and photographed are direct references to particular works or sculptors, but they do evoke that era; but again, like with the videos, I'm using these references, these works, not to think about *them* per se, but to think about our experience of them.

JP: For your exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery (CAG), we chose to focus on videos you've made since 2006. The videos are often subtle evolutions built from an accumulation of stills or a durational tracking of a static shot. They have an animated quality and transmit no sound. Some of them begin with one image that is then altered in some manner, transformed by environmental circumstances like tracking the daylight or by sequencing different analog renditions of the image. Repetition with slight variation in a static photographic image formally links many of the videos, but what is distinct here is duration. I think this may be linked to the archival and aged qualities of your photographs, but I'm hoping you can speak more directly to your use of duration.

ES: I was very affected in undergrad art history by Michael Snow's films from the 1960s and '70s. It was the simple lesson art students learn about time being a property—that duration was the thing affecting me more than what I was looking at; that I was changing in my chair as I watched these films, and, it seemed to me, their chief job was to make me aware of that. Understanding this was exceptionally exciting for me as a student. In the years since, I've realized I value most the experiences in my life when I've had an open, extended encounter with something. I don't know that time allows me to understand something more, but I know the experience is richer.

*JP: This focus on your durational works puts your sculptural concerns at somewhat of a remove, which I also see as following a trajectory in your work. For example, in *Lake* (2012) you use a found image of a landscape. There isn't a central focal object, which is so prominent in your other photographic and video works. Does this signal a shift?*

ES: Not significantly, in that the image at the centre of the video is itself an object, and its objectness comes in and out of focus as you watch the video. It is one of the reasons why the analog process of

the videos is so important for me to keep in view. The videos are very handmade, and I want viewers to be aware of that from time to time, for the thingness of the photograph to always be very present. For instance, at several points in *Roden Crater* (2009) you become aware of the surface texture of the image, which in turn indicates its snapshot scale. Roden Crater is the thing that you're looking at in the video, but you are also looking at the image of Roden Crater—the image is the thing. For *Lake* the thingness of the image was even more apparent because the original photo was kind of a relic: it was a full-page spread in an early 1980s tourist brochure that I found in a thrift store, and it was printed in that era's specific colour palette, very yellow and green. Seeing the image prompted a kind of double nostalgia for me: it was the image of a landscape I grew up in that I hadn't seen in years, but it was also the memory of this colour cast that was everywhere in my childhood. I had the tearsheet hanging in my studio for five or six years before I made the video, so eventually it became a thing unto itself. So while I understand what you're saying, that the picture is different in that there isn't a discrete form isolated and centred on a background, I came to think of the reproduction as a thing, and treated it as such. I think it looks painterly: the composition is classically Romantic. There's even a stack of rocks in the centre, a stand-in for the lone figure in the sublime landscape. I like when this happens—when one medium bleeds into another. Video into painting or drawing, sculpture into photography or photography into sculpture. It dilutes the specificity of the work and brings the focus back to our experience. I guess I'm often less interested in the conceptual layer of my work; I mostly just want it to be felt.

JP: I see this focus in your video work as positing multiple durations. Of course time passing is a constant; it's our experience that varies. The experience of moving from one video to the next resembles the way you shift our attention between the properties of the video or film, the object or form that is being represented and the photographic image. You use subtle shifts in colour and light to both hold and change the viewer's attention. These sometime minute inconsistencies mark and make the experience. Can you speak more about these subtle shifts and to the process of animation?

ES: This will be the first time I've shown exclusively video, so I'm curious how they will function in a space together. I've thought a lot about the pacing in each video. They are all relatively slow, but the slowness varies—as do, like you say, their light and colour qualities. I want to create a tone in the gallery that will allow the inconsistencies to be noticed. The process of animation in the videos is meant to draw the viewer into an experiential space, so I've really thought about their physical presentation: the scale of the image, how evident the equipment will be, the ambient experience in the gallery. I'm always amazed at how we gravitate toward screens, how easily we surrender to moving images. I love that suspension, but I also love what happens when it's broken.

This interview, here edited and condensed, was conducted by telephone on August 10, 2012.