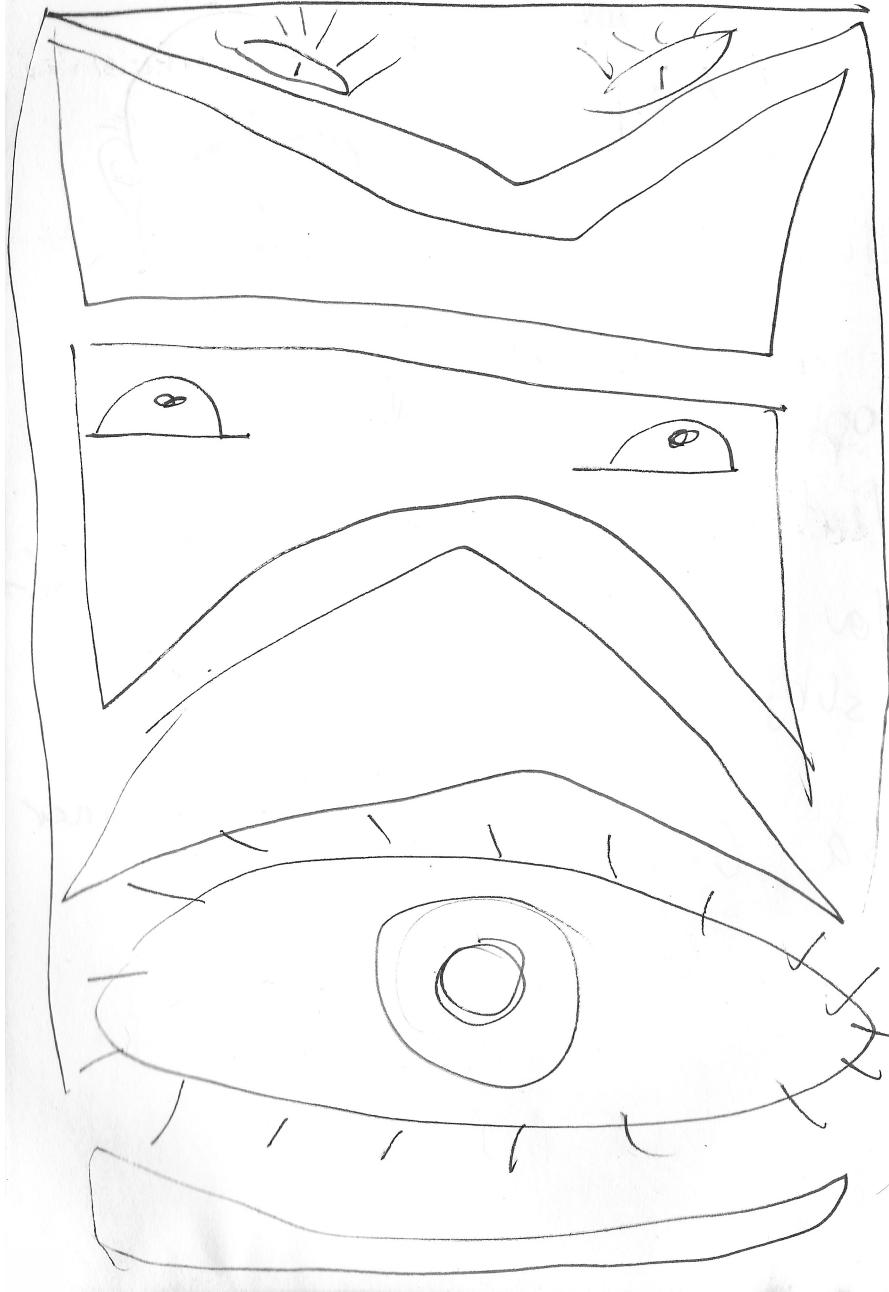


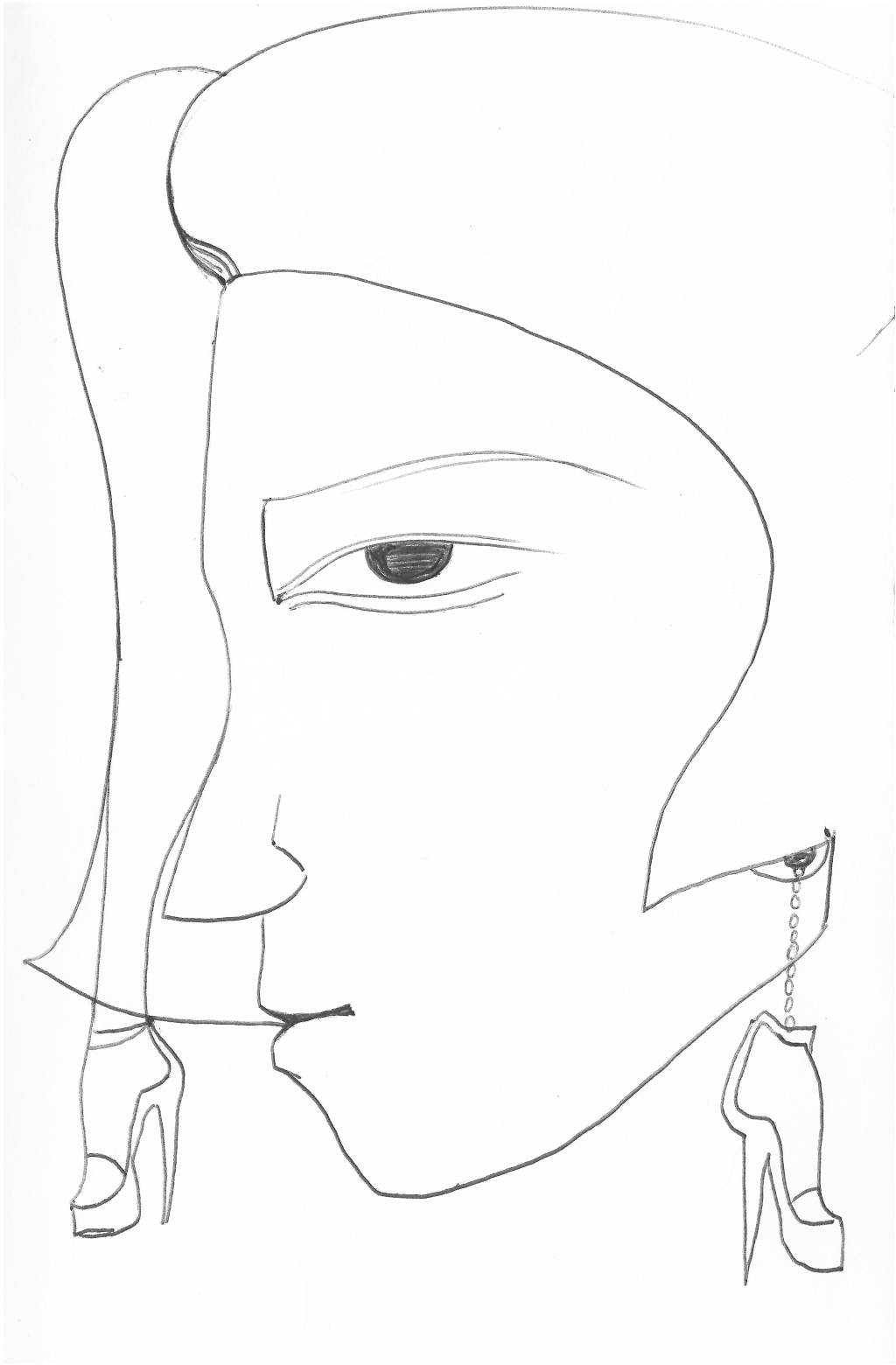
PRECEDENT



WHITE FLAG LIBRARY

Elaine Cameron-Weir

January 19 – March 2, 2013



When I visited Elaine Cameron-Weir's studio this past November, she was preparing for an exhibition in Brussels. A sculpture, which resembled the CN Tower in Toronto or the CCTV building in Beijing stood near her worktable. A slender brass rod supported an orb comprised of multiple sections of lamp parts. When we talked about the work, the artist was worried, because she needed more lamp pieces, but production had recently stopped on the particular pieces she was using. The work, which harkens on the history of interior design, became the subject of its own critique, as the process of obsolescence, which lowered the demand and made the parts cheaply available in the first place, had actually caught up with the artist, lending her sculptures the air of an actual antique, of scarcity.

The anecdote above helps to illustrate the gap between objects whose utility is present (i.e. practical, physical utility and sentimental or narrative utility) and where an object has become obsolete. The gap is not easily traversed by value and we're left, once an object no longer contains its aura of social, political or economic significance, with a thing, reduced to the materials that constitute its form, often more of a burden than a pleasure to have around. Cameron-Weir's work resides within this gap, where the ghost of fashions pulls current trends into the darkness and exhumes old styles for new generations – the wastelands of history and influence, junk stores, antique shops or the dump. Yet, once singular objects resurface, they do not possess the same normalcy of appearance, and this absent commonality imbues them with the value of numerical scarcity, allowing them to serve as a surrogate record, extricating the potency that our expectations lend to objects, that they might represent us today.

The triptych *Smoking in the Bathtub* (2012), *Smoking at the Beach* (2012) and *Smoking by the Pool* (2012), and their brass tubing stretchers and marble finished canvas locate, in their distressed ornamentation, a decorative craft stripped of fashionability, and whose materials nonetheless enforce an irreducible formalism. The application of the marble pattern is a simple home craft, a leisure activity, and can be as simple as using a small plastic tub, some water, cheap acrylic paint and a few drops of dish soap, dipping a sheet of paper or fabric in the solution, and letting it dry. The marbling effect is a cheap imitation, borrowing classicism to lend *class* to otherwise impoverished materials such as cheap copy paper, old curtains, or MDF. Conversely, the work also draws upon art history, as the manner by which the artist employs this method, its adherence to surface and the painterly field, mirrors certain Abstract Expressionist painting methods – Morris Louis, Sam Francis, Jackson Pollock. While retaining a heavily retinal effect, it is more appliqué than application and the historical reference to High Modernist Painting and campy decoration conflates two leisure activities once could do to fill a Sunday afternoon.

If we rest here, then these works are punchy art riffs on historical painting, reducing these massive, mid-century gestures to mass producible camp. They speak to a corporatization of avant-garde modernist thought in art that is conspicuously similar to the shift that took place in architecture and interior design during the same period. But, we are then stuck solely on the content of these works for their value, didactically misappropriating that which appears before us. In "Against Interpretation", Susan Sontag declaims this same misguided critical act when she writes: "...interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art."¹ As I mentioned above, these works *speak to* something, but they also *stale* themselves through the materiality of their form, problematizing such a polemical reading, as present as it is. And this arrives at the core of Cameron-Weir's practice: an aesthetic procedure that examines how materials create a sensual atmosphere, while conveying sensuousness – a question to art that mirrors one we may pose to culture: where does life fit into a lifestyle? It is an examination of how objects serve to contradict or reinforce a certain subjectivity, a certain way of being in the world, the type of space, literal and symbolic, objects create.

Another work, *Untitled* (2012), a tall brass sculpture, elaborates on the manner by which objects communicate viscerally through an experience of their materiality. A shear marble block with irregular edges rests on the ground with an aluminum tube providing a stable support for a segmented brass rod that extends almost seven and a half feet in a lightly arching diagonal from the floor. Attached to the pole, hand fashioned brass leaves rest at the joints where the rod narrows at each of its three segments, delicately wrapped around the pole with thick gauged wire – and one leaf flops down at the very top. The work flirts with figuration, making reference to the Arco lamp, decorative bamboo stands, fishing rods, a house plant, an antenna – mass produced goods that branded the domestic interior, that provided people with the same hobbies, their beautiful simplicity allowing for numerous ideological attachments. Standing at the point of referentiality, the sculpture subtly parodies, rather than represents. But, what holds the work together is a tension which amalgamates around the impure alloy imitating the tree's leaves and bow and the solid, rough-hewn marble quarry slough, implicating what is otherwise observed or judged in what is felt or sensed.

Caught in the coqueteries between representation and sense, an ineffable beauty insinuates itself, announcing, in its false gold luster and classical marble, a dedication to the humors. The effect is seductive and convincing, and inaugurates the theater of objecthood, the dance of aesthetic judgment we do around something such as *Untitled*. This implacable beauty, a complicated sensation, torn between interpretation and sense, leaves us like *Untitled*, awkwardly askew from the directions our judgments can take, while a beautiful perfume remains in the air, an atmosphere redolent of Modern tastes, conveying the potency of these materials when they are brought outside of the theater of use.

- Sam Korman
Assistant Director

¹ "Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*. New York, NY: Picador U.S.A., 2001. Print.

ISHERZEE BALKI

Materiality represents objecthood and an object can pass through time in a tangible way. It can be observed. It can age, degrade, be restored, forgotten.

In a way materials represent ^{actual} ~~form~~ ^{that it} time more directly than form, while form encapsulates an idea or function, material acts as context or sexuality.

Form can be reconstituted. Materials are finite. Surface separates out from both.

Checklist

Smoking in the Bathtub, 2012
Acrylic on canvas, brass
37 x 30 inches

Smoking at the Beach, 2012
Acrylic on canvas, brass
37 x 30 inches

Smoking by the Pool, 2012
Acrylic on canvas, brass
37 x 30 inches

Untitled, 2012
Marble, brass, aluminum
89 x 8.5 x 4 inches, dimensions variable

All artworks courtesy of the artist and Ramiken Crucible, New York

About the Artist

Elaine Cameron-Weir has held solo exhibitions with Ramiken Crucible, New York; Desaga, Cologne; and Possible Projects, Philadelphia. Her work appeared in the group exhibitions *Weights and Measures*, Eleven Rivington, New York; *The 2011 Bridgehampton Biennial*, Bridgehampton, New York; *Creature From the Blue Lagoon*, Bridgehampton, New York; *1867 1881 1981*, Bodega, Philadelphia; *Straight Up*, Family Business, New York. Her work has been discussed in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Bomb Magazine*, and *The New York Times*. Cameron-Weir received her MFA from New York University. She lives and works in New York.

White Flag Library is an ancillary exhibition program of White Flag Projects.

This publication is illustrated by selections from the artist's notebooks.

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