
undercurrent

70 John Street /Brooklyn /NY /11201

/Thur /Fri /Sat 12-7 pm

AFTER LIGHT

10.03 – 11.09 /2019

ELISABETH ROTH /MICHAEL VILLAREAL /MEGAN STROECH /ASHLEY JONAS /SAAR SHEMESH

Curated by Daina Mattis

Windows have a universal impact; they let light in, frame our view of the exterior, act as portals into another space, and aptly provide an escape/exit. In the 18th century Western Civilization, shopkeepers began integrating large openings and glass windows to brighten a dark shop-room, yet more significantly to draw attention from the outside inwards. Alternatively, audiences from sidewalk pedestrians—a marketing strategy bridging the domestic/private/familiar and the public/commercial/foreign— became a middle-class pastime with arcades developing, bridging class and the practice of window shopping. *After Light* spring-boards from this social phenomena of the idea of looking but not buying. One can buy a window accessory, a view, even airspace, but ironically no one can purchase daylight. The artists' work in *After Light* punch holes into the capitalistic mirage that everything is for sale. One cannot buy time; By churning the impossibility of commodifying daylight, these artists throw shade on access, ownership/tangibility, utility, and class in our current social, political, and ecological climate.

Elisabeth Roth's cyanotypes frame what is not visible - sunlight. Cyanotypes are an early, affordable form of photography using a paper that is coated with a light sensitive chemical. That which is exposed to the UV light cures to a dark shade of blue and what is blocked is washed away with water. Roth's sun-drenched work fill their frames with fragmented curtains. While trying to capture light there is a counteraction of material decay. Strong in contrast, visually delicate, presence through absence, and like a worn in couch, molded to the body of its owner. Roth masterfully and minimally creates a work about the invisible by merely blocking out the light.

Insulation foam, wood, and paint are raw construction materials **Michael Villarreal** utilizes to shape his work depicting disheveled blinds. Yolked between painting and bas-relief sculpture, his blinds ooze humor through their corporeal/anthropomorphic presence. Ripe with confrontation, the blinds physically enter our space, and sarcastically deny us any visual egress; tongue-and-cheek in nature, Villarreal stealthily withholds access, all while teasing, coaxing us to want what's on the other side. This sort of pussyfooting between give and take augments concerns and abuses of space, immigration, and manipulation—Materials that are used to insulate here become walls to shut out.

Integrating printmaking techniques, free-hand painting, and various solid and patterned fabrics, **Megan Stroech** creates large collage wall pieces that all at once teeter between object and aerial views of still lives. A browser of local dollar and discount stores, Stroech goes further than gleaning from the the excessively decorative window displays, and integrates and/or imitates the affordable, mass produced materials themselves. Plaids, paisleys, and hand-painted looping lines lasso low-brow elements together, grounding them in the Americana nostalgia of picnics and the Wild West while simultaneously creating a high brow sensibility of ownership in the shadow of the fine art commodity. Indiscriminately embracing irony, Stroech defies class, and spins high and low material culture to challenge ideas about commodity and access.

Deeply invested in the question of utility (a ceramist's dilemma), **Ashley Jonas** integrates both found utilitarian materials and ceramic pieces, creating free-standing sculptures. These banal materials are old, used, and marked up, consisting of pieces of wood, sink basins, garden edging, and thread, objects that served to enhance our lives and disposed of once completed or broken. Not all materials are created equal. In some states, clay can be reclaimed. It can be returned to its wet, moist body, to again be cut, thrown, shaped, pinched, and coiled. It's final act as container, to hold and carry liquid, can be shattered, yet Jonas argues that too is part of its "job." It's no wonder that clay's mantra, "Of Many Lives," is adopted to other utilitarian objects, redefining their reliability to function in a new way. Sustainably and gracefully, Jonas frames new purpose and new identities into fragments bound to the same law we all follow: gravity.

Not far from any of these works exists **Saar Shemesh's** *Louie*, a bronze cast cat. To Shemesh, *Louie* is the incarnation of humanity, what it means to be human— to live, suffer, grieve, loss, have strength, soul, and love. *Louie* becomes the ambassador for our escape as well as our memento mori. Basking in the "light," it is unclear if he is asleep, awake, or dead, eerily tethering him to the old saying, "curiosity killed the cat," and our own human errors, individually, socially, and universally as time runs out. Hung in our windowless basement, these works forge hope and new dialogues by refracting stereotypical characteristics of display, framing, visibility, and utility, pushing for new formats and alternative perceptions. We cannot buy back time, let us draw a new window and new solutions. After all, there is no time like the present to make a change.



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