

**SIMON
LEE**

BORDERCROSSINGS
Introduction by Meeka Walsh, Interview by Robert Enright,
"Image and Object in the art of Erin Shirreff"
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BORDERCROSSINGS

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Erin Shirreff Jimmie Durham Meryl McMaster
Ray Smith, GT Pellizzi and David Alfaro Siqueiros
Jeff Ladouceur Allison Katz

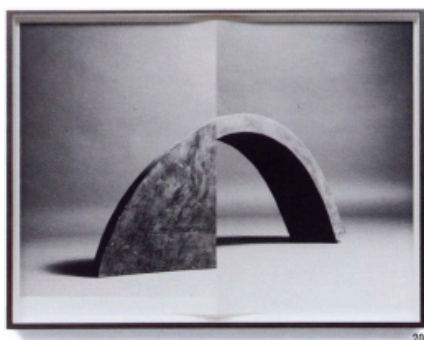
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THE SPACE OF NOT- KNOWING

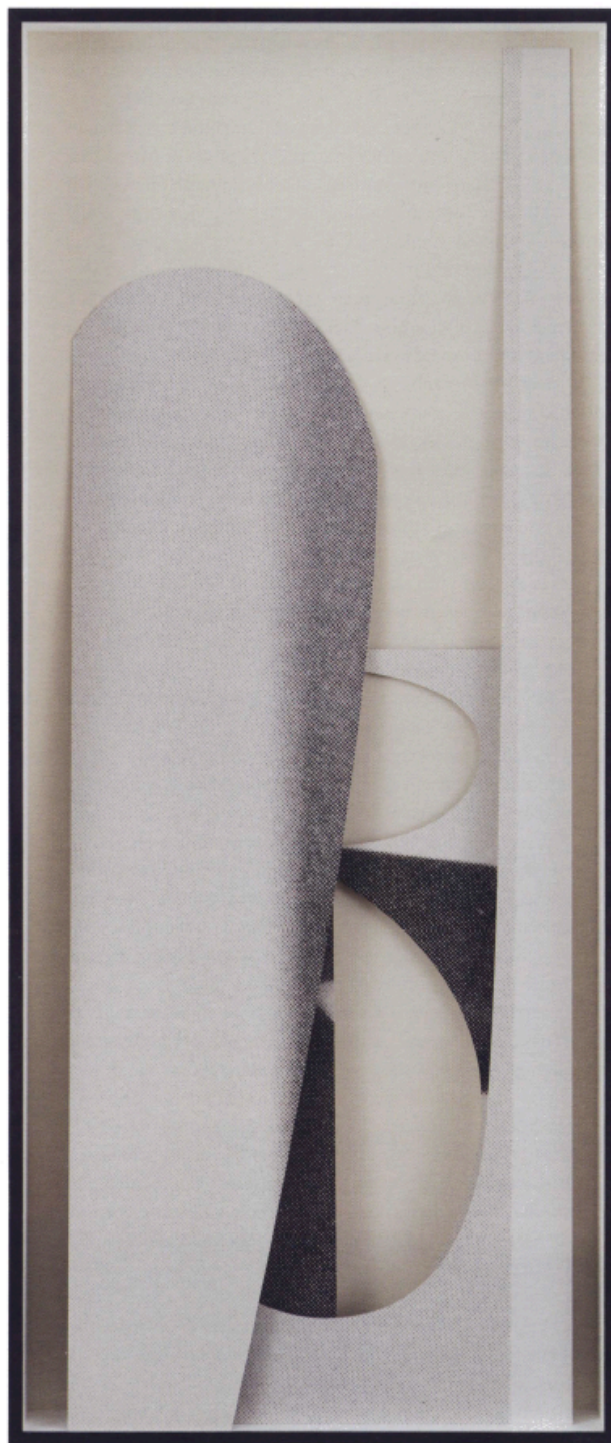
It's my sense that engaging with Erin Shirreff's work involves an act of faith. Her proposition that time is the elemental dimension in the embodiment of her works, that is, in bringing them into being, is one with which we agree if we commit to her work. It's this—and I can go with her: her video works (*Ansel Adams RCA Building circa 1940*, *Sculpture Park* (Tony Smith), *UN 2010*, for example), though animated, take as their visual subjects photographs of a structure or an object and amplify their presence through duration. Time is the factor, she is suggesting, that will allow the apprehension of something we can only ever see as a partial form and compels us to absorb and acknowledge its full being, its possible all-the-way-roundness. We have given our time to the object in her video, or to the video itself, have entered into a transient reverie or brief hypnotic pause as we go into or come out of the state and space of the work. We have stopped for a length to allow Shirreff's question of how we see and take that sense in as perception and knowledge, whether we know it or not. If we go with her work we, too, are asking how, through looking, do we engage what we see in the space we inhabit?

IMAGE AND OBJECT IN THE ART OF ERIN SHIRREFF

Introduction by Meeka Walsh
Interview by Robert Enright

Jenelle Porter, co-curator of the exhibition "Erin Shirreff" at the Albright Knox Art Gallery, 2015 and the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, 2016, drew a parallel in her essay "Equivalents" between Erin Shirreff's work and Alfred Stieglitz's "Equivalent" series, 1925–1934, about which he said his intention was that the work present rather than represent abstract images and emotions. Porter wrote, "Shirreff too proposes equivalences among objects and their representations, literal scale and sensed/experienced scale, and materiality, all within the context of ambiguous definitions of medium."

Equivalent but not the same. Shirreff's experience of seeing a photograph of Tony Smith's sculpture *New Piece*, 1966, and one of the editions of the piece itself installed on the grounds of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University may speak to the potency of an artwork, to the difficulty, as she stated, of seeing a three-dimensional object in a manner inconsistent with itself, i.e., only as a part of its whole, and to the rapidity of our visual apprehension in the digital age. I'm speaking of potency not in the auratic sense, the distinction that Walter Benjamin attributed to the real rather than the copy or reproduction,



but thinking here of Erin Shirreff's comment that some sculpture, to her surprise, seemed to carry less weight in its actual presence than it did as a photograph, and her confession that sometimes in order to better see something, even in her studio, she takes a photograph of it. I like her self-interrogation about the manageability of a photograph rather than the object itself. More time to look at length, or the distance that a photograph allows. Not prevarication but options and ambiguities. Not one thing only, but open-ended possibilities.

The studio is an important site of habitation and productivity for Shirreff, an active place where art is made. This is where the intuitive and the bibliophilic come together and flourish, where both inclinations can be nurtured and pressed to realization. She's not a street photographer, a documentarian or the capturer of still lifes, although, as she tells us, she likes the active verbs that adhere to photography, like "capturing" an image and holding it fast. But that's not really accurate, she points out, because photography's nature is to always be fugitive, to finally elude capture and fixity, resisting its own sealed emulsion through the multiplicity of viewers' readings.

There is a certain unguarded tenderness in extending a desire to be acknowledged or seen and recognized as present to the objects that, Shirreff implies, or perhaps feels, do have presence in the space we also occupy. I was struck by her elaborating on what motivated, at least in part, *Sculpture Park* (Tony Smith) and *Sculpture Park* (Tony Smith, Amaryllis). It was her imagining or feeling that these pieces were alone at night in the sculpture parks in which they'd been installed, in a time some distance from the present, alone in the dark, abandoned. This would be a melancholy state, Shirreff suggests, but would also require that these works, so powerful and assertive in their period, continue on and be brave, now. Through Shirreff's agency there is neither oversight nor neglect, and we see the singular faces these substantial mid-century works offer on a printed surface or as we move around them in their material dimensionality.

In its certitude, which is clear enough to be a manifesto, Erin Shirreff has remarked, art is making something out of nothing and also making your meaning. She tells us that artworks are sites of contemplation, one of the few things made with deliberation for the purpose of being looked at and considered, a route to looking, and thereby thinking through the process of its coming into being.

This interview was conducted by telephone with the artist in her Brooklyn studio on April 19, 2018, six days after the opening of her solo exhibition, "Erin Shirreff," at Sikkema Jenkins & Co, in New York.

BORDER CROSSINGS: You went to the University of Victoria, and one of the things it is known for is a tradition of fine faculty sculptors. Did you choose it for that reason?

ERIN SHIRREFF: You're giving me way too much credit as a 17-year-old living in Kelowna. I had no idea. I was really naïve.

I visited the Kelowna Art Gallery a lot growing up, but my high school art classes were not very sophisticated, and I wasn't a very sophisticated student. UVic was the only school I applied to, mostly because my grandparents lived in Victoria and I wanted to be close to them and my mom had gone to school there, so there was some familiarity, I guess. I mean, I was interested in art at the time, enough to apply to their department, but I didn't understand it as something I could commit my life to. I remember that first year at UVic I took a mandatory art theory course from Robert Linsley and that was it. The enormity and density and possibility of it all just blew me away. I took studio classes with Fred Douglas and Roland Brener, who both became very important to me, Roland especially. He asked me to be his studio assistant one summer, which sounded so cool but in reality meant stripping paint off his boat every day, listening to Frank Zappa. Roland's way of thinking and making, his very dry sense of humour, made a big, lasting impression on me.

Did you have some sense that you wanted to be an artist?

Like, as a profession? God, no. How would that ever happen? What would that even look like? That was way too abstract for me at the time. By now I've worked with enough students to know that some people exit the womb knowing they want to be professional artists and every day they move toward that goal. Even if they don't understand what that entails, they're committed. I'm just not like that. I never had a clear trajectory in mind for my life. It's always been a series of small decisions. I think I was admitted to the art department at UVic because they weren't accepting portfolios that year for administrative reasons, which was a good thing because I didn't have one. They asked me to write something instead. In hindsight those first steps look very chancy.

Did you develop a better sense of what you wanted to do between graduating from UVic and entering Yale?

The day I de-installed my undergraduate show at UVic, I moved down to northern New Mexico with my artist boyfriend at the time, who had suggested living off-grid on his parents' old commune property so we could pay off our student loans. He was a preparator at SITE Santa Fe, and I started interning in their publications department. I ended up staying and working at the museum in the curatorial department for four years under Louis Grachos, another Canadian. That was my immersive introduction to what we think of as the art world—professional artists, galleries, curators, trustees, foundations—all the components of this peculiar ecosystem. At the time SITE had a small staff and no endowment, and was mounting really ambitious exhibitions and programming. Looking back, I can't believe the projects I was a part of. My last was Dave Hickey's biennial in the summer of 2001. The year before I had looked around and thought, "What am I doing? I'm living in Santa Fe and slowly losing my



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Pages 20–21

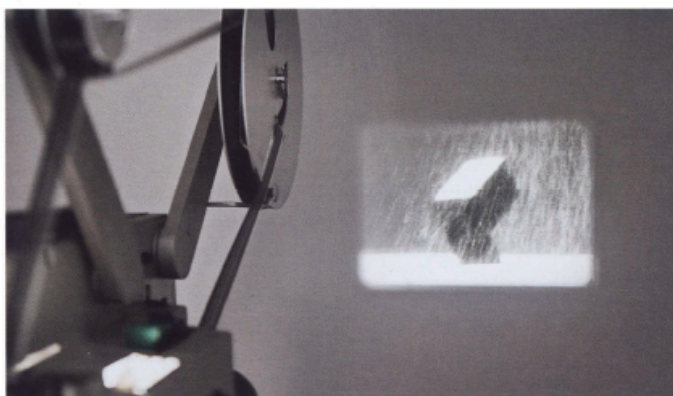
1. Erin Shirreff, *Lacquer, clips and stack*, 2018, dye sublimation and archival pigment prints, 88.25 x 37.25 x 5.75 inches. All images courtesy the artist.

2. *Lacquer, pocket*, 2018, dye sublimation and archival pigment prints, 88.25 x 37.25 x 5.75 inches.

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1. & 2. *Sculpture for Snow*, 2011, painted aluminum, 136.5 x 54 x 115.5 inches, installation view: Metrotech Center, Brooklyn.

3. *Sculpture Park* (Tony Smith, Amaryllis), 2006/2013, 16mm film, loop (8:43 minutes), installation view: Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland.



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1. *Catalogue, 39 parts (Value Lesson)*, 2015, hydrostone, pigment, graphite, steel armatures, pedestal, 65 x 68 x 53.25 inches.

2. *Concrete Buildings, 2013–16*, colour video, silent, two channels, loop (73 minutes; 46 minutes), installation view: Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland.

3.–8. *Concrete Buildings, 2013–16*, video still, colour video, two channels, loop (73 minutes; 46 minutes).

sense of humour and all my friends live in New York." So after Dave's incredible show, which was also incredibly complex and exhausting, I left New Mexico and eventually moved to New York toward the end of 2001, which was of course a horrible and disorienting time to show up. I eventually got work at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council with Moukhtar Kocache, who had run the artist residency program in the World Trade Center. I was part of their post-9/11 residency initiatives downtown, at the World Financial Center, the Woolworth Building and other underused buildings. I was there for over a year before casting a net and applying to a number of graduate schools, and ended up at Yale. I had kept up a studio practice in this time but was always squeezed with day jobs; I really saw graduate school as a way of taking myself and my work seriously for two years.

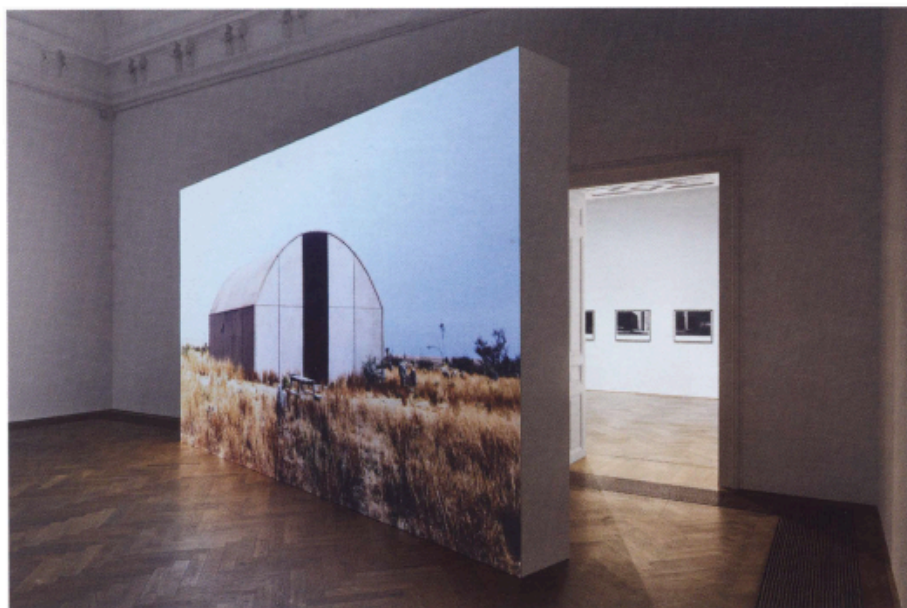
As you moved through the program at Yale, were you beginning to recognize that you weren't interested in prioritizing one art form over another? How did your notion of what kind of art you wanted to make evolve?

UVic's program isn't separated into departments and that always made sense to me. It's just "visual arts." When I was at Yale the sculpture department was where you went if you wanted to do a bunch of different things. Performance, interdisciplinary

stuff; some friends hosted a talk show when I was there. The department was very open and all over the place; it still is. I made objects, continued making low-fi photos and videos and explored materials. Jessica Stockholder was the director of the program back then and she always stressed that it was a "professional degree," which I was never entirely clear on, but it led me to think a lot about the kind of art practice I could imagine having once I left. I recognized a certain restlessness in myself, in not wanting to hew to one mode of expression or one way of making. So I didn't leave grad school with a particular body of work I wanted to push forward, but I left with a strong sense of my approach to making work.

Your material choices intrigue me. Because you work in so many different modes, I'm interested in how you decide not just what you want to do, but what you want to do it out of.

Probably like most artists it's a range of things that send me on certain paths. An image will get lodged in my head that I want to see, and then the work will take five different detours as I try to realize it. A lot is borne out of my daily studio practice and processes. Sort of one-to-one to one-to-one. Sometimes literally, as in scraps from one process form the basis of another project, and sometimes as a result of working



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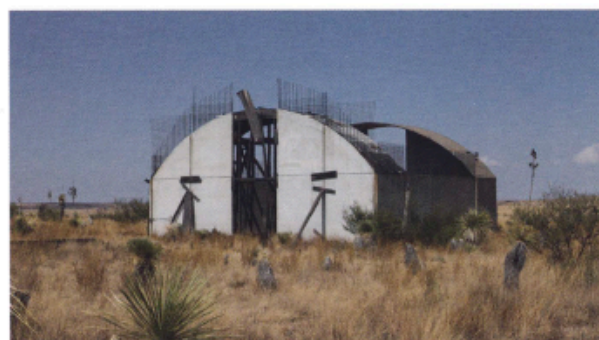
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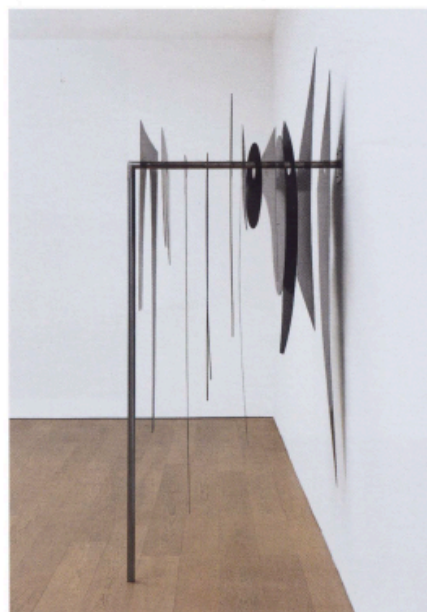
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intensively in one mode and wanting to switch things up. I started working with cyanotypes, for instance, because I felt I was always on the computer staring at Photoshop and it came to feel too disembodied. I wanted to handle things, for there to be texture again. The cyanotype photograms turned out very painterly and I wanted them to have a sculptural presence, so they had to be big; the cardboard forms I made to silhouette in the cyanotype compositions then became steel shapes for sculptures ... it goes like that. A lot of it is being here in the studio and moving from one thing to the next and looking around and maybe circling back. Which is maybe similar to how I just described my early years unfolding. It's kind of a theme.

Well, it certainly isn't linear. It's more rhizomatic.

Yes, I try to stay very intuitive in my studio, which can make things seem quite diffuse and murky at times. And it's true that for the last while I've attended, fairly evenly, to a range of different modes. But, for me, looking back, the throughline is always there. Sometimes it can feel embarrassingly logical.

You have said that the photograph of Tony Smith's *New Piece* from 1966 was more powerful than when you saw the actual sculpture at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Have you figured out why?

I think what's really compelling for me is the not-knowing that is always inherent in a photograph—that you'll never have a full sense of an object when it's pictured. There are all those gaps and all that missing information. The photograph of *New Piece* you're talking about was taken in the '60s, and there's this cool-looking couple standing next to it, chatting. I like thinking about how they experienced that form, because it's something we can't know ourselves. We're not bodies in the '60s; we have completely different relationships to physical objects now from what people had then. This feels like a confession—and from talking to friends I'm not alone in this—but if I'm making something three-dimensional in the studio, I sometimes take a picture and look at it on my phone. It gives me this other experience of the thing I'm working on that feels really useful. It's not another vantage point, I'm not seeing more, but the image creates this other relationship by taking it out of your physical space. It dials down the intensity of what it asks of you as a body and allows you the space to regard it. Like I said, I find it useful, but it feels fucked up to do, and to admit to. Anyhow, I'm sure on one level the dynamic at play is simple and related to the psychological sense of capturing something, or stilling something, but it feels more complicated and consequential than that. When I'm documenting things it's always surprising to see which work I make in the studio that falls apart as an image, just deflates. And then which things come alive when they're



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1. & 2. *Drop (no. 73)*, 2015, hot-rolled and Cor-ten steel, hanging apparatus, 81 x 62 x 36 inches.

3. *Drop (no. 74)*, 2015, hot-rolled, cold-rolled and Cor-ten steel, 117.25 x 214.5 x 34 inches.

4. *Cutouts*, 2018, waxed hydrostone, pedestal, 52 x 24 x 22 inches.

flattened and set apart on the wall. That translation—image into object and object into image—feels very layered and charged to me and really has formed the basis of my practice and my work for the past several years.

Would you say that your epistemology is more image-based than object-based?

I would say squarely in between. I feel equally engaged in both modes of making in my studio and certainly by the relationship between the two. Is that a non-answer?

No, and I'm not going to say that's a classic Canadian response where you can sit on the fence while you have your cake and eat it, too. But let me use this image/object dichotomy and ask you about two pieces of yours: *Figure 1* and *Figure 6*. I'm registering my perceptual engagement with those pieces through notions of shift and rupture. So I look at *Figure 6* and what I don't see is shift from one tonality to another as much as I see rupture. Then I look at *Figure 1* where the line coming down the centre of the page acts as a formal enhancement of the sculpture. It operates less as rupture than continuity.

I like hearing you speak in those terms although they aren't terms I use myself. The folded photograph works—"Figs" or "A.P.s"—are proposing an experience of form as image. So I suppose rupture and shift could be incorporated into my ideal scenario where we would be looking at the form in the photograph across the fold and accepting it as a whole, and then coming to an awareness that it is composed of two disparate halves, and imagining the missing halves we don't have access to while at the same time accepting it as one—I suppose that's a rupture.

Part of what I may be asking concerns the effect of your use of the double page spread. What is it about the book form that interests you as a possible way of reading images?

Because I'm 42 years old and my formative relationship to images came through books and not the Internet. That is slowly fading, to be sure. I look at things online all the time like everyone else, but very significant moments in my artistic life have come from going to the library, taking out a book and looking at pictures. I love going to libraries and having a one-to-the-next experience, going with one intention and being led along to another and another. I guess the corollary is a Google search, but the book version feels more absorbing and embodied. The folded photograph/book spread series you mention came out of that Tony Smith photograph, too; it was from this book of his monumental outdoor works. The reproductions were made as large as possible and apparently everyone involved in the design of that book agreed to ignore the gutter that runs right through the centre of each reproduction. It made me think about the layers of materiality and perspective and framing and invisible decision making that were contouring my experience of the

sculpture. I know a lot of people are talking about this now and had written about it previously, but at the time, for me, it was a new realization that this whole era of artmaking, specifically the pre-minimalist, modernist period that was so much about scale and form and relationship to the body in space, was now being experienced almost entirely through pictures. I talk with students all the time who speak offhandedly about minimalism and I wonder to myself what they mean when they reference it. Because there is so much assumption and second-hand information and text-based experience built into those words and ideas. And then they're making work in response to these impressions? What are we carrying forward in our work when the very important bodily experiences of that work aren't known? Or can't be known? I'm not even sure that we are equipped to have those experiences anymore.

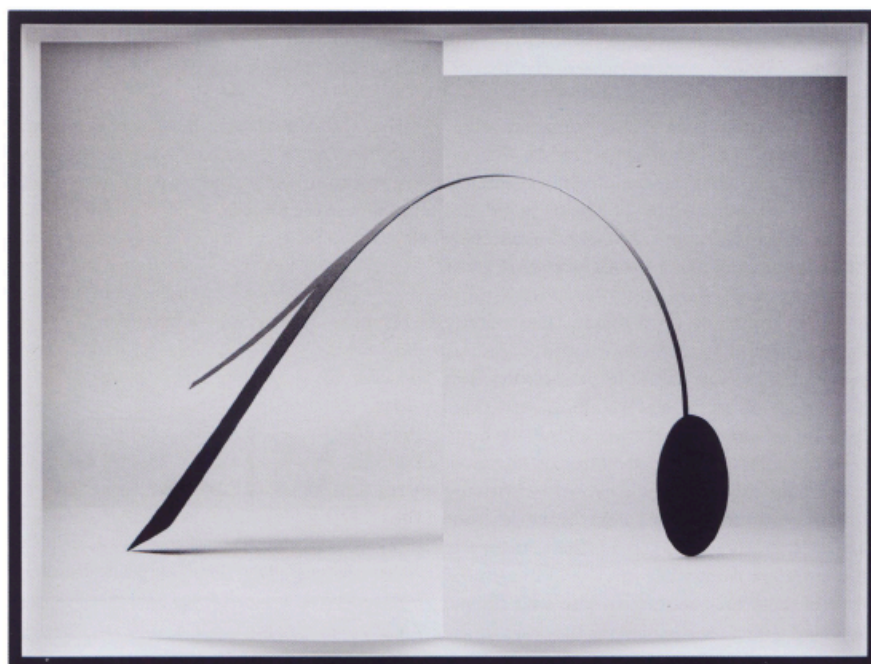
You have dismissed the notion of nostalgia, but is another way of thinking about your work that it is somehow compensatory for the thing we can't know?

I would never claim that. I just hope to create encounters in which these kinds of ideas can be set in motion or drawn out.

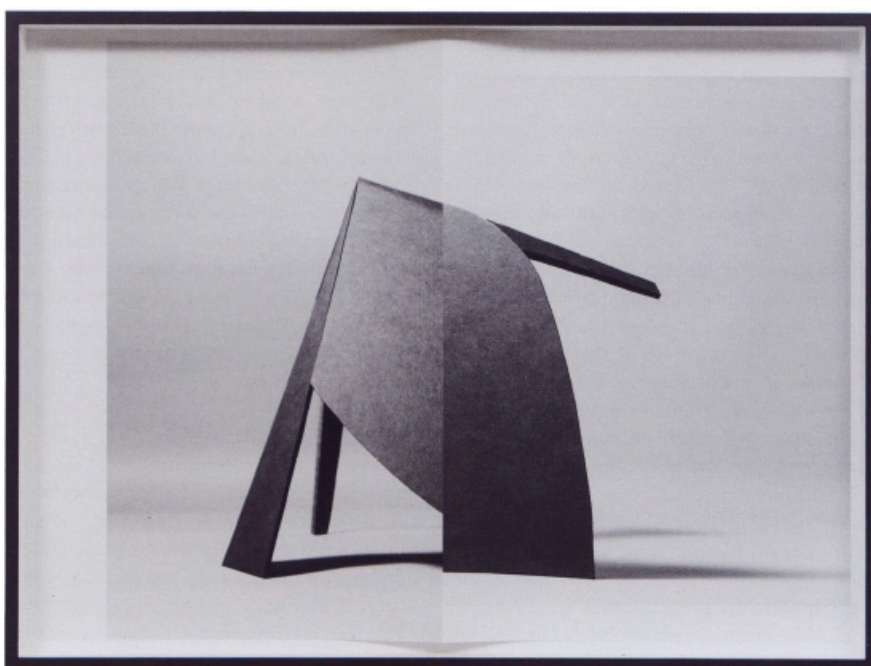
Your work, for me, is always an encounter because it echoes things I feel I can recognize. So I look at *Page* (no. 14) and I think of Moholy-Nagy; I look at *A.P.* (no. 9) and I think of Calder; *Drop* (no. 14) looks like Louise Nevelson. I know you're not attempting to replicate specific works, so what is the process about? Is it a typology of modernist form-making more than an attempt to remake a particular work?

For the "A.P." series I was thinking specifically about a particular vein of mid-century sculpture: the large-scale, graphic and pared-down geometric aesthetic. I looked at a big range of sculpture anthologies to absorb that language of form-making to make those maquettes for the photographs. So I wasn't remaking any specific art historical works; it was more a typology, as you say. In looking through those books, there was of course a whole swath of sculpture that was happening concurrently that I wasn't drawn to—the biomorphic, or constructivist, or figurative stuff. I'm interested in figuring out why I am drawn to particular forms more than others—why Tony Smith, for instance—and I have ideas about all that now, but at the time I just gave myself permission to follow the images that were compelling to me and tried not to hang myself up with too many questions.

I look at *Drop* (no. 13) and it looks a lot like Robert Morris to me. The "Drop" sculptures came about pretty directly from my own studio processes. I was making the maquettes to photograph out of cardboard and foam core, and I was generating a huge amount of scraps in the studio with these swooping lines and jagged cuts. As I cleared them up every week, some seemed more interesting than others, which registered to me as strange enough to notice,



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1. *A.P.* (no. 9), 2014, archival pigment print, 34 x 46 inches, with fold.

2. *A.P.* (no. 23), 2014, archival pigment print, 34 x 46 inches, with fold.

so I started keeping a collection of them. Pretty simple. After awhile I wanted to do something with these shapes—and these were flat shapes, not dimensional at all. I wanted them to be larger, to have a different scale, but to somehow retain that feeling of being hand-cut scraps. So I started scanning them into the computer and eventually translated them into 4 by 8- or 5 by 10-foot sheets of steel. Hot-rolled, cold-rolled and Cor-ten steel. The sculptures are simple layered arrangements of these scrap shapes that I composed in my studio as they lay around me on the floor. They're pretty heavy and sharp so it's a slow, slightly arduous process. "Drop" is the term for leftover material in a metal fab shop, which, along with their physicality, seemed to fit the work. I initially hung them on poles in a pretty matter-of-fact way, so you have the side view where they virtually disappear into these sinewy lines. From the front they're extremely flat and broad. Their presence is quite different from what you would imagine of big steel sculptures because they're a bit floppy, they bend, and if they're hanging they very slowly move with the air currents in the space. I think they retain a feel of paper cut-outs when you see them. So those come from a very different source from the maquettes. But I hear what you're saying about art historical precedents. I think everybody has a sense of composition and form that is baked into them; I am sure I have tendencies and formal preferences that have shown themselves over time, and I have done a deep dive into work from that era, for sure. But in those sculptures I'm not trying specifically to echo Morris or Nevelson. It was more an exploration of materiality and material translation. But I like what you said about being able to have an encounter with the work because you have some sense of familiarity when you look at it. I hear that as the work's having a certain openness, which is something that is enormously important to me. Because my work often alludes to other artwork, I think it can be read as insular or dependent on its referent, but of course I hope that's not the whole story. They can operate in different layers, but not knowing what "Roden Crater" is, for instance, is not a deal breaker for having the experience I hope for with that video work. Artworks are sites of contemplation, and there are few things in life that are exclusively made to be looked at and considered in this way. So using an art object as a motif in an artwork—and

this has become clearer for me over time—is a way to enact or speak to more abstract, complicated things like looking and recognition.

The "Catalogue" series works are made similarly to the "Drops"—you have the parts of the sculptures around the studio and then you begin to compose the piece?



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I am actually looking in the corner of my studio now at this library of forms sitting on rows of shelves. Each form is from an individual one-off mould. I make quite a group at a time without a finished sculpture in mind and then, yes, arrange the work after the fact. They're made from pigmented hydrostone with graphite mixed in, which is oily so it doesn't fully absorb into the water; as they're curing it settles to the surface, and then when I sand them or shape them the graphite gets moved around and they end up looking very drawing-like, too. When they're arranged in groups they remind me of those compositions that a Drawing 101 teacher would set up to make you learn about shade and texture.

How are they held together?

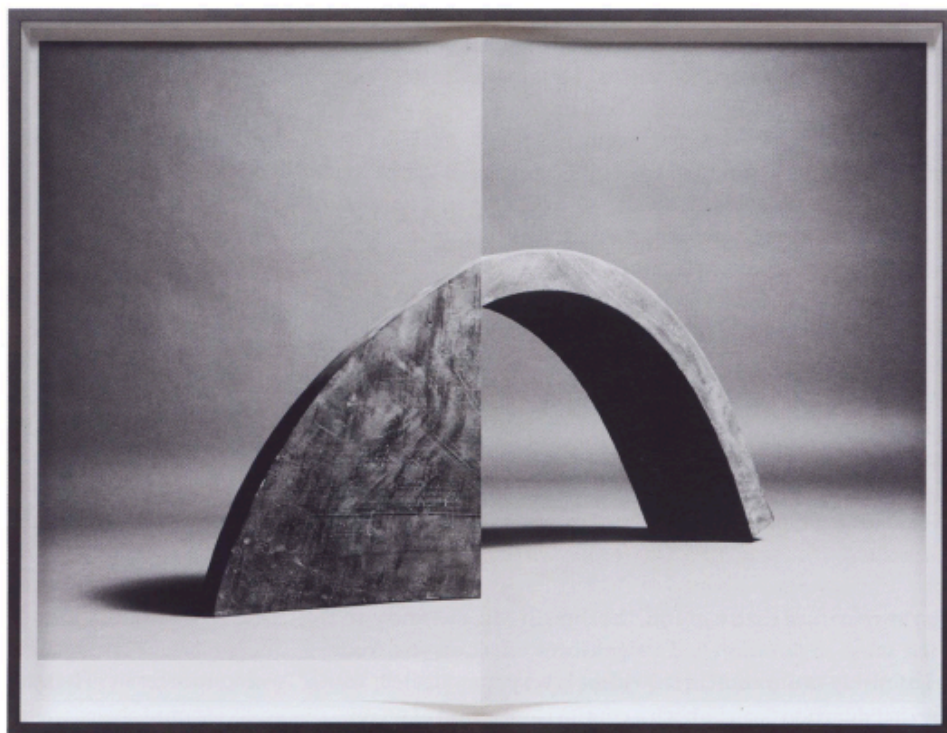
Just balance. The larger, two-tiered ones have an armature embedded in the flat planes because I don't want to get a phone call in five years asking me to recast something. But the smaller works are just gravity. Gravity and some museum wax.

This is an inescapable association for me because one of my all-time favourite pieces is Rodney

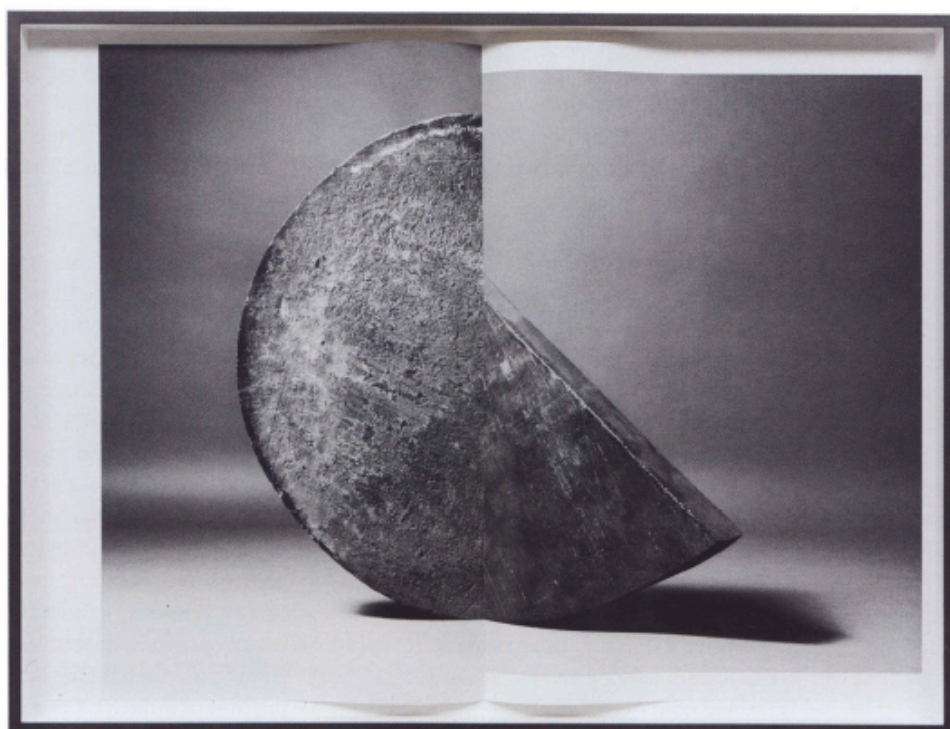
1. *Monograph (no. 3)*, 2012, five archival pigment prints, each 34 x 46 inches, with fold.

2. *Fig. 6*, 2017, archival pigment print, 40 x 54 inches, with fold.

3. *Fig. 7*, 2017, archival pigment print, 40 x 54 inches, with fold.



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Graham's *Rheinmetall/Victoria 8* from 2003 where he covers a typewriter in flour. When I look at your 16mm film *Sculpture Park* (Tony Smith, Amaryllis), you use Styrofoam and not flour, but I can't help but think of the Graham piece.

Yeah, that piece is great. I remember seeing it myself. That looper! The whole mechanism rumbling along. But, yes, the "snow" in my work is more literal. When I made *Sculpture Park* I was thinking about the life of sculptures that are made in these particular moments in time and then installed forever in these vast sculpture parks. I had this image in my mind of the landscapes at night when the works are all alone in the dark. It seemed melancholy but also poignant: these enduring, maybe irrelevant things still there saying what they can say. The video starts out very dark and murky, and as the snow collects on the planes of the sculpture, it becomes defined in the frame; in effect it's revealed as it's covered, which is a dynamic that struck me as key at the time and has reappeared in my work in other forms since then.

You've remarked that, early on, the films of Michael Snow and their sense of duration had a significant effect on you. Your relationship to duration in the videos is very complicated. You say that duration "can be both a comfort and a kind of terror." So built into your notion of time is a fairly complex emotional and psychological range.

I remember sitting in my structuralist film class watching *Wavelength* and really understanding, in my body, the aims of the work. Feeling engaged, and then exasperated, and bored, and hypnotized, and thrilled, and bored again. And then because I was in Canada I watched it again in two other classes. Really drove it all home! But what the work made clear was the unending complexity of looking and being in your body as time unspooled; that was as much of the experience, the content of the work, as the zoom. In my life, too, it had become clear that taking time—being still, staying with something—was a way to actually engage and connect. Pretty basic stuff. So duration in my video work—and implied here for me is really minimal action, no explicit narrative and, superficially at least, a monotone affect—sets in motion a way of being. I always end up describing the videos as "open-ended encounters." Within the gallery context I think duration can be a comfort, in that it implies a scree, and at this point in our cultural diet that mode of engagement is deeply familiar. It suggests that you are going to 'get' something if you sit and watch, which I think tamps down the anxiety that can be elicited by a sculpture, which, worryingly, never turns off and doesn't tell you how to experience it. But I think art at its best asks us to engage in exactly this: an experience of not knowing. So in my videos I use duration to persuade you to spend some time within this zone of looking and uncertainty. It can be uncomfortable. Early on, I was curious about the different modes of attention that are provoked by different mediums. When I

made that Tony Smith video (the 16mm film derives from a video from 2006), one idea I wanted to explore was assigning a duration to a sculpture. I wanted to think through the reluctance to spend time with a Tony Smith sculpture on Park Avenue, but the willingness to sit and stare at a monitor showing the same sculpture get snowed on for seven minutes. The terror part of duration, at least in my videos, is in the friction between the stillness and motion. They are loops, and built in a way that there's no discernable beginning or end. So the object—always static beneath the fluctuating light on the image surface—exudes this sense of being somehow out of time and eternal, which can be unsettling.

You talk about art as being a process in which things get made, so you don't take a video as much as you make one. Yours is a hands-on, frame-by-frame way of constructing. Do I have to read your work differently from the way I read conventional video?

Well, they're not conventional narrative video, so they won't meet those expectations. I'm not using that language at all. They probably have more in common with still photography and sculpture in terms of how they relate to space and to viewers. I've projected onto angled walls and other bespoke structures, trying always to affirm the thingness of the materiality at the root of the videos. And I don't expect viewers to watch them in their entirety. I hope they are themselves at every moment. Making the videos is a mix of analogue and digital processes, which I think becomes legible at different points as they progress. Things happen when I'm making them that I don't have complete control over and I like that. Something extraordinary can develop that might not have if I had had an end point clearly in mind. I feel that within my overall practice as well. I'm committed to having a rubric, or having a method, but then being completely open within that.

You say that all your videos are actually psychologically driven. I want to tease more out of you about the nature of the psychology that drives these things.

Again, this is something that became clearer for me looking back over time. I started making the videos that are essentially animations of still images in 2009. But I've made relatively few in that time. They're less a concentrated series that I focused on in the studio and more a method of thinking through an experience of an image or vantage point—on a thing, or building, or object—that I return to again and again. They start with an experience I have out in the world, walking around, or coming across a reproduction in a book, or having a memory of an image. Whatever it is ends up being distilled down to a single image or single perspective, and the material for the video grows from there. So, building facades—my own views or other artists' pictures of building facades—photographs of sculpture, or land art, images of the moon. I've been asked what unifies them, which



Cuttings, 2018, cyanotype photogram, muslin over panel, 60 x 70 inches.

is a fair question, but because they're borne out of a unique set of circumstances when I'm making them, the common threads are necessarily broad and generalized. Looking back at them as a group, I can see I've been drawn to forms that are, in different ways, somehow out of time. They point to, or embody, a different, larger scale of time. The Secretariat building is this vestige of the '50s in the middle of Manhattan's contemporary skyline; Turrell's crater was shaped millions of years ago. They're forms that often carry this feeling of coming into being and fading away at the same time, like Rosso's *Madame X*. And they're always forms that, to me, exude a real sense of blankness. That is a very charged, resonant quality in each of these works, and, for me, it operates within these works on a psychological level. I realized, again many years after I first got caught up by Tony Smith's outdoor pieces, that a reason I was drawn to them was something he was very aware of himself in those works. You're aware, when you encounter them, that they're hollow. That awareness chimes with our experience of encountering a person, a body—a body that has an inside you can't access. Smith's sculptures can seem authorless, like they just arrived on their own steam from somewhere else; that they hold a knowledge within them you can't know. All you can see are the smooth, flat planes of their face. This same dynamic, and the gaps and wondering and projection embedded in it, is something I try to set in motion in these videos. You sit at this fixed remove from this thing that you are regarding, and it can feel like it's regarding you. There are moments or stretches of time in the videos that can feel like you enter into the space of the image, that you can sense time passing within it. It can feel like a connection. But then all of a sudden it becomes clear you're looking at an image, or an image of an image, and that all breaks down.

In this conversation you have used the word "regarding" many times. "Regard" is a lovely word because it doesn't only mean "to look at," but it also means "to care for" in attempting to understand. "Regarding" is both an optical and an emotional measure.

I agree. "Regarding" implies a soft possession—that you are bringing yourself to something else. It also implies focus and a measure of intensity. When I was young I had a habit of staring at things until my mind "unclicked"—that's how I thought of it. Unclicking. I remember one day looking at the kitchen table in our family home—always such a loaded space—and saw it in that moment as just wood assembled in a certain way. All the significance and the heaviness of it fell away and I felt like I could see the actual thing, the bare form underneath that was there all along. It was profoundly static and apart from me; it existed in a different scale of time. And then the moments pass, it's just a table again, and you carry on.

The video you make out of the image of the ponderosa pines around Okanagan Lake makes me think of Canadian landscape art. Were you plugging into that tradition?

No, not intentionally, anyhow. I grew up in the Okanagan, and when I came across that picture I was struck because I hadn't visited in a long while. It was in one of these '80s tourist brochures, and the reproduction had this particular offset printing colouration that was deeply familiar to me as a kid

growing up in that time period. So the picture prompted this intense double nostalgia. But aside from my own associations, the image itself is very strange. The composition is really self-consciously Romantic—there's a stump that stands in for the lone figure in the landscape—and it looks like it was somehow hand-tinted. The colours are weirdly saturated. But it immediately transported me back to my childhood in those dusty hills of the valley. I think *Lake* is the only explicitly biographical work I've made. I mean, I would say all my work is embarrassingly autobiographical, but in ways that are apparent only to me and the people who know me very well.

You've talked about wanting to leave the viewer hanging. I think you were referring to the "Untitled (Series 1)," where I look at one image and think I've figured something out and the next image comes along and destabilizes that perception. Why do you want to do that to the viewer?

Because the space I'm most interested in extending is the space of not-knowing. In that particular series, you look at one picture and you think it maybe looks like a relic some archaeologist dug up, and then the next one looks like a weird organism, and the next looks like a diagram. They resemble conventional black-and-white museological documentation, but I wanted to short-circuit an attempt to understand them as a legible collection, or even to fully identify the objects. You're in a strange space of knowing you're looking at clay, which is super-evident in the images, and recognizing some aspects of a familiar form, but it never fully resolves into something you can know, despite its objecthood. The entire intention of that series was to create and extend that suspension of not-knowing. The "A.P." series goes on a more specific art historical tangent, but they also prompt that experience where you're looking at something and, as you said before, there is that shift. So you can see the image of a form, but it comes with the notion that it's incomplete.

You like the way that one medium blends into another. Is that instability an aesthetic choice or a philosophical recognition?

It definitely comes from a deeper set of beliefs. So in the studio it's a place I arrive at in my work very consistently and without consciously trying.

Recognizing that real knowledge is what we don't know rather than what we can determine is the conclusion of your epistemological search. That space of doubt is an intriguing place in which to locate the viewer and in which you seem to locate yourself as the maker as well.

Maybe less a space of doubt and more a space of questioning. Definitely open-ended wondering. Upending our sense of knowing something, and doing this through relatively direct encounters. I can't imagine being anywhere else, to be honest. Photography is so interesting within this context because it's so literal and has all these verbs attached to it, like "capturing," that imply a grasp. I like thinking through the picture plane to the things inside that are fixed but so fugitive, that are so defined but always slipping out from underneath their image and never really known. We understand all this but we forget it. ■