

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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## Amanda Ross-Ho creates a public work with the public very much in mind

Posted by Sarah Nardi



As Anish Kapoor can likely attest, once you introduce a work of art into the public realm, the people will claim it as their own. Public art is, by definition, removed from the hermetic atmosphere of galleries or museums, institutions in which the narrative can be controlled. It's through interaction with the art—in ways ranging from quiet contemplation to poking at it with churros—that the public does the work of imbuing the art with meaning. The art doesn't exist as an object unto itself. Instead, it's a tangible piece of a messy world, dependent upon all the different people with whom it shares space. There is no curator on site to

construct context, no docent to cultivate understanding, no watchful guard to prevent you from touching. There is nothing to stop you from disregarding the fact that a work is entitled "Cloud Gate" and renaming it after a legume.

And there's certainly nothing preventing you from photographing it (at least, not anymore).

In her new exhibition, "The Character and Shape of Illuminated Things," opening today on the MCA plaza, Chicago native Amanda Ross-Ho both embraces the notion of public art and subverts the expectations we've come to have of it. The exhibition takes its name from a 1980 photography handbook written for the amateur photographer. Ross-Ho has re-created a vignette from one of the book's sections—a sphere, a cube, and a mannequin's head—meant to instruct the photographer in the methods of lighting objects.

"In conceptualizing of this project," says Ross-Ho, who is now based in Los Angeles, "I was very aware of the fact that whatever I put here would be heavily documented. We live in the age of social media."

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Her decision to re-create a very controlled environment—a studio setting with configured lighting—in the wilds of the public sphere strikes me as both a concession to the age and a commentary on it. In the time of Facebook and Instagram, we're all amateur photographers, obsessively documenting and broadcasting the minutia of our everyday lives. And in doing so, we've eroded the division between public and private, making the borders between the two porous. Ross-Ho's three objects, each executed at an exaggerated scale and painted "middle-grey"—a universal measurement in photographic cameras—are intentionally self-conscious, aware of their role as photographic objects. Adding to the idea of awareness is a large-scale color calibration card, a grid used to maintain accuracy in printing that is generally cropped out of finished photographs.

"I'm interested in exploring the medium of photography as an analogue to experience," says Ross-Ho.

So, go the MCA plaza and experience the exhibition in any way you'd like. Poke it, contemplate it, and above all, photograph it. The work understands that it's an object—and may make you understand that in many ways, so are you.

*"The Character and Shape of Illuminated Things" opens at the MCA tonight, June 23, with a conversation with the artist at 5 PM.*

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