

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Modern Painters
December 2015

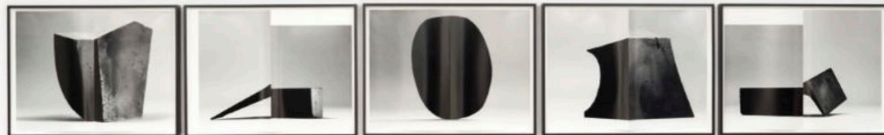
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Erin Shirreff
ABOVE:
Knife, 2008.
Archival
pigment print,
40 x 30 in.

RIGHT:
Monograph
(no. 3), 2012.
Five archival
pigment prints,
each 34 x 46 in.



BOSTON

Erin Shirreff

Institute of Contemporary Art // August 29–November 29

WHAT IS A SCULPTURE, and what is a photograph? Shirreff explores the interdependence of image and object in an exhibition that brings together four bodies of work created over the past five years. *Monograph no. 3*, 2012, the frontispiece to the show, immediately sets up its focus—the problem of compressing three-dimensional sculpture into the two-dimensional space of a reproduction—by echoing the art-book format. Each of the five photographs in the suite features one of an assortment of ambiguously shaped objects that generally signify “modernist sculpture.” Shirreff has created the printed image at its midpoint so that the photographs splay like the pages of a book opened at its center, rather than being hung as a flat image. One must orient oneself in relation to the photograph as one would to a sculpture, moving around it to “see” the object, as the reflectivity of light on paper obscures the image from full comprehensibility. Here, Shirreff substitutes the dimensionality of the book for the lost dimensionality of the sculpture.

The next suite of photographs features “knives,” fashioned by the artist out of clay, that loosely resemble anthropological artifacts. But as tools they are useless, and literalize the term *fetish*. Shirreff’s treatment of the object, framed close up by the camera and enlarged when printed, highlights every crack and mar on its surface, eliminating sculptural mass to emphasize the flatness of surface and image. The anthropological eye is fetishized by the camera.

The slow-moving, photography-based video *Medardo Rossa, Madame X, 1896*, 2013, is shown in a room of its own, allowing for the intimate re-viewing of Rossa’s sculpture over time. *Madame X*, though itself an obscure object by a little-known artist at the turn of the 19th century, is cited as the origin of the modernist abstract sculpture that would become a hallmark of the next century. Shirreff found an image of the sculpture in a book and rephotographed the photograph of a photograph under different light conditions, replicating Rosso’s own process of sculptural photographic experiments. The resulting images are here sequenced into a 24-minute looping video that plays on a vertical flat-screen monitor four times the size of the original sculpture. The video brackets a conversation about looking through the lens, stretching from early exercises in photography to the age of Instagram.

In her final treatise on image-object relations, Shirreff works with a demodded cyanotype process, using flat shapes cut from sheets of metal, as well as the remaining sheets themselves. Placing the flat metal shapes and sheets directly on paper of the same scale, she complicates here the photograph’s relationship to the object through flatness, transposing positive and negative space in lieu of dimensionality. All together, Shirreff encircles various objects as one would a sculpture, attempting to replicate the viewing experience when only reproduction is possible. —Risa Puleo

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