

ELAINE CAMERON-WEIR

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Isabella Miller, “Anachronism and Apocalysm, Note on contemporary medieval”

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Elaine Cameron-Weir, *Dressing for Windows/ Dressing for Altitude/ Dressing for Pleasure* (detail) (2022).
Fighter jet seat, bronze statue, stainless steel barrel cart,
leather jacket, meat hooks, conveyor belt, pulleys, and hardware,
144 × 87 × 150 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Hannah
Hoffman, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane.

Anachronism and Apocalypse

Notes on the Contemporary Medieval

Elaine Cameron-Weir's recent exhibition at Hannah Hoffman gallery, *Exploded View / Dressing for Windows*, enmeshed the old with the new and the sacred with the profane—or at least, with the grim, grimy, and secular. Disparate found objects were stripped of their original functions in favor of new forms. Four counterweighted sculptural installations resembled, as the exhibition's title would suggest, department store window product displays. Comprising objects as various as stainless steel barrels, conveyor belts, and bronze reliefs depicting Jesus' crucifixion, the assemblages cultivated a kind of junkyard mysticism in which the hypermodern conspired with the neomedieval.

A peculiar combination of anachronism and apocalypticism pervaded the exhibition. Objects invoking the Middle Ages were rendered equal to the detritus of modernity, as though the world envisioned by Cameron-Weir would emerge only after the "end times," when all that remains is material ruin. In these constructions, time felt out of joint: Glass magic lantern slides depicting premodern religious imagery, such as cathedrals and stained glass, mingled with images of modern sites of violence and destruction. Cameron-Weir is one of several contemporary artists experimenting with anachronism, combining symbols of a medieval past with those lifted from contemporary life—what we might call the "contemporary medieval." These artists' invocations of the past offer new ways to think through contemporary existential laments surrounding

technology, consumer culture, and environmental devastation.

In the 1980s, Italian philosopher and writer Umberto Eco linked neo-medieval style with apocalypticism. For Eco, the modern fascination with the Middle Ages visible across twentieth-century popular art and architectural forms (Hearst Castle in central California, the early films of Ernst Ingmar Bergman, mass-market paperbacks like Arthur H. Landis' 1976 *A World Called Camelot* and J.R.R. Tolkien's 1955 *The Return of the King*) might be ascribed to the era's troublesome social, political, and economic dynamics, such as the rise of fascism and neoliberalism's increasing hold on global economic and political structures. These circumstances mirrored changes that burgeoned in the medieval era between 1100 and 1500, when capitalist economies began to supersede feudalism, nation-states became primary political units, and heresy (the culture war of yesteryear) was rendered a punishable offense.

Judgment Day was a cornerstone of medieval ideology, and because its imminent arrival was perpetually deferred, it always loomed large in the medieval imaginary. Eco writes: "These Middle Ages [...] still accompany us and will continue to do so, until midnight of the Day After. Source of so many insanities, [the Middle Ages] remain however as a permanent warning. Sometimes it is not so medieval to think that perhaps the end is coming and the Antichrist, in plainclothes, is knocking at the door."¹ In the mid-late twentieth century, medieval narratives, atmospheres, and archetypes became especially enticing tools to register an enduring doomsday anxiety. According to Eco, we were "dreaming the Middle Ages"²—a dream from which we've not yet woken. Caught between the environmental, political, and economic crises of today, it's not difficult to imagine humanity's imminent demise.

Just as Eco saw traces of medieval fascinations across pop culture in his lifetime, over the past few years, neomedievalism has

made a pronounced resurgence, saturating contemporary cultural production with tales of nuns, knights, courtly love, and mortal sin. From Jos Charles' poetry collection *feeld* (2018), Ottessa Moshfegh's novel *Lapvona* (2022), and Lauren Groff's novel *Matrix* (2021), to films like Ridley Scott's *The Last Duel* (2021), David Lowery's *The Green Knight* (2021), and Robert Eggers' *The Northman* (2022), popular interest in totalizing (if not always historically accurate) medieval worldbuilding seems to be more widespread than ever. But as the genre increasingly appears in visual art, its relationship to anachronism takes on a slightly different form. From the commedia dell'arte³ masks present in the paintings of TARWUK, Joel Dean, Adam Alessi, and Victor Boulet, to the sculptures of Kira Freije, Rochelle Goldberg, and Cameron-Weir, these and other artists strategically appropriate icons and symbols invoking the medieval, rather than attempting to immerse the viewer in a contained narrative fantasy of another historical moment. In other words, they emphasize anachronism to reveal something about our current world.

Like Cameron-Weir, Goldberg and Freije often work with imagery rooted in medieval Catholic art and architecture that nevertheless resonates in our present historical moment. In Goldberg's *Intralocuters* series (2017–present), for instance, she works primarily with the “Composite Magdalene” of Roman Catholic theology, specifically Saint Mary of Egypt, a former prostitute who, upon visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, ventured into the desert to live devoutly in solitude.⁴ Across the series, Goldberg renders Mary of Egypt as one with her environment through organic and inorganic materials—ceramic, steel, wood, human hair, animal fur, and feathers. This depiction of Mary as inextricable from the Earth provides a welcome foil to increasing attempts to escape it, like recent responses to the realities of climate change that embrace virtual or cloud-based worlds.⁵

Freije's recent sculptures also traffic in a kind of hyper-materiality, albeit one more rooted in design and industrial materials. Composed of cage-like metal bands, the figures either resemble or are interspersed with light fixtures. They kneel and stand in various positions of awe and cowardice as though mimicking the postures painted in Renaissance depictions of Judgement Day. But instead of ascending to heaven among angels, or descending into hell among devils, Freije's subjects are cyborgs, not the souls of mortals. In her merging of the technological with the human form, Freije asks us to imagine a future in which the human and the commodity can no longer be effectively distinguished.

Like Freije, Cameron-Weir harnesses neomedievalism to further an investigation of the commodity form, a Marxist term that describes the way in which so many features of cultural life have taken on the form and function of objects that are salable or exchangeable. In *Joy in Repetition* (all works 2022), two similar industrial fireproof doors lean against the gallery's back wall, providing weighted support to two identical hanging bronze reliefs of a fallen Christ being tended to by his acolytes. The sizes of the massive doors and smaller reliefs are proportional to each other and, like most objects in the exhibition, cold and greyish in tone. The phrase *Joy in Repetition* reads like ad copy or a hokey slogan touted by a furniture store—an ironically upbeat title for a work that summons both Jesus' sacrifices for humanity and the power and dangers of industry. The work flattens two disparate temporal lines through their formal similarities, creating an aesthetic harmony that enables Cameron-Weir's wry subversion of contemporary marketing clichés.

Juxtapositions of medieval Catholicism and contemporary consumer culture also structure Cameron-Weir's *Florid Piggy Memories brought to you on the wing of the Common Ground Dove/ Dressing for Lectern*. In this work, a dirt-smeared



Top: Elaine Cameron-Weir, *World Stage Town Crier* (2022). Speakers, spotlights, electrical components, drop tank nose cone, paint, meat hooks, conveyor belt, pulleys, and hardware, 144 × 87 × 150 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane.

Bottom: Elaine Cameron-Weir, *Florid Piggy Memories brought to you on the wing of the Common Ground Dove/ Dressing or Lectern* (detail) (2022). Image courtesy of the artist and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane.



Kira Freije, *the sudden sleep* (2022). Stainless steel, cast aluminum, and copper, 61 x 40 x 40 inches.
© Kira Freije. Image courtesy of the artist and The Approach, London.
Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

display case that might have once contained jewelry or watches is instead filled with slides depicting medieval religious sites and modern violence alike. The images include a depiction of the Virgin and Child from a thirteenth-century missal, the Salisbury Cathedral, the Gurk Cathedral, a series of concrete blast walls, and the stern deck of the battleship USS *Nevada*, which was subject to atomic bomb tests in 1946.⁶ Each photograph, adorned with an ornate pewter frame, is joined to its neighboring photograph with small, circular electrical components recalling jewelry clasps. First, Cameron-Weir materially and conceptually links medieval religiosity and its orientation towards Judgement Day with the twentieth-century development of world-ending bombs. Then, she turns the fear, grandeur, and gravitas of God and the A-bomb into mere ornaments, as though the end-of-world anxiety of today was already expressed through, or implicated in, the commodity form.

Cameron-Weir's assemblages respond to, rather than erase, the fraught prehistories of the objects that comprise them. *Dressing for Windows/ Dressing for Altitude/ Dressing for Pleasure* positions a damaged fighter jet seat opposite a sculpture of the Virgin Mary kneeling in prayer on a furniture dolly. Their colors and curved forms are uncannily similar, and they both function as counterweights to a leather jacket affixed with meat hooks to a vertically-suspended conveyor belt. Here, the violence of Christ's crucifixion implied in Mary's piety is paralleled with the violence of a fighter jet that has presumably been struck down and plundered. The meat hooks and leather suggest further violence, still, pointing to the brutal slaughter and processing of animals. *Dressing for Windows* evokes an overdetermined narrative of violence that lingers throughout the show yet is impossible to fully comprehend—much like Eco's account of the endurance of apocalyptic anxieties.

Many expressions of the neomedieval respond to present desires to remystify our relationship to society, the Earth, and ourselves. They offer us a chance to escape—or at the very least, aestheticize—the powerlessness we feel in an increasingly technologized and globalized world. But rather than provide avenues away from our world, Cameron-Weir and her contemporaries route us back to it through the deep past, as if to say the medieval is once again contemporary.

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1. Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, new ed. (London: Vintage, 1995), 72. (Original work published 1973).

2. Eco, 104.

3. Commedia dell'arte was an early form of improvised theater that emerged in the 1600s, not in the Middle Ages. However, neomedievalism is an aesthetic mode that collapses distinctions between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. The flattening of the two eras abounds in popular media like *Game of Thrones*, or even at the Renaissance Faire, a primary site of neomedievalism.

4. Western Catholicism characterizes Mary Magdalene as a penitent sinner partially because biblical exegeses from the Early Middle Ages conflate her with St. Mary of Egypt. See: Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994).

5. See: the island country of Tuvalu's plans to upload the country to the metaverse. Simon Kofe, "Rising sea levels force Tuvalu to move to the Metaverse: COP27 speech," YouTube, November 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXpeO5BgAOM>.

6. Alex Fox, "Researchers Locate Wreck of Battleship That Survived Pearl Harbor and Nuclear Bomb Tests." *Smithsonian Magazine*, Smithsonian Institution, May 13, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/wreck-battleship-survived-pearl-harbor-and-nuclear-bomb-tests-found-180974860/>.

reparaciones”], de Ta-Nehisi Coates, en el que calificaba a USA de “régimen que elevó el robo a mano armada a principio rector”⁵. En diciembre de 2022, la representante estadounidense Sheila Jackson Lee (demócrata de Texas), patrocinadora de la iteración actual, instó al presidente Biden a aprobar la H.R. 40 por la vía de una orden ejecutiva⁶.

Este movimiento también se está produciendo en todo el mundo —en 2007, Guyana solicitó a los países europeos que pagaran indemnizaciones por la esclavitud—. En 2011, Antigua y Barbuda hizo lo mismo. En Estados Unidos, los ciudadanos también empezaron a exigir que se les devolviera lo que habían perdido. Por ejemplo, en la década de 2010 muchos individuos y grupos trabajaron para recuperar sus comunidades mediante actos de *damnatio memoriae*, pidiendo la remoción de monumentos confederados a figuras como Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson y J. E. B. Stuart⁷. Y en el momento de la publicación de este informe, la propia Reparations Advisory Commission [Comisión Asesora sobre Reparaciones] de Los Angeles (creada en junio de 2021) se prepara para emitir recomendaciones para atender las desigualdades que afectan a los residentes negros de la ciudad⁸.

Afro-Atlantic Histories ofrece al mismo tiempo un espacio conmemorativo para la sanación de la comunidad, describe el panorama general del Atlántico negro y participa de este momento político. Curiosamente, cuando le pregunté a Gonzalez si el LACMA había invitado a los miembros de la Comisión de Los Angeles a visitar la exposición, me dijo que el museo no lo había hecho. Me sentí

momentáneamente decepcionada. Pero entonces me pregunté sobre mis propias expectativas políticas respecto a las instituciones artísticas. ¿Tiene el LACMA la obligación de presionar directamente a favor del cambio social?

Tal vez lo hagan. Los museos, que durante mucho tiempo han desempeñado un papel histórico en el saqueo de los cuerpos y los productos culturales de las personas de color, pueden tener deberes morales y legales especiales de reparar las injusticias del pasado⁹. Aunque el Peabody de Harvard no hizo lo correcto con Lanier, algunas organizaciones culturales han dado pasos en esta dirección, como The Brooklyn Museum, que repatrió artefactos prehispánicos a Costa Rica en 2011 y 2020¹⁰. Las instituciones artísticas están lidiando con un cambio de paradigma en lo que respecta a sus responsabilidades con los pueblos históricamente dominados y, en este momento, la posibilidad de que el LACMA se convierta en un contenedor de diálogos activos sobre las reparaciones comunitarias resulta muy emocionante.

Por el momento, el cuidadoso comisariado de Gonzalez y Blondet ha puesto las bases, y corresponde al público asistir, recordar, criticar y considerar nuestros próximos pasos. El trabajo que las obras exigen al público no es solo estético, sino político. La exposición exige que nosotros hagamos el trabajo. En 2019 Tamara Lanier respondió a dos daguerrotipos de la colección de un museo con acciones legales. Está claro que *Afro-Atlantic Histories* —o cualquier otra exposición— no es suficiente para reparar la injusticia de la esclavitud. Solamente muchos actos continuados de

buena fe, la redistribución de la riqueza y la transformación comunitaria pueden empezar a remediar los ultrajes tan hábilmente documentados por los artistas aquí representados. Las dolorosas revelaciones de exposiciones como esta interpelan a los espectadores tanto a nivel personal como social, y constituyen así el primer paso hacia un ajuste de cuentas global.

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Anacronismo y Apocalipsis

Notas sobre el Medievo Contemporáneo

La reciente exposición de Elaine Cameron-Weir en la galería Hannah Hoffman, *Exploded View / Dressing for Windows [Vista Detallada / Revestimiento para ventanas]*, mezclaba lo antiguo con lo nuevo y lo sagrado con lo profano, o al menos con lo lúgubre, mugriento y secular. Objetos dispares encontrados se vieron despojados de sus funciones originales en favor de nuevas formas. Cuatro instalaciones escultóricas contrapuestas parecían, tal y como sugería el título de la exposición, los productos expuestos en los escaparates de unos grandes almacenes. Compuestos por objetos tan diversos como barriles de acero inoxidable, cintas transportadoras y relieves de bronce con la representación de la crucifixión de Jesús, los ensamblajes cultivaban una especie de misticismo de chatarrería en el que lo hipermoderno conspiraba con lo neomedieval.

Una peculiar combinación de anacronismo y apocalipsis reinaba en la exposición. Los objetos que evocaban

la Edad Media se equiparaban a los detritus de la modernidad, como si el mundo imaginado por Cameron-Weir solo fuera a surgir después del “fin de los tiempos”, cuando todo lo que quede serán ruinas materiales. En estas construcciones, el tiempo resultaba fuera de lugar: las diapositivas de cristal de una linterna mágica con imágenes religiosas premodernas, como catedrales y vidrieras, se mezclaban con imágenes de lugares modernos de violencia y destrucción. Cameron-Weir es una de las muchas artistas contemporáneas que experimentan con el anacronismo, combinando símbolos de un pasado medieval con otros extraídos de la vida contemporánea, lo que podríamos llamar el “medievo contemporáneo”. Las invocaciones del pasado de estos artistas ofrecen nuevas formas de analiza los lamentos existenciales contemporáneos en torno a la tecnología, la cultura del consumo y la devastación medioambiental.

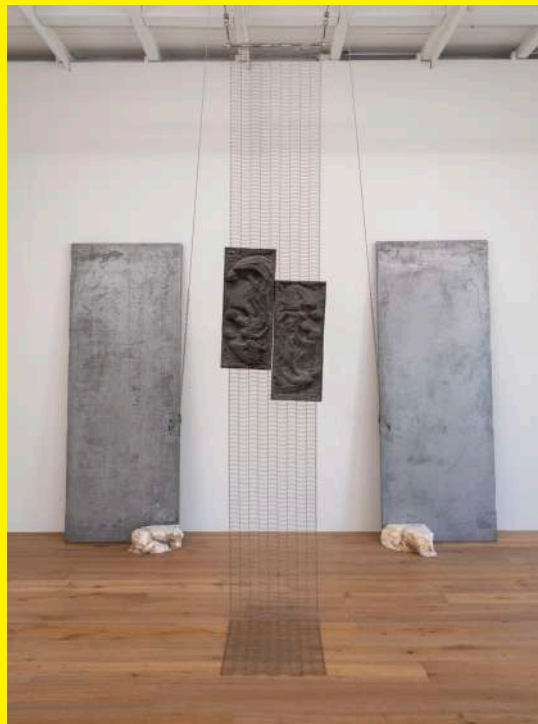
En la década de 1980, el filósofo y escritor italiano Umberto Eco vinculó el estilo neomedieval con el apocalíptico. Para Eco, la fascinación moderna por la Edad Media, visible en el arte popular y las formas arquitectónicas del siglo XX (el castillo de Hearst en California Central, las primeras películas de Ernst Ingmar Bergman, libros de bolsillo de gran tirada como *A World Called Camelot*, de Arthur H. Landis, de 1976, y *The Return of the King [El retorno del Rey]*, de J. R. R. Tolkien, de 1955), podría atribuirse a la problemática dinámica social, política y económica de la época, como fueron el auge del fascismo y el creciente control del neoliberalismo sobre las estructuras económicas y políticas

mundiales. Estas circunstancias reflejaban los cambios que se desarrollaron en la época medieval entre 1100 y 1500, cuando las economías capitalistas empezaron a sustituir al feudalismo, las naciones-estado se convirtieron en unidades políticas principales y la herejía (la guerra cultural de antaño) se declaró delito punible.

El Juicio Final era una piedra angular de la ideología medieval y, dado que su inminente llegada se aplazaba constantemente, siempre pesó mucho en el imaginario medieval. Eco escribe: “Esta Edad Media [...] aún nos acompaña y seguirá haciéndolo, hasta la medianoche del Día Después. Fuente de tantas locuras, [la Edad Media] permanece sin embargo como una advertencia permanente. A veces no resulta tan medieval pensar que tal vez se acerca el fin y el Anticristo, vestido

de paisano, llama a la puerta”¹. En la segunda mitad del siglo XX, las narrativas, atmósferas y arquetipos medievales se convirtieron en herramientas especialmente atractivas para registrar una perdurable ansiedad por el fin del mundo. Según Eco, estábamos “soñando la Edad Media”², un sueño del que aún no hemos despertado. Atrapados entre las crisis medioambiental, política y económica actuales, no es difícil imaginar la inminente desaparición de la humanidad.

De la misma manera que Eco vio vestigios de fascinaciones medievales en la cultura pop durante su vida, en los últimos años el neomedievalismo ha resurgido de forma pronunciada, saturando la producción cultural contemporánea con historias de monjas, caballeros, amor cortés y pecado mortal. Desde el poemario *feeld* (2018), de Jos Charles, la novela *Lapvona* (2022), de Ottessa



Elaine Cameron-Weir, *Joy in Repetition [Alegria en la repetición]* (vista de la instalación) (2022). Puertas industriales ignífugas, alabastro, relieves de bronce, cinta transportadora, poleas y herrajes, 144 × 87 × 150 pulgadas. Imagen cortesía de la artista y Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles. Foto: Jeff McLane.

Moshfegh, y *Matrix* (2021), la novela de Lauren Groff, hasta películas como *The Last Duel* (2021), de Ridley Scott, *The Green Knight* (2021), de David Lowery, y *The Northman* (2022), de Robert Eggers, el interés popular por la reconstrucción totalizadora (si bien no siempre históricamente exacta) del mundo medieval parece estar más extendido que nunca. Pero a medida que el género aparece cada vez más en el arte visual, su relación con el anacronismo adopta una forma ligeramente distinta. Desde las máscaras de la *commedia dell'arte*³ presentes en las pinturas de TARWUK, Joel Dean, Adam Alessi y Victor Boulet, hasta las esculturas de Kira Freije, Rochelle Goldberg y Cameron-Weir, estos y otros artistas se apropian estratégicamente de iconos y símbolos que invocan lo medieval, más que intentar sumergir al espectador en una fantasía narrativa contenida de otro momento histórico. En otras palabras, hacen hincapié en el anacronismo para revelar algo sobre nuestro mundo actual.

Al igual que Cameron-Weir, Goldberg y Freije trabajan a menudo con imágenes arraigadas en el arte y la arquitectura católicos medievales que, con todo, resuenan en nuestro momento histórico actual. En la serie *Intralocutors* [*Intralocutores*] de Goldberg (2017–presente), por ejemplo, ella trabaja sobre todo con la “Magdalena compuesta” de la teología Católica Romana, específicamente con María de Egipto, una mujer que había sido prostituta y que tras visitar la Iglesia de la Sagrada Sepultura se aventuró al desierto para vivir en devota soledad⁴. A lo largo de la serie, Goldberg representa a María de Egipto como una unidad con su entorno a través

de materiales orgánicos e inorgánicos: cerámica, acero, madera, pelo humano, piel de animal y plumas. Esta representación de María como indisociable de la Tierra ofrece un bienvenido contrapunto a los crecientes intentos de escapar de la misma, como las recientes reacciones ante las realidades del cambio climático que adoptan los mundos virtuales o basados en la nube⁵.

Las esculturas recientes de Freije también trafican con una especie de hipermaterialidad, aunque esté más arraigada en el diseño y los materiales industriales. Compuestas por bandas metálicas en forma de jaula, las figuras se asemejan a dispositivos de iluminación o están intercaladas con ellos. Se arrodillan y se levantan en diversas posiciones de temor y cobardía, como si imitaran las posturas pintadas en las representaciones renacentistas del Día del Juicio Final. Pero en lugar de ascender al cielo entre ángeles o descender al infierno entre demonios, los sujetos de Freije son *cyborgs*, no las almas de los mortales. En su fusión de lo tecnológico con la forma humana, Freije nos pide que imaginemos un futuro en el que lo humano y la mercancía ya no se pueden distinguir eficazmente.

Al igual que Freije, Cameron-Weir se sirve del neomedievalismo para profundizar en la cuestión de la forma de la mercancía, término marxista que describe la manera en que muchos aspectos de la vida cultural han adoptado la forma y la función de objetos vendibles o intercambiables. En *Joy in Repetition* [*Alegría en la repetición*] (todas las obras de 2022), dos puertas industriales ignífugas similares se apoyan contra la pared

trasera de la galería, proporcionando un soporte pesado a dos relieves de bronce colgantes idénticos de un Cristo caído que es atendido por sus acólitos. Los tamaños de las enormes puertas y de los relieves más pequeños son proporcionales entre sí y, como la mayoría de los objetos de la exposición, de tono frío y grisáceo. La frase *Joy in Repetition* parece un texto publicitario o un eslogan cursi pregonado por una tienda de muebles: un título irónicamente optimista para una obra que evoca tanto los sacrificios de Jesús por la humanidad como el poder y los peligros de la industria. La obra nivela dos líneas temporales dispares a través de sus similitudes formales, creando una armonía estética que permite la irónica subversión de Cameron-Weir respecto a los tópicos del *marketing* contemporáneo.

Yuxtaposiciones del catolicismo medieval y la cultura de consumo contemporánea estructuran también la obra de Cameron-Weir *Florid Piggy Memories brought to you on the wing of the Common Ground Dove/ Dressing for Lectern* [*Memorias del cerdito florido presentadas en el ala del Common Ground Dove/ Vestimenta para el atril*]. En esta obra, una vitrina manchada de suciedad que podría haber contenido joyas o relojes en otro tiempo está llena de diapositivas que representan tanto lugares religiosos medievales como la violencia moderna. Las imágenes incluyen una representación de la Virgen con el Niño de un misal del siglo XIII, la catedral de Salisbury, la catedral de Gurk, una serie de muros de hormigón explosivos y la cubierta de popa del acorazado USS Nevada, que fue sometido a pruebas con bombas atómicas en 1946⁶. Cada

fotografía, engalanada con un ornamentado marco de peltre, está unida a su fotografía vecina con pequeños componentes eléctricos circulares que recuerdan los broches de las joyas. En primer lugar, Cameron-Weir vincula material y conceptualmente la religiosidad medieval y su orientación hacia el Día del Juicio Final con el desarrollo de bombas capaces de acabar con el mundo del siglo XX. A continuación, convierte el miedo, la grandeza y la seriedad de Dios y la bomba atómica en meros ornamentos, como si la ansiedad actual por el fin del mundo ya se expresara a través de la forma mercantil o estuviera implicada en ella.

Los ensamblajes de Cameron-Weir responden, más que eliminan, a las tensas prehistorias de los objetos que los componen. *Dressing for Windows/ Dressing for Altitude/ Dressing for Pleasure [Revestimiento para ventanas/ Vestirse para la altura/ Vestirse para el placer]* coloca un asiento de caza deteriorado frente a una escultura de la Virgen María arrodillada en oración sobre un mueble rodante. Sus colores y formas curvadas son curiosamente similares, y ambos funcionan como contrapesos de una chaqueta de cuero sujeta con ganchos de carnicero a una cinta transportadora suspendida verticalmente. Aquí, la violencia de la crucifixión de Cristo implícita en la piedad de María es paralela a la violencia de un avión de combate que presumiblemente ha sido derribado y saqueado. Los ganchos para carne y el cuero sugieren aún más violencia, apuntando al brutal sacrificio y procesamiento de los animales. *Dressing for Windows* evoca una narrativa de violencia sobredeterminada que perdura

a lo largo del espectáculo, pero que es imposible de comprender del todo, muy en línea con el relato de Eco sobre la resistencia de las ansiedades apocalípticas.

Muchas expresiones de lo neomedieval responden a los deseos actuales de remitificar nuestra relación con la sociedad, la Tierra y nosotros mismos. Nos ofrecen la oportunidad de escapar —o, al menos, de estetizar— la impotencia que sentimos en un mundo cada vez más tecnologizado y globalizado. Pero en lugar de proporcionarnos vías de evasión de nuestro mundo, Cameron-Weir y otros artistas que trabajan en el neomedievalismo nos devuelven a él a través del pasado profundo, como si quisieran decirnos que lo medieval vuelve a ser contemporáneo.

Consulte la página 90 para ver las notas a pie de página.

Entrevista con rafa esparza

En el último Art Basel en Miami, el artista rafa esparza invitó a miembros de su comunidad de Los Angeles a montar y cabalgar su cuerpo, habiéndose transmutado en un lowrider antropomórfico. Para la *performance*, titulada *Corpo RanFLA: Terra Cruiser* (2022), se soldaron moldes de los antebrazos y pies de esparza chapados en oro, el cuadro de una bicicleta playera y una atracción infantil mecánica de 25 céntimos readaptada. El artista se insertó en el improvisado cuadro de bicicleta, con la espalda arqueada, el vientre hacia abajo, los brazos extendidos y la barbilla elevada. Cuatro juegos de relucientes pies cromados se abren en forma de abanico detrás de él con aluminio pintado de verde neón entrelazados. Los manillares

retorcidos en un estilo barroco surgían de la cabeza de esparza como astas listas para ser agarradas. La amiga de esparza, la artista Gabriela Ruiz, introdujo una moneda para arrancar la moto. Equipados con auriculares, los conductores escucharon uno a uno en privado la voz de esparza mientras el paseo les hacía rebotar a ambos. Colaborativo hasta la médula, *Terra Cruiser* se realizó con la ayuda de la comunidad de artistas de esparza, incluidos Ruiz, Víctor Barragán, Karla Ekatherine Canseco, Fabián Guerrero, Mario Ayala y Guadalupe Rosales.

Inspirándose en la cultura *lowrider* y *cruising*, así como en motivos indígenas, el *lowrider cyborg* de esparza imagina el cambio de forma como una herramienta para animar lo no humano de forma transgresiva. *Terra Cruiser* encarna lo que la teórica feminista poscolonial Chéla Sandoval llama una “forma *cyb[org]* de resistencia”¹, en la que la adopción de criaturas híbridas se convierte en un método eficaz de rechazo bajo las condiciones culturales posmodernas que fomentan la conformidad. Sandoval argumenta que “los pueblos colonizados de las Américas ya han desarrollado las habilidades *cyborg* necesarias para sobrevivir en condiciones tecnohumanas como requisito para sobrevivir bajo la dominación”². En una unión inherentemente queer de animal y máquina, a la vez primordial y biónica, el *lowrider* de esparza utiliza habilidades *cyborg* para deconstruir las nociones tradicionales del *lowrider*, lo no humano y lo humano.

En obras anteriores, esparza ha extraído su acomodado cuerpo de un pilar de hormigón en el exterior del

ELAINE CAMERON-WEIR

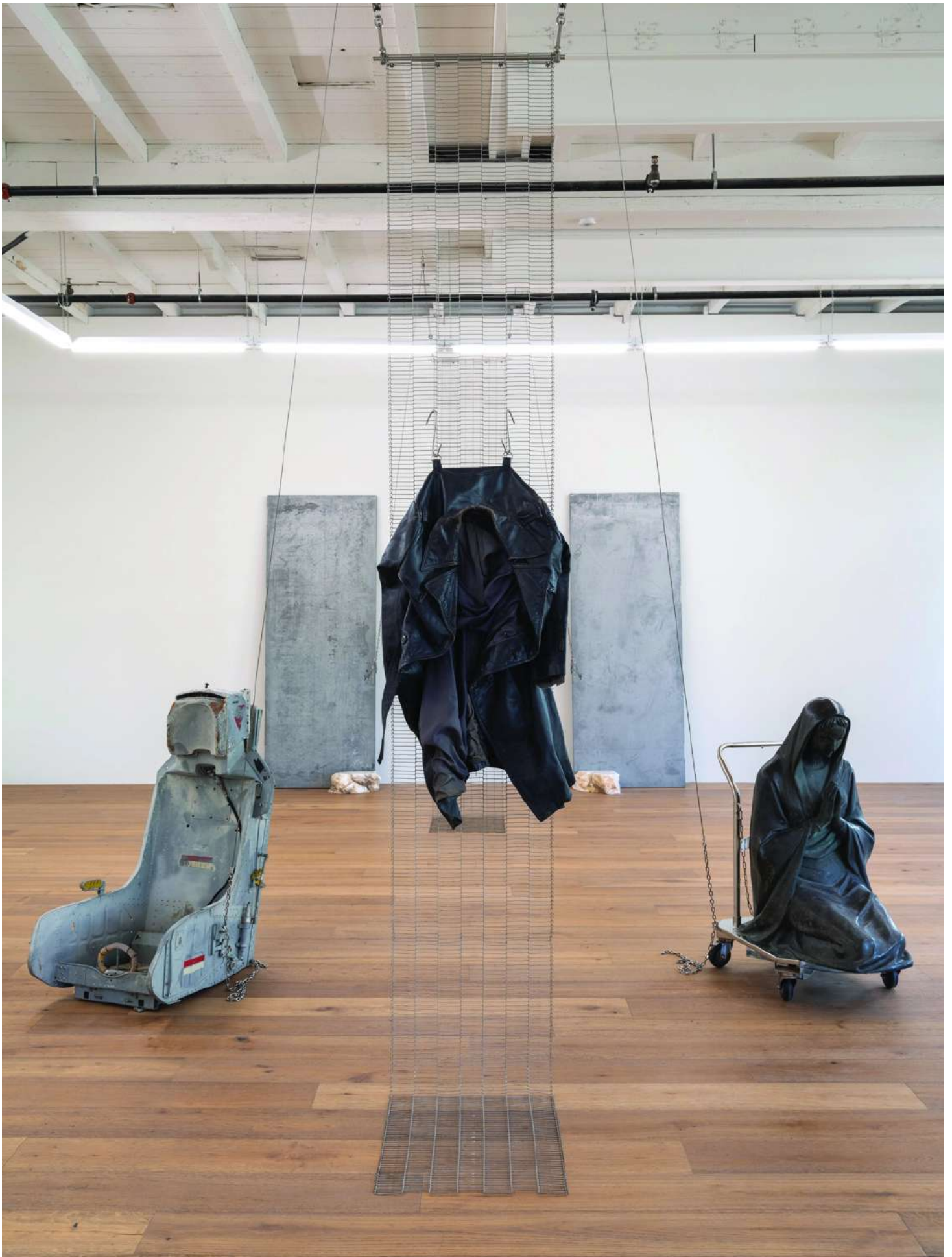
One Work: Elaine Cameron-Weir's "Dressing for Windows/Dressing for Altitude/Dressing for Pleasure" By Eli Diner

ARTnews, January 12, 2023

One Work: Elaine Cameron-Weir's "Dressing for Windows/Dressing for
Altitude/Dressing for Pleasure"

By Eli Diner

January 12, 2023 12:25pm



Elaine Cameron-Weir: *Dressing for Windows/ Dressing for Altitude/ Dressing for Pleasure*, 2022, fighter jet seat, bronze statue, stainless steel barrel cart, leather jacket, meat hooks, conveyor belt, pulleys, hardware, 144 by 87 by 150 inches.

PHOTO JEFF MCLANE/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND HANNAH HOFFMAN, LOS ANGELES

Dressing for Windows/Dressing for Altitude/Dressing for Pleasure (2022), part of [Elaine Cameron-Weir \(https://www.artnews.com/t/elaine-cameron-weir/\)](https://www.artnews.com/t/elaine-cameron-weir/)'s current exhibition at [Hannah Hoffman \(https://www.artnews.com/t/hannah-hoffman/\)](https://www.artnews.com/t/hannah-hoffman/) in Los Angeles, is a simple arrangement of found objects hooked up to a rig of chains, cables, and pulleys. A bronze statue of the Virgin Mary and a fighter-jet seat bereft of cushions or seatbelts anchor a contraption that hoists a strip of metal mesh. There, a leather jacket, like Christ on the cross, hangs front and center. All of this is within Cameron-Weir's established vocabulary—militaria, dangling garments, old and new metal, things bound and suspended—and appears both clinical and operatic. Is this contrivance of tethers and equipment a mere stage for the trio of symbolically loaded items (jacket, ejector seat, Virgin), or should it be taken for a system of some sort? The sculpture's effect depends on such tensions: between stasis and movement, heft and lift, generic and specific, and, above all, materials as such and their connotations.

Put another way, this is the difference between the title and the materials list. Cameron-Weir has eschewed an exhibition text, and in that expository vacuum, these two little texts shoulder newfound significance. From the latter you learn that the jacket hangs by meat hooks on a conveyor belt and that Mary sits on a stainless-steel barrel cart. In contrast to the solidity and specificity of these repurposed things, the title enacts a kind of free association, as if flitting through several possible and equally valid options. This could be an exercise in style, a window display where the centerpiece is a flight jacket, or a bit of BDSM gear ("dressing for pleasure" being an old fetish slogan). But none of it sticks, and the work isn't so much about the military-industrial-Catholic-kink complex as the interplay between vague evocations of meaning and the cold hard facts of material.



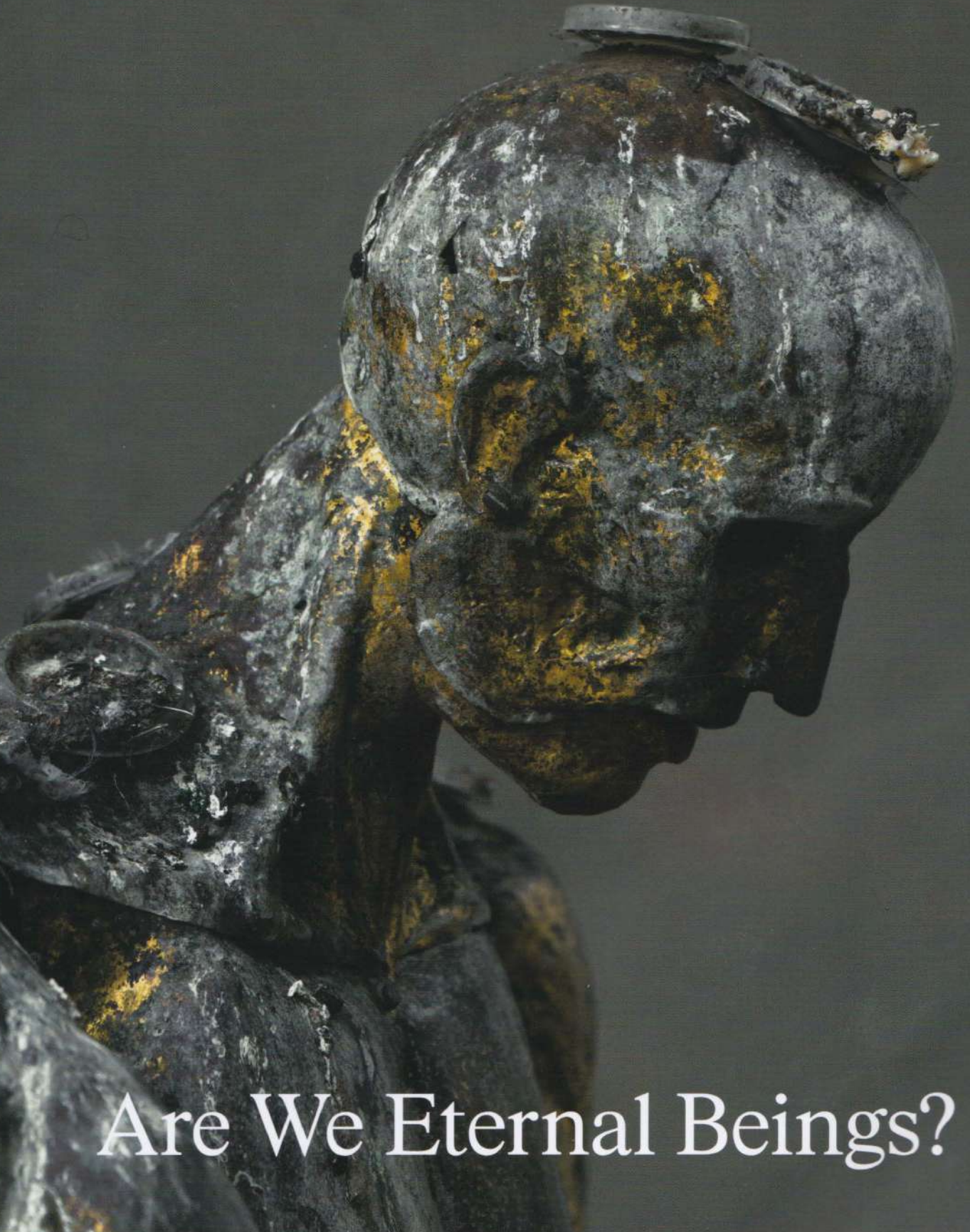
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ELAINE CAMERON-WEIR

“Spotlight Elaine Cameron-Weir a conversation with Jodi Graf”
Cura., no 39, Fall Winter 22-23

CURA.



Are We Eternal Beings?

312 Spotlight Elaine Cameron-Weir A Conversation with Jody Graf

On a muggy summer evening, I sat down with artist Elaine Cameron-Weir at her studio in New York City to discuss her multifaceted practice. I first saw Cameron-Weir's

work at Ramiken Crucible in 2014: giant, gaping, elegant clamshells that doubled as incense burners. Her approach has continued to intrigue, mining strange seams

of material possibility. Over wine, we touched on a range of topics: mythology, preppers, techno-optimism, and the origins of the word "hypocrisy," to name a few.



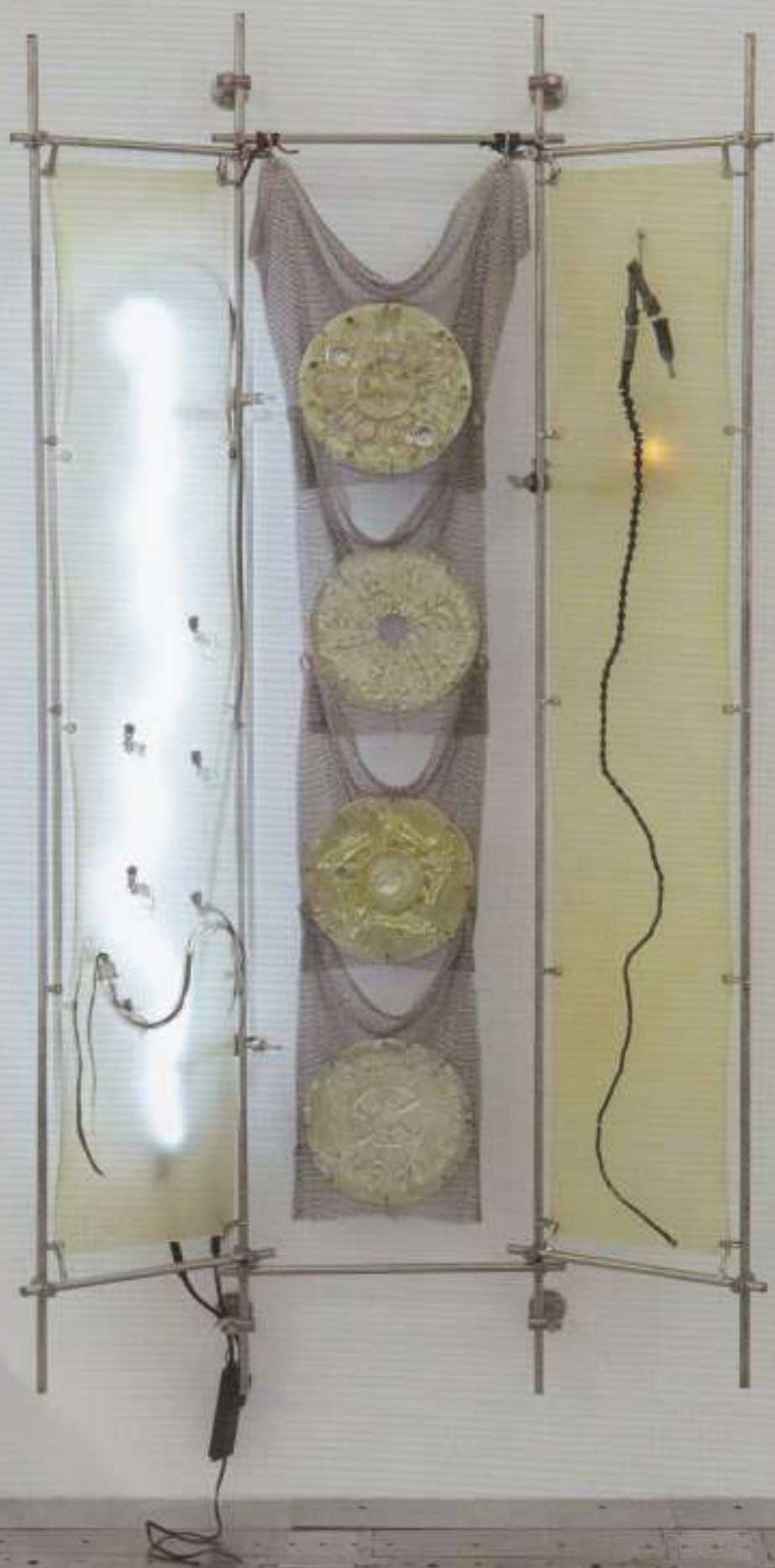


















JG I want to start by asking how you feel about descriptions of your work as contrasting the technological or non-human, and the organic. The more I think about it the more I question if this dichotomy entirely holds true, but I feel this perceived tension in your work is probably one reason why you were asked to be part of this issue, whose theme is "are we eternal beings?"

ECW I think there is definitely part of my practice that has to do with that, but it's an incomplete picture, probably because I don't think of the artificial and natural as that different. There's always a bit of disjoint between what you think you're doing and what people are going to see. That doesn't bother me. But if I was going to say what I think I'm doing right now, I actually don't know. It has taken me so long to be able to say that—to un-professionalize the way that I feel like I've been expected to talk about things. I don't know what I'm doing... but I am usually interested in talking about anything related to eternity.

JG It takes a lot of confidence to lean into doubt and the kinds of vulnerability that art stems from—that space of unknowing. Something I struggle with as a curator is having to clarify or wrap things up nicely so they become digestible. Some art wants or needs that, depending on the context. But oftentimes, I think we jump to certain structuring dichotomies that are easy to relate to current events, when the work itself is speaking in a much more confused way. I mean confused in a positive sense. I was thinking about this vis-a-vis your materials, which you always list completely—concrete, neon, lead, Frankincense, clamshells, to name a few examples. You could read the works as contrasting the natural and the unnatural, but what's really interesting is that you're calling attention to a spectrum or leveling of materials rather than a contrast, insofar as everything that you're incorporating ultimately comes from the earth. This is potentially a much more unsettling kind of perspective. It's easier to be like, "oh, there are these dominating or negative technological elements, and then the good and natural."

ECW That makes sense. I want to complicate morality. There are very few things that I'm ready to declare as pure evil or pure good. I don't put that kind of black and

white thinking into my work. It's a problem when understanding starts to mean oversimplification. I'm not trying to be didactic and echo popular perception. Like, "Yeah. Nature is grand and beautiful. We have to save it and let's not put plastic in the ocean." That has nothing to do with what I'm interested in.

JG Yet your work does set up certain tensions—maybe there's a structuring tension between porosity and fragility and disappearance, on the one hand, and things that armor themselves against change, on the other. Human life is often designated by its absence in the work. This got me thinking about death, not to get too serious.

ECW Yeah. [laughter] First of all, I think that porosity and ephemerality—things that have to do with continuums of time and duration—are definitely qualities of materials and ideas I'm really attracted to. A metaphor about the durability of power structures hovers in some of the materials... It seems like no one talks about death directly but it's so implied in everything. And artificiality seems to be a way to avoid it, or separate humans from the world. There's something related to faith and belief in there too, a psychological aspect either in tech, science, or religion that seems related to exceptionalism or something.

JG We are dealing with a scary techno-utopianism now—some bizarre faith that tech will save us from planetary disaster, from our ephemerality. I was struck by the works that you showed in the Venice Biennale, which incorporate cases used by the US military to transfer human remains. I was thinking back to your older work, and realizing that a similar appeal to loss or transitional states is there—in the silk parachutes you used in your show at the Dortmund Kunstverein, or the repetition of gates, or the burning of substances. There are also many references to Greek mythology, which is so much about understanding our material world via before- or after-lives. I'm curious to what extent this question of loss or mourning has always been part of your practice.

ECW It's easy to forget that Greek mythology comes from religion and isn't some neutral thing. I've always wanted to talk about belief but I think that there has been a shift for me from referencing Greek and Roman gods and goddesses

or myth—something I don't personally believe in and that I have distance from, but has surrounded me—towards Christianity. I've never been a practicing Christian, except when I got scared for a few weeks when I was twelve because they gave Bibles out at our school. And I was like, "What the fuck? I am definitely going to hell!" and I read it every night to scare myself. But I guess I'm drawn to Christianity now as an iconography that exists in the world. I feel I'm separate from it, but I'm influenced and affected by it because look at where we live... God is on the money here in the US. It's not like this is a secular society. I've also become more interested in thinking about state power. You can't disentangle religion and state power.

JG There's an interrogation of belief systems of many forms in the work, religion being one belief system—referenced sometimes through the ritual-like burning of incense. That of course carries a lot of transmuted cultural baggage, in terms of discourses of self-help and self-care, which are in my opinion rather sad attempts to bring order in the face of chaos. But also state power and science, which are belief systems that don't often get apprehended as such.

ECW Yes. Science is big for me, though all of my knowledge is amateur. I went to art school and I learned how to chop wood and make ceramics. I don't know how to do anything else. [laughter]. But I think that the amateur mindset is actually helpful for me. I'm into the idea of observation overthrowing conventional wisdom. A misunderstanding of the technicality of science and a desire to grasp it through metaphor is maybe akin to religious experience. You can't grasp the Trinity. It's like contemplating infinity or the speed of light—going back to duration again. But science is full of metaphors that help us wrap our heads around things. Even the name of something, like the "Big Bang," helps us conceive of what it is. It was originally called the "hypothesis of the primeval atom" but got inadvertently renamed by a skeptical scientist referring to it dismissively as "this big bang theory" on the radio. There's something interesting about how systems at odds with each other employ the same means of communication—again, often metaphor. I'm more interested in thinking about meaning—what it is and how it's

created—than I am in depicting subject matter.

JG And, well, art becomes its own belief system. You have to buy in. I find the idea of condensation helpful in terms of thinking about metaphor and how systems create meaning. Maybe an effective artwork is a condensation or distillation—there's a density—in the same way that any effective political system or religious system has to simplify and boil down. But that's also really scary.

ECW Yes, a concentrated power flowing into or from a single point—like God, or the Big Bang. The consequences of that being a goal are scary, but where it comes from, where it drips off from, is the saltiest part, you know?

JG I'm interested, too, in the idea of transmission in your work, and how art itself transmits meaning. And I was thinking back to your antenna-like pieces, some of the first works of yours that I ever saw in person, which suggest the sending or receiving of messages.

ECW I think a good metaphor relies on poetics to be clear, like a weird meme or a good joke. It's also why I'm interested in garbled language. I'm not interested in misunderstanding or attempting to be incomprehensible for its own sake. That's so annoying to me actually...

JG It's one of my least favorite things.

ECW In terms of the transmission and reception of a signal, I'm interested in my audience, too, though I don't know who that is all the time.

JG Thinking about audience reaction, I'm wondering about the hints of dread in your work, which are mixed with elements of seduction. There's a shared societal dread that feels palpable right now, and which manifests itself through heightened forms of faith, but also through nuts-and-bolts survivalist, prepper culture.

ECW Oh yeah, I'm really into prepper culture. I think it comes from my fascination with things on the edge of decline, and loving fin de siècle doom and gloom as in Baudelaire, Huysmans etc. A lot of the military equipment that I research or get close to tangentially is also close to the prepper world. The person I bought the body transfer cases from suggested that





I bury them and put weapons in them. The idea of someone who would prepare for the downfall of society seems archetypal to me, and has to do with duration, the body, protective measures, revolution. The apocalypse maybe.

JG I'm reminded of the clam shells you've used quite a bit, which are another kind of protective architecture that has been released from that function.

ECW Yeah! [laughter] I'm curious about what happens when there is no structure to protect or oppress you, like a shell might. In high school, I used to hang out with people who called themselves anarchists, but in the way that 15-year-old punk rockers do. Even at that age, I was like, "You guys aren't really anarchists. You live with your parents." [laughter] But I've always been interested in hypocrisy that arises from the thwarted desire to set yourself outside of society, the impossibility and ennui of that as well as the dandyism of that position. I have myself been a hypocrite in that way, like many people, but I'm more interested in hypocrisy as a functionally compromising position now, how people use it as a weapon.

JG I think about hypocrisy a lot.

ECW It's hard not to.

JG I'm just realizing, I don't know the origins of the word.

ECW Should I find out?

JG Yeah, I'm curious. Obviously, working in an institution I think a lot about feeling compromised. I find it interesting that it has become a go-to form of critique, especially in the art world, to be like, "Oh, that's hypocritical."

ECW Or "impure." Which is actually so dangerous.

JG As if there could ever be a space of pure politics or morality. I'm thinking now about the way that you use materials. You tend to retain the integrity of each material. I don't know if that has any connection to what we're talking about... Like letting each material live in its own time and mess.

ECW Actually, I think it might. I want the constituent parts of things to be seen because I see them as the words in the sentence

that make the meaning. I structure meaning the way that I think about poetry, in which you can put one word next to another without narrative, necessarily. The meaning might be nonsensical or stupid or ineffective, but it will still do something because each element has meaning it contributes to a whole. I'm so obsessed with the meanings of materials.

JG In your work there's nothing extraneous. Everything is serving a purpose, holding something together. The simplicity of gravity at work. What you are saying about poetry as a logic of juxtaposition sparked me to think about how you use pairings or doublings in your work. There are a lot of instances in which you have two of something in a work, or two sculptures next to each other. Where does that impulse come from for you?

ECW Yes, the doubling aspect of my work, it's like the real world and its double: which one is the original? Ideas of truth and perception underlie every kind of system that we've talked about. I'm naturally attracted to symmetry in things and mirror images, reflections. I've never fought that impulse, but I think there's also something about how the perceiving organs on the human body are usually manifested in pairs—looking at the world from two singular points of vision and seeing it as one. Or, the brain having two hemispheres, bodies having two imperfect sides. A lot of things that are organized around a spinal cord are "symmetrical." I'm really interested in that hinge point. It's also a challenge to try to make something roughly physically symmetrical one side at a time. It forces me to look at what I did the first time, when I wasn't thinking about the eventual symmetry. To reverse that is a way to reflect back using my own body, like writing backwards or something. Once it's been finished for a while I usually forget which side of the work I made first.

JG To return to the first dichotomy I brought up between the human-made and the natural, I feel like, at first glance, the kind of doubling or symmetry in your work might be read as falling on the side of things that are mechanical or technological, versus the chaotic, organic world. Yet, there's actually so much symmetry, almost uncanny and hallucinatory, in nature. Symmetry reads as both artificial and primal. This brings me to the function of heat in your works, which often emit light or heat, or gesture towards that

through artificial means. Burning candles are emblematic of the eternal; we burn candles to keep the memory of someone alive, but burning is also an expenditure and an eventual disappearance. It seems related to this underlying prompt of "eternal beings."

ECW I think "expenditure" is a good word. It's also related to why I have been so interested in smell, because it's an evaporation and a using up of something. And I do use it, again, as a metaphor. Different types of light sources connote different things: a real flame says something different than an artificial candle, like I used in Venice. Humanity still hasn't figured out free energy, it's a finite resource still, but, theoretically, energy is never destroyed. It changes state. There's a facade to an artificial flame, which appears to go on forever but relies on electricity. I was making that work in the height of the summer of 2020, so it was a tumultuous time and it just felt right to talk about facades or showmanship. Going back to hypocrisy, it's like saying, "oh don't worry, this will never burn out. We've got this artificial thing, don't worry about it." Engaging in hypocrisy is a way to bend the truth, and there's something not necessarily hypocritical about a fake candle, but paradoxical—like double speak. That whole installation, which was first shown at the Henry Art Gallery and then in Venice, was about a set-up or questioning of narratives billed as truth.

JG Yeah. And the fake candles are reminiscent of the ways in which "thoughts and prayers" are a stand-in for actual change or action. Something that we hear a lot these days.

ECW Let me tell you the origin of the word hypocrisy though. According to Google the Greek word is rooted in 'hupo' which means *under* and 'krinein' which means *decide/judge*. I'm going to butcher the pronunciation, 'hupokrineisthais,' which means to play a part or pretend. But then it morphed into another Greek word 'hupokristies,' which means the acting of a theatrical part. And then it went to Latin. Then it went to old French as *ypocrisite* and then English hypocrisy. It's interesting that it is the word for acting.

JG Makes a lot of sense because if you're being hypocritical, you're probably having to fake.

ECW But to be a good actor, you have to access something really genuine.

JG Yeah. I used to not understand why anyone would be interested in theater when there was so much already in the world. I didn't understand why acting was so impressive [laughter]. But now I have the opposite feeling about it; I think it's one of the most impressive things that one could do. It's so hard to emote. Transmitting the signal is hard.

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ELAINE CAMERON-WEIR

“Elaine Cameron-Weir, futuristic alchemist” Interview with Zoe

De Luca

domus, July 2018

domus

Elaine Cameron-Weir, futuristic alchemist

Interview with the Canadian artist who, at her first solo show in a German institution, presents a news series of eight sculptures in steel, leather and silk.



Author

Zoe De Luca

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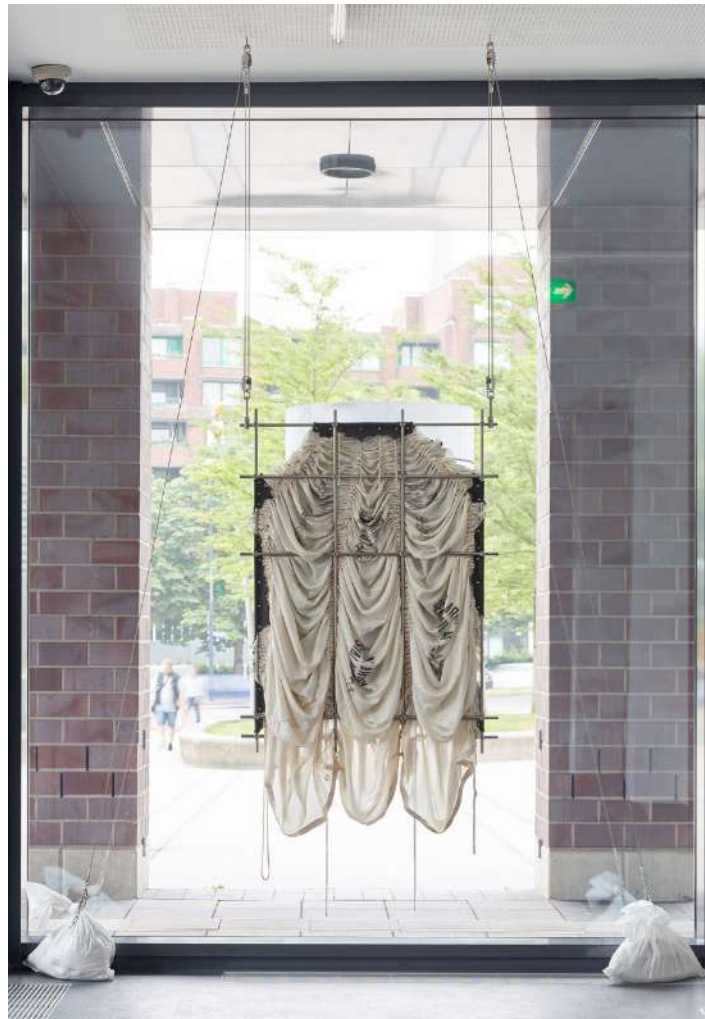
The artist Elaine Cameron-Weir was born in Alberta, Canada in 1985 and now lives in New York. She uses the technique of assemblage, fastening together artificial and organic materials to which she is attracted for their functional or potential properties. The

<https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2018/07/03/elaine-cameron-weir-futuristic-chemist.html>

reworking of details and the incorporation of objects to form larger experimental settings are central to her work, which shows a focus on mutation and regeneration. The exhibition “Exhibit from a dripping personal collection” at the Dortmunder Kunstverein until 22.07.2018 is her first solo show in a German institution. We met with Cameron-Weir to hear about her new series of eight sculptures in steel, leather and silk.

The Dortmunder Kunstverein introduces you as a futuristic alchemist. What do you think of this definition?

It's not Futurism with a capital F (I'm pretty sure they banned women in the manifesto anyway), and the world alchemy kind of makes me think of a wizard. But I would say it refers to a person interested in the future and in change from one state to another, which is definitely me.



Installation view of “Elaine Cameron-Weir, exhibit from a dripping personal collection”, 2018, DOKV

<https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2018/07/03/elaine-cameron-weir-futuristic-chemist.html>

The mix of strong symbolic references in your work is reminiscent of 15th-Century medicine. Does this show perpetuate the aesthetic you've been investigation in the last few years.

It's not a totally different direction, but I'm very close to it, so some people might look at it and say it's different because of the rectilinear wall relationship these pieces have, or their seriality. But for me it's a continuation of the things I've always been thinking about, maybe with certain aspects being more identifiable here. For example, I used sections of silk parachutes from World War II in the pieces. I'm often drawn to military equipment, but it tends to be objects that might be more obscure, less overtly identifiable as military than these parachutes, which have US ARMY stamped on them in places from when they were decommissioned.

Your assemblage sculptures combine contrasting materials of organic and artificial origin. They imply a reflection of manufacturing and on our attitude towards the design of nature. Is this connected to something specific in your background.

My interest lies in human-scale ideas of functionality, as well as a kind of necessity of function that is a provisionality and how that connects to the will of nature to survive or to function. All of the equipment and things I like to use are modular objects designed for a specific use and this use is not hidden. I'm not sure what there is specific in my background that draws me to this, but I used to be fascinated with cages as a kid and one of my favorite toys was my cat's metal cage we put him in to bring him to the vet. The object has a similar kind of obvious function that I liked, scaled down to the cat. Of course my work is personal and psychological and has everything to do with that I think, but I'm not attempting to be biographically narrative.

You often include a laboratorial twist. Is this a device to keep the transformation process open, or to represent it in a more detectable way?

Potentiality is important to me, and a state change (the alchemy thing). I have found that a lot of lab equipment is made to study and monitor state change, and so I use it. I like to have things heat up, or do what I want them to do without looking like a magic trick to me, I want the intent of the original utility to show, the cords, switches, clamps, bolts, and so on.

You said you're not attempting to be biographically narrative, but this attention to potentiality does entail some kind of narrative. Most of your sculptures look like objects made for unknown purposes, sets for actions left halfway.

I am definitely interested in narrative since narratives imply some kind of time passage or changing relationship, but I tend to not explore my personal biography by revealing it through to my work as a narrative. That's not a judgment on the right way to make art, it's only what I'm inclined to do.

<https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2018/07/03/elaine-cameron-weir-futuristic-chemist.html>

Have you ever thought of including performative elements in your works?

To a certain extent there are performative elements in some of the work I make, since it has to be maintained by a person. I'm thinking of the pieces that incorporate scent by burning or warming incense. Those involve an open flame or a laboratory heater and they have to be monitored and replenished while they're exhibited. It's kind of an incidental think, and maybe it's more about the maintainers' absence and the evidence of their actions than seeing them touching the piece. It's the potential for that relationship to be thought about in some way.

Speaking of perception, how relevant is the relationship with the audience in the conception of your works?

I want to communicate with people. That doesn't mean I would strategize what I do so someone would have this or that reaction. I've always just assumed in general that audiences find things interesting if the person making not only as interest, but a need to make them. That's an optimistic view I think.

Exhibition title: exhibit from a dripping personal collection

Opening dates: 26 May – 22 July 2018

Venue: Dortmunder Kunstverein

Address: Park der Partnerstädte 2, Dortmund