

Exhibition Checklist

Fig.4 **Nakeya Brown**
Folded Rag Rugs and Towel,
 from the series *Some Assembly Required*, 2016
 Inkjet Print, 16 x 20 inches
 Courtesy of the artist

Rob and Nick Carter
Transforming Flowers in a Vase, 2016
 70-minute looped film, monitor with player, frame
 26 3/8 x 24 1/8 x 4 3/8 inches
 © Rob and Nick Carter, Courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts, London

Mat Collishaw
Gary Miller, 2011
 Framed C-print, 31 x 24 x 2 1/8 inches (framed)
 © Mat Collishaw, Courtesy of the artist and
 Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York/Los Angeles

Fig.1 **Sharon Core**
1610, from the series *1606-1907*, 2011
 Archival Pigment Print, 19 x 14 3/4 inches
 © Sharon Core, Courtesy of the artist and
 Yancey Richardson New York

Inside **Ori Gersht**
New Orders, Evertime 01, 2018
 Archival pigment print, 13 3/4 x 18 inches
 © Ori Gersht, Courtesy of the artist and
 Yancey Richardson New York

Cover **Ori Gersht**
New Orders, Evertime 03, 2018
 Archival pigment print, 13 3/4 x 18 inches
 © Ori Gersht, Courtesy of the artist and
 Yancey Richardson New York

Cynthia Greig
Still Life with Peaches (after Sam Taylor-Wood), 2009-10
 5:27, single-channel video loop
 Courtesy of the artist

Fig.6 **Daniel Gordon**
Jade Plant with Pears and Green Apples, 2019
 Pigment Print with UV Lamination, 55 x 68 3/4 inches
 © Daniel Gordon, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery,
 New York / James Fuentes Gallery, New York

Dave Greber
Stilllives, 2011
 Single-Channel video 2:03 min, looped
 Courtesy of the artist

Fig.5 **Claudia Hart**
Big Red, 2019
 Video animation (color, silent), tiled monitors or projection
 on stretched screen, computer or media player
 90 x 63 x 1 1/2 inches, 5 min, video loop
 © Claudia Hart, Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

Claudia Hart
The Still Life With Flowers by Henri Fantin-Latour, 2020
 3D-printed resin, pigmented silicone, walnut, basswood,
 and maple, custom pine and plexiglass pedestal
 48 x 36 1/2 x 24 1/2 inches
 © Claudia Hart, Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

Will Pappenheimer
Still Oasis, 2021
 Augmented reality installation
 Courtesy of the artist

Barbara Probst
Exposure #138: Munich,
Nederlingerstrasse 68, 08.13.18, 2:47 p.m., 2018
 Ultrachrome ink on cotton paper, 44 1/10 x 90 3/5 inches
 © Barbara Probst, Courtesy of the artist and
 Higher Pictures Generation, New York

Fig.3 **Chuck Ramirez**
Seven Days: Breakfast Tacos, 2003
 Pigment Inkjet Print, 24 x 30 inches
 © Estate of Chuck Ramirez, Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art,
 San Antonio

Chuck Ramirez
Seven Days: Birthday Party, 2003
 Pigment Inkjet Print, 24 x 30 inches
 © Estate of Chuck Ramirez, Courtesy Ruiz-Healy Art,
 San Antonio

David Rokeby
The Giver of Names, 1991-
 Dimensions variable
 Interactive installation, software, computer system,
 projection, assorted toys and objects
 Courtesy of the artist

Jason Salavon
Still Life (Vanitas), 2009
 Computer, custom software, industrial LCD panel
 16 x 25 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches
 4 hour 10 minute continuous loop
 Courtesy of David and Jennifer Feldman

Fig.2 **Patrick Tresset**
Human Study #2, 2020
 Dimensions variable
 Robot, skull, shells, taxidermy, ballpoint pen, desk, table,
 camera, drawings on paper
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photography Credit: Elon Schoenholz Photography



Katonah Museum of Art

134 Jay Street
 Katonah, NY 10536
 katonahmuseum.org



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STILL / LIVE

MARCH 16 – JUNE 27, 2021

Still/Live explores how contemporary artists are reimagining the still life tradition. The artists represented in the exhibition work from within the millennia-old conventions of the genre, creating videos, photographs, and new media pieces that investigate three themes—time, contemporary symbolism, and trompe l’oeil—that were present historically, but not necessarily with the same emphasis. These visual technologies provide new possibilities for expanding the still life’s expressive potential and range of potential meanings.

Many of the *Still/Live* artists play with the genre’s temporal dimensions by examining the tension between film, which unfolds over time, and the still life, which seems frozen in time. For others, the still life is a powerful vehicle for exploring their own personal identity and history, or for political or social commentary. In a time when the lines between the actual and the virtual, appearance and reality, and truth and fiction are growing ever more blurred, the intensified realism of trompe l’oeil (a technique that deceives the viewer into believing that depicted objects are real) has become newly relevant. As artists question what it means to “fool the eye” in the 21st-century, they also use the still life to consider the meaning of social connectivity in a world mediated by technology.

For contemporary artists, photography and new media have provided new avenues for investigating still life’s ongoing dialogue with time. In 17th-century Netherlands, artists produced still lifes that encoded time in every object. Paintings of “impossible bouquets,” for instance, gathered together flowers that bloom during different seasons—an intellectual delight for viewers and a bravura display of the artist’s power to overcome even the limits of time. Other examples paired bouquets of wilting flowers with half-peeled oranges, buzzing insects, and other symbols of the immutable forces of time and decay. *Vanitas* and *memento mori* expanded upon this message of life’s transience, adding human skulls, hourglasses, smoke and other symbols of the brevity of life and the fleeting nature of earthly pleasure.



Fig. 1

As in the “impossible bouquets,” Sharon Core’s still life photographs incorporate multiple temporal layers. For the images that comprise her series *1606-1907*, Core references the pictorial conventions of still life spanning 300 years. The artist’s attention to detail is meticulous. For *1610*, she sourced period glassware and even cultivated the rare broken tulips and opium poppies so prized by Dutch still life painters. (Fig. 1) The resulting work is a clash of the contemporary and the historical, the short-lived and the long-lasting. Her 21st-century photograph could be confused with a 17th-century painting, while the fragility of the flowers, in addition to the near-instantaneity of her photographic exposures, contrast against the enduring power of the still life paintings she evokes.

Patrick Tresset’s *Human Study #2* also plays with the still life genre’s preoccupation with the passage of time. (Fig. 2) In Tresset’s installation,



Fig. 2

a single robotic actor—little more than an arm bolted to a desk—contemplates a still life composition that includes a skull and shells, symbolic objects that often appear in *vanitas* images. Holding a cheap ballpoint pen, the robot sketches drawing after drawing, pursuing its obsessive meditation on human mortality ad infinitum. Yet, the robot’s actions mirror a very human motivation for creating art: achieving immortality by leaving traces of ourselves behind.

Like Tresset’s skull and shells, which still bear their original symbolic associations, throughout history the objects in still life paintings have carried symbolic meanings that are specific to the time and place of each work’s creation. Religious symbolism, for instance, imbues Dutch still lifes. While flowers were reminders of the transience of all earthly things, some flowers had special significance. For example, lilies and thorned roses symbolized the Virgin Mary’s purity and suffering. Through the objects they depict, still lifes also reveal a culture’s values and aspirations as well as the political and social identities of artists and their publics.

Contemporary artists make the still life personal, telling stories about their own history and identity through carefully-chosen objects. In *Seven Days: Breakfast Tacos*, Chuck Ramirez creates an intricate, table-top still life from the detritus of breakfast. (Fig. 3) Amidst the crumpled wrappers, half-empty cups of coffee, and cans of Lone Star and Miller Lite is a miniature, souvenir sombrero. The son of a Mexican American father and an



Fig. 3

Anglo mother, Ramirez was born and raised in San Antonio, which has been a “majority minority” city for over fifty years. Through this image, Ramirez reflects on his own multiple cultural identities—and on the identities that others project upon him.

Combining images from her family’s photographic archive and nine still life photographs, Nakeya Brown’s series *Some Assembly Required* connects mass-produced goods and the commoditization of female labor. For Brown, each object she photographs—from a vanity box to a stack of folded rag rugs—is tied not only to a memory of her grandmother, but also to the exploitative systems of labor that her grandmother and other Black women were, and are, forced to endure. Thus, while *Folded Rag Rugs and Towel* evokes the neatly-folded hand towels that Brown’s grandmother kept on her kitchen table, it also references her work as a personal housekeeper and cleaning woman. (Fig. 4)

While veiled symbolism has always been integral to the still life, from its origins in ancient Roman frescoes and mosaics, the genre has also been closely associated with illusionism. In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder recounts that, when the great painter Zeuxis unveiled a painting of grapes, so skillful was his manipulation of light and shadow that birds swooped down to peck the painted fruit. The popularity of trompe l’oeil can be traced through the history of still life, from the illusionistic marquetry and murals of Quattrocento Italy, to the 17th-century Dutch sub-genre called *bedriegertje*

(“little deceptions”), to 19th-century American still lifes of ordinary objects rendered with remarkable verisimilitude.

Given this rich history, it is perhaps unsurprising that contemporary artists are using modern reproductive technologies to reimagine trompe l’oeil’s confusion of reality and its two-dimensional representation. Claudia Hart’s monumental animation *Big Red* borrows the composition and saturated colors of Matisse’s *Large Red Interior* from 1948. (Fig. 5) Projected on a stretched canvas the same dimensions as Matisse’s painting, Hart’s work appears, at first glance, to be a still image. However, Hart has programmed the flowers, as well as the patterned carpet and wallpaper, to pulse and shift at different rates. Through this integration of 3D animation and two-dimensional image, Hart’s work simulates the asynchronous motions of nature.

Daniel Gordon’s still life photographs, which combine digital and analogue processes, also test the boundaries between artifice and reality. Gordon’s *Jade with Pears and Green Apples* began with Google image searches for every element: potted plant, Grecian urns, apples, and even shadows were sourced online. (Fig. 6) The artist then printed the images to scale, cut and tore them into shape, and assembled them into a paper sculpture. Finally, he carefully lit and photographed



Fig. 4

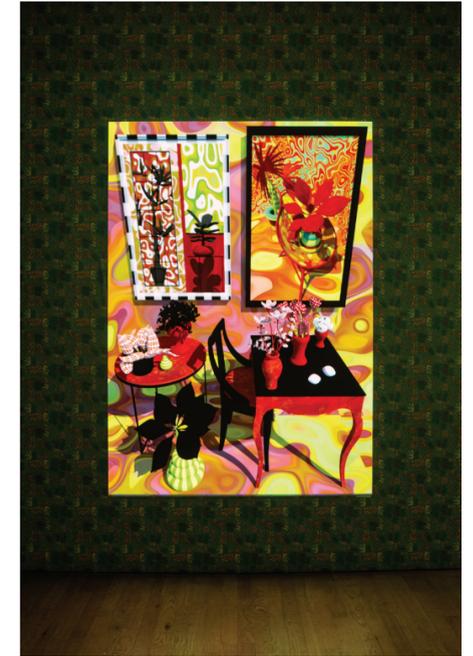


Fig. 5

this three-dimensional, trompe l’oeil tableau, manipulating the colors and flattening the forms. The resulting still life, many steps removed from the real-life objects it references, is less a representation than it is a reinvention.

The history of the still life is the history of its constant reinterpretation. Like countless artists before them, the contemporary photographers, filmmakers, and new media artists represented in *Still/Live* view the genre not as a lifeless relic, but as a dynamic medium of expression.

Emily Handlin
Associate Curator of Exhibitions and Programs



Fig. 6