



Selina Trepp

*Do you have cents for nonsense?
I have cents for sensitive.*



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Cleve Carney Art Gallery
Monday, Oct.10 to Saturday, Nov.19, 2016



Do you have cents for nonsense?, 2016, archival inkjet print, 36" x 50"

Out of the Dinosaur, Into the Moment

Do you have cents for nonsense? I have cents for sensitive.

—Caroline Picard

When first covered with a polyurethane skin, the floor of Selina Trepp's studio was white. The surface has long since turned gray, mottled, pock marked and peeled up in places. It feels alive, open to change and bearing traces of past lives when the former warehouse had other, more industrial uses. For Trepp, the bounds of this floor—defined by temporary drywall, a door and a wall of windows—is a self-contained place, a world with its own rhythms, rules and material limitations. Upon this site, 13 new photographs, drawings and a video materialized for her latest exhibition, *Do you have cents for nonsense? I have cents for sensitive* on view at College of DuPage's Cleve Carney Gallery.

Like citizens coming from another country, these works bear the accent and logic of her studio. In most of the photographs, assorted mirrors installed at different angles and distances from the camera equally reflect a segment of the artist's body, the studio walls, the studio floor and paintings. By virtue of the final photograph's flat and serene surface, each element in the composition is equivalent, capturing a performative moment of commiseration between the artist, her landscape and materials. *Sitting On It* (2015) includes a figure (Trepp's) cropped from torso to calf. This body sits on a striped box in the middle of the composition behind a second, smaller cube of mirrors that obscures the

figure's feet. The shoulders are cut off by a large black painting with a purple face, black sunglasses and coral lips. The face's abstract nature is further amplified by two variously sized green shapes, the larger of which joins with a pink-orange-and-cream sculpture in the foreground of the photograph. These seemingly cavalier cuts disorient the viewer. The fragmentation of each differently angled mirror combined with the segmented figure, force foreground and background to collapse upon one another, such that the space described within the smooth photographic bounds is unstable and unpredictable. Space doesn't layer but rather recedes. Historical and psychological narratives embedded in the artist's materials collapse as well. It is difficult to see exactly what is a reflection and what is not. What are we seeing in reverse? Is the figure's face really eclipsed by the painted portrait—a kind of abstract persona behind which some authentic form awaits? Within the unified photograph, the coincidence of new impressions imposed by outside stimulation, filtration methods based on past associations and reflection conveys a real moment of consciousness.

Originally a video and installation artist, Trepp began painting in 2009 and in 2012 made a rule. Not only would she refuse to buy new art materials, she was no longer allowed to bring anything new—including art materials—into her studio.

With that pact, the autonomous nature of her studio space and practice grew, just as an aesthetic language congealed around those limitations. There were certain exceptions. Trepp's clothes could change; she could bring in food and drinks as needed, but otherwise she has been relying on the materials of her past artistic production to fuel new projects. There are two reasons for this rule: It is a political gesture on the one hand, allowing Trepp to resist the pressure to consume in one area of her life. The gesture is also practical; as a parent, saving money is paramount. Privileging frugality as a creative practice becomes a game, a challenge. How many times can you repaint the same canvas? Or recycle a section of a former photograph? As colors run out, Trepp's pallet changes as well. What colors she may have preferred three years ago are long gone. Through this act of making-do, a co-evolutionary process unfolds. Generations of her past works make strange and unexpected appearances, showing up in Trepp's new installations like characters from a novel. Always modified slightly, or serving some other compositional purpose, they nevertheless carry with them the baggage of prior contexts. Trepp does not make ageless objects; like the floor she stands on, materials in her studio move, slipping seamlessly between final art objects and raw materials for future production with only the camera to document that passage. Presumably there will be a point when prospective surfaces are no longer usable, when there are no more chinks or leftover paints, all the mirrors broken and photographs clipped into smaller and smaller segments. Presumably her studio

will one day be potential-less. Within this paradigm of limited resources, new possibilities emerge despite (or against) the specter of exhaustion. One cannot help but wonder—is it possible?—if perhaps Trepp's creative innovation might unearth new innovations forever.

The project bumps into culture's hierarchical assessment of material and entropy, an approach so ingrained as to be automatic: It seems obvious, for instance, that the failed painting should be discarded, just as the broken frame, computer or torn up plastic bag are best banished to a landfill. In order for innovation to be endlessly possible, the whole category of "trash" would have to be turned over, encouraging society to examine the opportunities that debris might contain. The abstract *Friend* portraits were composed on loose pages once scattered across Trepp's studio floor. Their unique personalities congeal on the picture plane, influenced directly by the artist's footprints and errant materials that each page happened to absorb by proxy, recording the periphery of her practice. Think of those patterns as the marginalia of her thought, not entirely linguistic, but still meaningful. By inscribing faces upon the surface of each loose page, Trepp anthropomorphizes the surface, reminding viewers not only about the nuanced moods embedded in a day of work, but also how impactful creative acts can be upon their environment. Extracted from their point of origin, the faces appear in the gallery like strange artifacts from another world, members of an audience Trepp imported to witness the event of her show.



A tender moment, 2015, archival inkjet print, 36" x 50"



Sitting On It, 2015, archival inkjet print, 50" x 36"

Her studio's animistic energy appears again in Trepp's *Rotation* (2016), a stop-motion animation where abstract figures move before the camera as though of their own accord. To capture that movement, the camera turns on its axis, performing a 360-degree rotation with roughly 700 photographs over the course of its cycle. Reinforcing the conviction of her rules, photographic documentation of this process features Trepp's jerry-rigged rotation device built from leftover scraps of wood, nails, screws and a homemade weight system. Under the gaze of the camera, an elaborate choreography unfolds. These figurative objects, brought to life through their movement, include a cast of paintings, mirrors and sculptures reassembled from other purposes, and coming to life here like a complex and almost oceanic chorus. As is often the case in different worlds, the time this video took to produce—roughly 60 days—far exceeds its modest duration, offering an experience that—like Trepp's photographs—is deep rather than long. Within the intersection of the exhibition's three elements—seated figures, faces and animation—visitors peer into the finite stage upon which artistic gestures are choreographed.

These gestures don't come out of nowhere. Trepp works directly through an awareness of lineage, poised between her daughter's future and two preceding generations of matriarchal painters. In response to her predecessors, Trepp's first foray into painting was a series of self-portraits produced on one mirror. The mirror was wiped clean at the

end of each painting, privileging the documentation of her process over any final painted object. With that beginning, figurative representation has remained central to Trepp's process, as is reflection and ephemerality. The medium of paint is inextricably tied to familial ideas and her daughter, Maxine, is also addressed in this new body of work. An awareness of the future demands questions about the excessive consumerist path humanity has devised for itself. It is unlikely, for instance, that the human species can continue to produce and use as much plastic as it does without furthering the crisis of ecological devastation. Perhaps in answer, Trepp performs a different model, proposing alternative strategies. What if everything, not even just plastic, was recycled? She demonstrates this possibility by example, like a parent modeling good behavior. But Maxine also has a neurological difference that makes her extra sensitive to sound. Think for a moment about all of the supermarket soundtracks, the buses with vocal instructions, the cars, the televisions, the airports, the radio stations, the air shows. At a certain point you have to wonder what it is humanity is so afraid of in its vehement mission to fill social space with noise—a thing so customary as to be easily taken for granted. Yet so many of these sounds bear with them agendas, urging the population to buy more, again, to be more stimulated. By empathizing with Maxine's condition, the strange hyper-reality of our world snaps into focus; did we all just wake up inside a Ray Bradbury novel? Mirrors fragment and reflect the picture plane once more in *Head in Hands* (2015), playing with

the intersection of a room's corner. The soles of two sneakers are readily visible at the bottom of the picture—these connect with an angled painting that reads like a figure's black torso in yellow underwear crouching over itself, red hands covering the head—or more specifically, the ears. The figure seems to brace itself against the fragmentation it inhabits. If Trepp cannot guard her child's experience against this barrage of influence, if she cannot envision a healthy future for society, she can at least create a laboratory within which to innovate pragmatic idealism. Suddenly, her studio becomes radical in its fierce insistence of potential.

What's remarkable about Trepp's studio floor is the way one feels that each aspect of it—the wooden slats, burnished and worn in unevenly where they are visible; or the irregular surface, thick like paint that dried fast; or the various residues of dirt, oil and ambiguous stains that then mix with more recent colorful chalk powders and paint smudges from its tenure as an artist studio. This floor could be an abstract painting in its own right, capturing a rich intersection of American industrial practices, haphazard individual accidents and the deer trails of Trepp's artistic thinking. How strange to enter a space and tune into such a complex topography. The old industrial warehouse in Chicago's Garfield Park embodies the history of Midwestern commerce, America and perhaps even global economics. The logics attending that network are embedded in large boned architecture—the thick warm brick, the floors, the open windows, the trains nearby. The fact that

this building has since been reinvented as an artist studio reflects the ways in which the industrial market changed, moving off-shore, even as it left these dinosaur buildings behind. In effect the location complements Trepp's postulated frugality, for here too she relies on what has already come to pass, acknowledging patterns set in motion years, decades and centuries before, without succumbing to the limitations they espouse. Perhaps we can think about the artistic act as a kind of feral emergence—something that intervenes upon already-existing infrastructures and plays-to-inhabit, invigorate and resist. A co-evolutionary thought coming into old matter that common sense would designate useless. Trepp's latest exhibition builds from the debris of personal and industrial production and, through a suite of private acts, insists upon the future.

Caroline Picard is a Chicago-based writer and curator. She is executive director of The Green Lantern Press and co-directs Sector 2337.



One Two One, 2016, archival inkjet print, 34" x 50"



Here we are. Here I am., 2016, archival inkjet print, 36" x 50"



RBF, 2015, archival inkjet print, 29" x 40"



Head in Hands, 2015, archival inkjet print, 50" x 39"



Friend, 2016, pastel on paper, 11" x 19"



Images above: *Friend*, 2016, pastel, india ink, guache on paper, 11" x 18"



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The Cleve Carney Art Gallery would like to thank Selina Trepp for creating this wonderful exhibition. We would also like to thank Caroline Picard for her thoughtful essay. Additionally we would like to acknowledge the work of Mara Baker, David Oullette, Jahari Thompson, Jacob Welsh, Cecelia Soto, Ariel Von Gorski and Abbas Hussein as well as the staff of the MAC for their support in putting this show together.

Justin Witte
Director and Curator
Cleve Carney Art Gallery

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Cover image: *Interior shot of Selina Trepp's studio, 2016*

Inside cover images: *Still from Rotation, 2016, HD video*



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