



Onsite [at] OCAD U

2013

No Dull Affairs [Exhibition Catalogue]

Smith, Lisa Deanne

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BIOS

Karen Lofgren is a Toronto-born Los Angeles-based artist who received her MFA from CalArts and an AOCAD from OCAD University. Solo exhibitions include Machine Project, Pitzer Art Galleries, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, royale projects : contemporary art and Armory Center for the Arts. Group exhibitions include Los Angeles County Museum of Art, High Desert Test Sites and Human Resources for Pacific Standard Time. Her work has been featured in Artforum critic's picks, LA Weekly, and the LA Times, as well as books, catalogues, and album covers. Awards include Canada Council for the Arts and Durfee Foundation grants.

Vanessa Maltese lives and works in Toronto and holds a BFA from OCAD University. The National Winner in the 2012 RBC Canadian Painting Competition, she has presented two solo exhibitions at Toronto's Erin Stump Projects. Maltese will soon be exhibiting in a group show at Wil Aballe Art Projects in Vancouver.

Jillian McDonald is a Canadian artist living in New York. Her work was featured in a 2013 radio documentary by Paul Kennedy on CBC's Ideas, titled *Valley of the Deer*; has been reviewed in publications including The New York Times, Art Papers, The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, and Border Crossings; and appears in several books including *Better Off Dead* edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro. In 2012 she represented Canada at the Glenfiddich international residency in Dufftown, Scotland.

Lisa Deanne Smith is engaged in a cultural practice that moves between multiple mediums — art, curation, writing and arts administration — exploring issues of voice, experience, community and power. Recent curatorial projects at Onsite [at] OCAD University include *Ads for People: Selling Ethics in the Digital Age* and *I Wonder* by Marian Bantjes.

Presented with support from Glenfiddich Single Malt Scotch Whiskey.

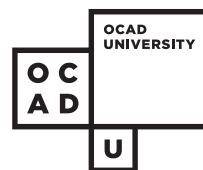
Acknowledgements

Thanks to Andy Fairgrieve at Glenfiddich Artist-in-Residence and Beth-Anne Thomas at William Grant & Sons Distillers Ltd; Rick Royale at royale projects : contemporary art; Erin Stump at Erin Stump Projects; the Onsite Advisory Board chaired by Michael Haddad; Lucas Soi at Soi Fischer; Vladimir Spicanovic at OCAD U; Erin Smithies; Rouzbeh Akhbari and especially the artists: Karen Lofgren, Vanessa Maltese and Jillian McDonald.

Onsite [at] OCAD U
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www.ocadu.ca/onsite

Gallery Hours
Tuesday to Friday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Saturday, noon to 6 p.m.

*Admission to the gallery
and all related events is free.*



Above: Jillian McDonald, *Valley of the Deer*, 2012



Above: Vanessa Maltese, *Lasso apparatus* (detail), 2013

EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 6 TO 9 P.M.

Opening Reception

SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 1 P.M.

Artists Panel with Karen Lofgren, Vanessa Maltese and Jillian McDonald

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 6:30 P.M.

Insite Curator's Tour with Lisa Deanne Smith

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 6:30 P.M.

Insite Exhibition Tour with Lucas Soi, Director/ Curator at Soi Fischer.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 6:30 P.M.

Insite Exhibition Tour with Vladimir Spicanovic, Dean, OCAD University's Faculty of Art

Cover: Karen Lofgren, *Stabilizer #2*, 2012, Photo credit: Robert Crouch

NO DULL AFFAIRS

KAREN LOFGREN, VANESSA MALTESE
AND JILLIAN MCDONALD

WEDNESDAY JUNE 19 TO SATURDAY OCTOBER 12, 2013

NO DULL AFFAIRS

Balls out confidence is needed to make art work an aesthetic event. In saying “balls out” I am not referring to a macho practice but to the origin of “balls out” which refers to running a steam engine train at maximum speed via a governor or a speed limiter — when going full out without crashing, the instrument’s balls rise to the top. This kind of confidence and balance marks the work of Karen Lofgren, Vanessa Maltese and Jillian McDonald in *No Dull Affairs*. They create bold relationships with their materials, site and audience.

Most viewers relish the pleasure of a good illusion, sleight of hand or optical trick but it takes more to make one ponder a work of art for a long time after viewing. Maltese’s paintings and sculptures attract us with the skill of her perceptive play but they stick in one’s mind in a way that keeps us thinking. I was first introduced to her work three years ago. My first impression was that her paintings were brave but humble gemlike representations of tiny sculptures she had built from wood, paper and scraps of detritus. Her paintings thoroughly investigate the formal aspects of painting — point, line, shape, value and colour with her sculptures exploring mass, scale, material and motion. She builds relationships between the paintings and sculptures that create a wonderful tension in the viewer as they experience similar motifs in two and three dimensions. In *No Dull Affairs* Maltese expands her carefully constructed, spare language to directly include the site — the gallery as a frame. Historically her work draws from abstract painters like Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, minimalists such as Sol LeWitt and Jo Baer but her concerns are fully rooted in today. What is artistically relevant when the “new,” as was explored historically in the avant-garde movements of our recent past, is arguably no longer possible? It is important to situate Maltese’s work as raising questions and provoking discussion — the individual works she creates are less important than the relationships she creates between them.

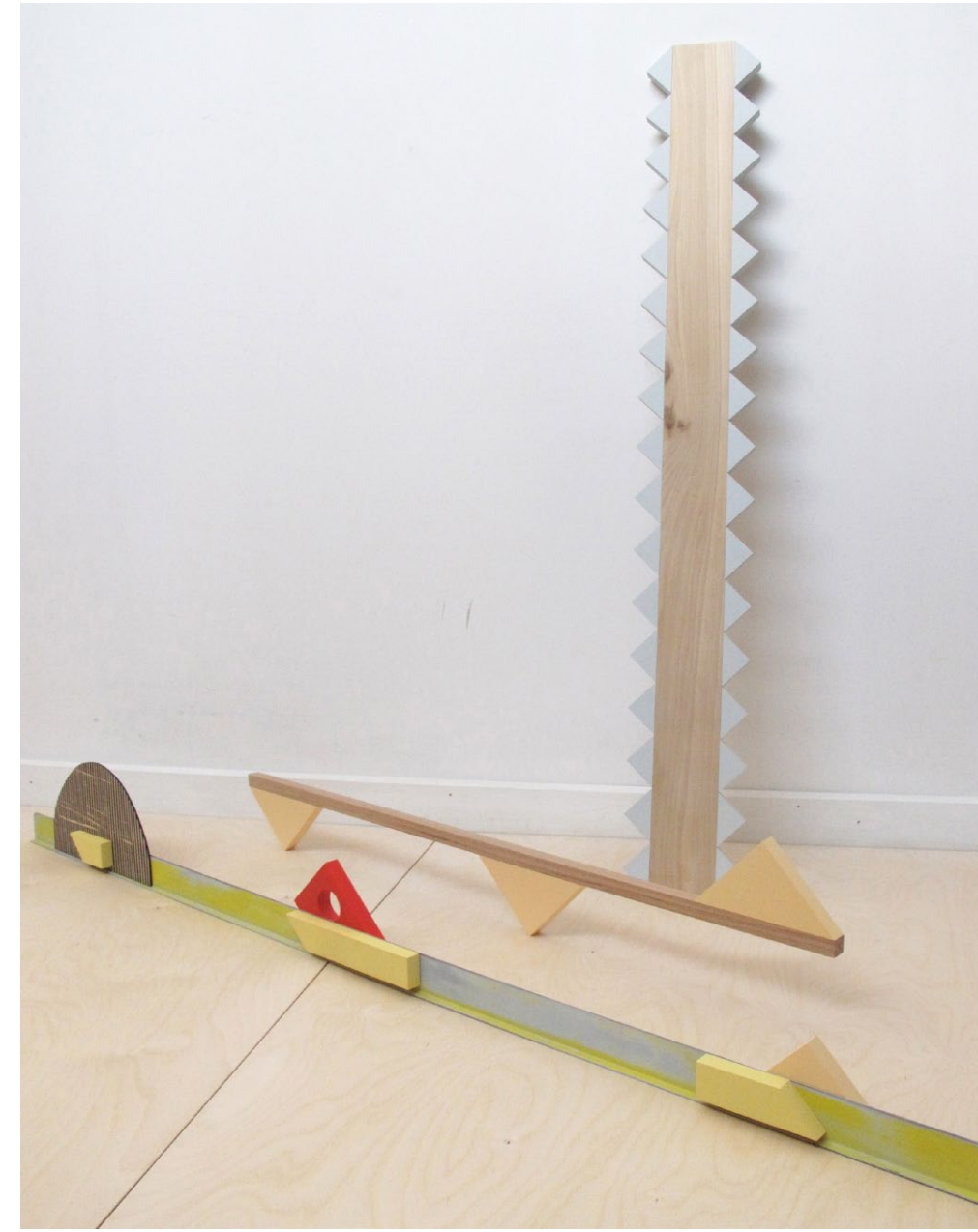
“I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited.”¹

—JORGE LUIS BORGES



Karen Lofgren, *Pole Extrusions*, 2012, Photo credit: Robert Crouch

Jillian McDonald produced, *Valley of the Deer*, a 48:30 minute video, at the Glenfiddich International Artist’s Residency in Dufftown, Scotland. The hauntingly beautiful landscape dominates the work: its slightly out of focus trees vibrate with energy; a rainbow divides a darkened sky; impenetrable water holds secrets and in the background are the ever present rolling hills with shadowy valleys. Much has happened on this land over the years; its myths inform the figures in the video. The figures do not speak but sway and move slowly in the landscape wearing traditional Scottish garb and animal masks. There is a suggestion of narrative, just enough to keep the viewer wanting more. The beauty of the natural landscape holds you and the haunting music composed by Dave Roberts, sung by Ealeen Strathdee with pipes and drums by the Dufftown and Area Pipe Band lulls and relaxes you. Upon my first viewing, I struggled at the ten minute mark. I wanted to walk away — not enough was happening. I am busy, so many things to do. 48:30 is a long time for a video without dialogue. But *Valley of the Deer* is seductive and I relaxed, lured by its power and allowed myself to experience the world at a different pace. It is in this relationship between the viewer and the video that the artwork is made. It sets the framework for the brain to be less rational. I am conscious of the film tropes at work in the beautiful landscape, the traces of ancient myth and the hints of horror that play gently with my anxiety. *Valley of the Deer* sets the perfect context for the important things that I never seem to have the time to think about — like magic and wonder. It is lovely to be aware of how a sense of wonder is being constructed and to still allow it to happen.



Vanessa Maltese, Installation of: *Primary Track; Zag; and Zig - Part A* (front to back), 2013

Lofgren’s artwork is unquestionably balancing at full speed as it fearlessly draws from minimalism, alchemy, conceptual art, divination, world events, deconstructivist architecture, philosophy, sculpture and science. Her work is serious yet lighthearted. In *No Dull Affairs* are elegant, fleshy, tall cylindrical sculptures from the *Extrusion Series*. They reference core samples extracted from the earth to determine its safety by measuring the earth’s solidity, composition and stability. Seismic action as caused by earthquakes, or other rapid loading, at times creates liquefaction in the soil, a phenomenon in which the strength and firmness is reduced. Think of the news images we have all seen of a building or vehicle being swallowed by the ground during an earthquake. Liquefaction also describes the transcendental, ecstatic state of mind achieved in religion when a believer connects with their entity.

“While it is scientifically known that blood once removed from the body soon coagulates and eventually spoils, and since this natural reaction was common knowledge among the medical faculty of the Middle Ages, a claim made by them of remarkable liquefactions can hardly be ignored and would seem to indvicate a transcendence of their experience. And in our own day, the specimens that are still active are no less scientifically inexplicable than they were centuries ago, even amidst intense scientific investigation.”²

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—LISA DEANNE SMITH

Tying fate, faith and chance into the process of creating these sculptures, Lofgren chooses some of their colours by pendulum, a ritual in which a sacred item is placed on a chain or ribbon decisions are based on how the pendulum swings. Responding to the architecture of Onsite and placed discreetly on existing corners are Lofgren’s *Stabilizers*. Resembling semiprecious, black hematite that has grown, grid like, on inconspicuous junctures of the interior walls, these sculptures become a metaphorical keystone connecting symbols of support with a conceptual foundation.

“Music, feelings of happiness, mythology, faces worn by time, certain twilights and certain places, want to tell us something, or they told us something that we should not have missed, or they are about to tell us something; this imminence of a revelation that is not produced is, perhaps, ‘the aesthetic event’.”³

—JORGE LUIS BORGES

The work in *No Dull Affairs* references historical predecessors, seduces with craftsmanship and ultimately includes the viewer in its completion, creating a moment difficult to pin down with language without making it disappear — a balls out balancing act.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ *Guardian profile* “Jorge Luis Borges” 22 July 2008 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/10/jorgeluisborges>
- ² <http://www.miraclesofthechurch.com/2010/10/blood-miracle-of-st-januaris-gennaro.html>
- ³ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Wall and the Books,” “Labyrinths,” New Directions Publishing, 1962