



Christie Neptune,  
*She Fell from  
Normalcy*, 2017,  
digital video, color,  
sound, 7 minutes  
37 seconds.

Neptune's work tends more toward the diaristic than the didactic (an inner monologue being the main audio component), but it points to tensions deeply embedded within art history—namely, representation and oppression within gallery spaces. In his 2000 introduction to Brian O'Doherty's seminal 1986 text *Inside the White Cube*, Thomas McEvilley notes that the "eternity" of time and aesthetics suggested by the insular white cube also "suggests the eternal ratification of the claims of that caste or group sharing that sensibility. . . . It censors out the world of social variation." The voice-over in *She Fell from Normalcy* echoes this sentiment, seemingly coming from everywhere and nowhere, and contributing to a clinical, vaguely dystopian atmosphere. In a discussion of "normalcy," the narrator defines "conforming to the type" as also "serving to establish a standard: Hegemony." Amplified within the gallery space, the voice speaks to its surroundings, which, as O'Doherty writes, frame an "exclusive audience, [and] rare objects difficult to comprehend—here we have a social, financial, and intellectual snobbery . . . [modeling] our modes of assigning value, our social habits at large."

What does it mean, then, to fall from normalcy, to damn or be damned by the white cube? In one sense, Neptune has already been damned and is subverting the gallery's status simply by having a show in one; a recent City University of New York study identified less than 10 percent of New York gallery artists as black, less than 20 percent as artists of color, and roughly 30 percent as women. O'Doherty (like others since) traced the ironic trajectory of artists coming to see the space around art—its supports, values, and limits—as something to be mirrored or turned inside out; Neptune works at those limits, visually modeling the institution's fissures and, crucially, showing how its parameters have also been embedded in her own conscience.

Roughly halfway through Neptune's video, a mechanized voice (a sonic shift away from the inner monologue) instructs the two women to find a crack in the wall. They run in parallel strides toward the breach and look through it, into the abyss of the camera lens. The women's previously clone-like behavior (an indication of subjection or fetishization: "dark, erotic . . . incompetent . . . fallacious," as the voice says) morphs into curious observation. Is the way out through the viewer, who can step outside of the constraints of the white cube? What other worlds might be possible? (Or, as O'Doherty asks, "Is the artist who accepts the gallery space conforming with the social order?")

*She Fell from Normalcy* does not provide concrete answers—the women never escape the cube, and the video loops again and again, staggered across its three screens—but its ambiguity is a resolution in itself, suggesting that this psychic damage cannot be solved through reparation or flight.

—Mira Dayal

## Doreen Garner and Kenya (Robinson)

### PIONEER WORKS

Doreen Garner and Kenya (Robinson) offered a challenge to deep-seated legacies of revered white men in America with their exhibition "White Man on a Pedestal." After collaborating for two years, the artists put together eight new sculptures and installations (all works 2017) at the largest scale of either of their careers to date. As stories of sexual misconduct and harassment proliferate against the white supremacist backdrop of Donald Trump's presidency—including allegations against former *Artforum* copublisher Knight Landesman—it has become clear that white men won't descend from their pedestals willingly.

The white man in (Robinson)'s work is intentionally generic, a proxy that originated with her project #WHITEMANINMYPocket. In 2013, while teaching at the Brooklyn Children's Museum, she removed the briefcase-toting white man from a "pretend professionals" toy set. The figurine, which she named Dave Fowler, became a fetish object of whiteness that she carried with her everywhere, imagining an expropriation of his wealth of privileges. Meanwhile, Garner has been researching a particular historical white man, the sadistic gynecologist J. Marion Sims, and his brutal experiments on enslaved women. Garner's skinned statue of Sims (the original is located near the 103rd Street entrance to New York's Central Park) is hewn from nubby foam and covered in bloodred polyurethane. His mangled silicone skin was also on view, slumped in an open casket.

A dozen silicone sculptures dangle in Garner's *Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting*, suspended by meat hooks from an eight-foot-square metal frame. Brown body parts such as hands and breasts are identifiable among fleshy mounds, sutured and stapled together, and splitting open to reveal a riot of deftly manipulated beads and pearls. Accompanying the piece was a red velvet vitrine of real gynecological tools, loaned from the Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. The metal hooks, clamps, and blades make all the more palpable the atrocities of Sims's operations, which were performed without anesthesia and were often medically unnecessary. Garner's merciless determination to communicate this subject matter can be felt even from a distance; her carnal forms rang with hurt through Pioneer Works' huge exhibition hall. Sharp metal pins wound as they bedeck the *Rack* sculptures—the pins were added by the artist to protect her breast-like forms from being fondled by the public. Garner embeds herself in a paradox: The violence she dramatizes



Doreen Garner, *Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting (detail)*, 2017, silicone, foam, glass beads, fiberglass, insulation, steel meat hooks, steel pins, pearls, 96 × 96 × 96".

is both morally repulsive and visually enticing. This tension is most evident in *A Fifteen Year Old Girl Who Would Never Dance Again*; *A White Man in Pursuit of the Pedestal*. A maimed leg spins seductively on a silver table, dripping with the shining globules of some hellish fruit.

In contrast to Garner's intricate handiwork, (Robinson)'s seventeen-foot-high monolith *Twelve Thousand Maniacs!* takes a manufactured material approach. The artist ordered ten thousand tiny plastic "Daves" to be mass-produced in China. (Robinson)'s regimented figurines collapse into a chaotic heap at the base of this grand monument, visualizing the thrill of white patriarchy folding under the weight of its own constitutive fallacies. A tragicomic mood pervaded (Robinson)'s *Altar*, an ironically tender funerary arrangement of candles and plastic flowers for Dave, lit with a glinting disco ball. Even more Daves could be found in *If I Were King. . .*, zip-tied together to form two curtains. But, unlike the industrially produced army in *Twelve Thousand Maniacs!*, these are misshapen casts molded by the artist herself. (Robinson) treated her subject most successfully in *Maniacs!*, where the careful orchestration of his homogeneity can be seen clearly as an endlessly reproduced blankness.

Gleeful fantasies of retribution underlay "White Man on a Pedestal," exultant in its impressive production. Yet the daunting scale of the work tempered any celebratory tone. Each Dave was stamped with the word SHARE, implying the shared task of dismantling systemic injustices. While the real statue of Sims is scheduled for removal by the city, Garner and (Robinson) reject the hegemonic fixedness of monumentality itself. After the exhibition, (Robinson) ritually buried the Daves, yet no matter how many times she lays him to rest, his synthetic specter hardly degrades. Garner's slippery monuments bring our nation's deep trauma to the fore, bespangled with raw wounds and pierced by the threat of more violence to come.

—Vanessa Thill

## CINCINNATI

### Glenn Kaino

#### CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

The literalness of Glenn Kaino's recent work is surprising. His mid-career retrospective "A Shout Within a Storm," on view through April 22, includes the work *The Winds of Revolt (Selma) 2*, 2016, in which Kaino has rendered in charcoal on a waxed paper ground an iconic 1965 photograph of Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, and other civil rights leaders marching arm in arm. Heat applied to the upper part of the composition has caused wax to drip down, partially distorting the image. In *The Past Has Not Yet Happened (Panama)*, 2017, Kaino used a tactile alcohol transfer process to degrade the appearance of an antique map. There is no missing the point of these heavy-handed exhibition didactics: Don't allow past social-justice strides to fade, *The Winds of Revolt* seemingly insists; geopolitical boundaries are violently wrought, *The Past Has Not Yet Happened* ostensibly contends. Message received, but the work itself doesn't have much bite.

Occurring on the heels of a show of entirely new work at Kavi Gupta in Chicago, this exhibition marks a stark shift in Kaino's practice from the poetic to the prosaic. Yet the motive for this change is unclear. An example of a lyrical earlier work is *Excalibur 2*, 2014 (which is not part of the display at the Contemporary Arts Center): The efficacy of the sculpture, a trompe l'oeil-painted bronze slingshot, is foiled due to its projectile pocket being embedded in a wall. *Excalibur 2* could be viewed as symbolic of individual struggles against oppression (think



Glenn Kaino, (*Sign*)  
*A Pen for Every Player*  
(detail), 2017, wood,  
plaster, video (color,  
sound, 1 minute).  
Installation view.  
Photo: Tony Walsh.

David and Goliath), or as a potential source of empowerment, if only someone stepped forth to wrest the slingshot from its confines. *A Shout Within a Storm*, 2014, which does figure among the two dozen works featured in the show, consists of a suspended conical arrangement of uniform, laterally oriented copper-plated steel arrows that converge in space at a point positioned at the height of the average viewer's head. The work exudes the appearance of arrested energy. The viewer can look at *A Shout* from behind the cone's base, thus positioning herself as part of the storm of arrows, or she can position herself at the cone's apex, subject to its deadly force (unless one were to halt its onslaught with an outstretched hand). A hint of the imaginative remains in *Sign (A Pen for Every Player)*, 2017. A Chippendale-style three-drawer writing desk with two legs removed from one of its short sides sits askew in the gallery space. Numerous plaster casts of holstered pens—like those found in banks and post offices—radiate from the center of the table, which is occupied by what seems to be a plaster cast of a stack of paper. In a one-minute video projected on an adjacent wall, one sees the sculpture in another space. Kaino enters the frame and briefly lifts the table to an erect, balanced position, his legs standing in for the absent table legs. The wall label tells us that this gesture consequently temporarily alleviates the human burden that is the table-destabilizing by-product of treaties and executive actions made and signed with pens like these on tables like this. As in *A Shout*, the artist wants us to feel like we are part of the art: Could we, too, lift the table? But in watching Kaino do so, one wonders: Is he truly lifting the burden of oppression? Or, in propping up an oppressive apparatus, is he (are we) simply reinforcing power structures and our own complicity in them?

A similarly ambiguous political message manifests throughout Kaino's prolonged engagement with the legacy of Tommie Smith and the athlete's podium protest at the 1968 Summer Olympics, when Smith and John Carlos performed the Black Power salute. Pieces related to this multimedia project—for instance, *Untitled (Bridge)*, 2017—constitute a considerable portion of the retrospective. Kaino, who initially wished to work outside the commercial gallery system, has since turned to the "changemakers" of Kickstarter to raise funds for a related initiative to host drawing workshops for children; their sketches will be made into a stop-action animation that will be included in a documentary about Smith that Kaino is codirecting. Our clicking "Back this project" is a popular capitalist sign of support that makes us part of this venture. But is this just another lackluster gesture?

—Jeffrey Saletnik