

Tough, Raw and Paradoxical: Fabienne Lasserre's New Sculpture

by Thomas Michelli on November 16, 2013



Fabienne Lasserre
Look - Meet, 2013
acrylic polymer, linen, steel,
cardboard, hardboard and acrylic paint
54.5 x 48.5 x 8 in

Fabienne Lasserre makes objects she calls sculptures, but they could very well be paintings. They could also be remnants from a demolition site or detritus from a car bomb explosion.

Lasserre's surfaces are tough and raw. They are painted primarily in black and white, though there are prominent passages of Naples yellow, cadmium yellow, sea green and crimson. Her materials include acrylic polymer, linen, steel, cardboard, hardboard, Flexiglas, copper tubing, and acrylic and enamel paint. The paint acts as a leavening agent, allowing large swaths of the otherwise hard-bitten surfaces to luxuriate in textures that are alternately delicate and lush.

The artist's current exhibition at Jeff Bailey Gallery (it ends today) is called *Here Like a Story Like a Picture and a Mirror*. In an artist's statement included in the press release, Lasserre writes:

*Here are pieces to be looked at while moving. Like a wall seen
streetside, a corner turned, the pavement scanned while
absorbed in the environment rather than occupying it.*

It is Lasserre's harsh, seductive urbanism that makes these pieces irresistible. They are visual paradoxes: ostensibly slight and fragile yet bristling with a survivor's scars and swagger.

"*Look - Meet*" (2013) is a black and green work a little more than four and a half feet tall and four feet wide. It looks as if it were made from a crumbled piece of cardboard — an Occupy Wall Street sign retrieved and repurposed — but on closer inspection, its actual materials, which include steel and linen as well as cardboard and hardboard, imbue it with an imposing strength that approaches the architectural.

One of the more disorienting pieces is "*Now After Now*" (2013), in which the shorter of its two vertically bifurcated sections — a wing-like flap — is bent back to stabilize the work. This may allow the piece to stand upright, like a tabletop frame, but it also contributes to its sense of brokenness and fragility.

The sculpture is painted in overlapping planes of black and white, which accentuate its off-kilter, even comedic physical shape, while the upper, black portion is graced with ghostly white curves and loops that feel simultaneously ephemeral and sensuous, cockeyed and sophisticated.

They appear to be the afterimage of coils of rope that had been laid on the surface, lightly spray-painted and then removed, leaving their shadows swimming around the black expanse like invisible glowworms. "*Now After Now*," with its black and white planes zigzagging across the surface and its faint traces of white looping through the black upper ranks, comes across as a shambling, awkward presence that somehow manages an elegant spin across the dance floor.



Fabienne Lasserre
Now After Now, 2013
acrylic polymer, linen, steel, cardboard,
hardboard, enamel paint and acrylic paint,
61.5 x 31 x 31 in

Regarding the "mirror" reference in her title, the artist concludes her statement with:

Like mirrors, the sculptures exist through others and context. They partake in a representation that is not reproduction or illusionism. Things are at arm's length and touchable. One must look around, behind, up and over. The sculptures are facts that the senses explain.

This is actually a pretty accurate assessment of how these sculptures work on the viewer. The idea of the sculptures "exist[ing] through others and context" is borne out in the installation, in which the pieces are turned sideways to the gallery entrance, emphasizing their planar aspects. Your initial sense of them is that they are so light and precarious that they could be blown over by a gust of wind. But as you move through them, and their widths broaden with the shift in perspective, you realize how authoritatively they carry their frontal force.

Another reversal in perception stems from their superficial resemblance to the junk aesthetic of artists such as Cordy Ryman and Doug Weathersby. Lasserre's sculptures, despite their battered appearance, exhibit none of the willful incompleteness found in the work of the other two artists. They may be roughhewn, knockabout and improvisational, but whatever propositions they set forth are consummately investigated. Nothing remains undigested; the post-consumer aspect of the work is acknowledged in the scruffiness of its materials, then submerged in the act of art making.

Lasserre's lightness of touch, which suffuses her formidable sculptural strengths and formal intelligence with a disarming vulnerability, cuts both ways. By avoiding the temptation to make a grand statement, she has focused her process on the inexhaustible argument between form and material. Her refusal to force the sculptures into a terrain beyond her notion that they are "facts that the senses explain" endows them with an inner-directed combativeness that's bold, refreshing and raggedly beautiful.

Fabienne Lasserre: *Here Like a Story Like a Picture and a Mirror* continues at the Jeff Bailey Gallery (625 West 27th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through today.