

**WOMEN** WITH  
THEIR **WORK**

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# REFLEC- TIONS

SPACE ONE ELEVEN

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# WOMEN WITH THEIR WORK

ANNA CAMPBELL

ELISABETH PELLATHY

STACY LYNN WADDELL

*Reflections*, the second exhibition in Space One Eleven's series *Women with their Work*, presents the artists Anna Campbell, Elisabeth Pellathy, and Stacy Lynn Waddell. Touching on themes of identity and place, their subject matter varies, from the history of LGBTQ activism, to the topography of rural New York, to the American actress Thelma "Butterfly" McQueen. So too does their media. Campbell adds lightbulbs to etched acrylic mirrors. Pellathy works with experimental digital technologies. And Waddell combines appropriated imagery with watercolor and gilding. Yet though visually and topically distinct, these artists' works provocatively engage elements of reflection to posit questions about perception, translation, and self-representation.

Campbell's *vs. Vanitas* (2014) comprises two rectangular mirrors, like a diptych or pendant pair, each illuminated by four rows of six globe-shaped lightbulbs and etched with text and image. Hung at exactly the same height, each mirror is a near duplicate of the other except for the placement of the bright electric cords and the differing etched designs. The sculpture's title hearkens to the vanitas paintings of the seventeenth century, those pictures filled with skulls, rotting fruit, burning candles, wilted flowers, and other reminders of life's transience. Its form, rectangular panels dotted with glowing globes, recalls lavatory vanities, those sites of self-appraisal, admiration, and critique. Or moreover, a dazzling theatre marquee, for in the lower corner of the right panel, an etching of Judy Garland's billowing pinafore dress from *The Wizard of Oz* floats ethereally, upside down. Diagonally opposite this symbol of Garland, considered an icon of gay culture, Campbell etches a series of phrases borrowed from period accounts of one of the first LGBTQ uprisings that took place in 1959 at Cooper's Donuts in Los Angeles, ten years before the Stonewall riots in New York City. For the left panel the artist also incorporates text describing two other early demonstrations for LGBTQ rights, the 1965 sit-in at Dewey's restaurant in Philadelphia and the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot in San Francisco. Campbell's application of word and image, partially hidden by behind lights that create glare and cast shadows, disrupts the normal mirroring process by rendering us, as viewers, both visible and invisible. We are caught, framed in the present and implicated in history. Instead of a clear image of self, Campbell has said, she creates a "context where constructing self-representation is necessarily done via a pastiche and patchwork of geographies and time."

Pellathy's *Digital Flower, Magenta* (2017) inhabits the windows of Space One Eleven. Perceptible only at night, these videos reflect the artist's experiments in how to represent nature digitally, collapsing boundaries between the organic and artificial. Here Pellathy produces the radiant images by manipulating the frequency of the video signal using the Jones Roster Scanner and Ross Synthesizer. Like *Digital Flower*, the four-channel video *Horizon Line, Trace 2* (2016), exhibited inside the gallery, also emerged from Pellathy's residency at Signal Culture, the experimental media arts center in Owego, New York. Using *Trace*, a Signal Culture app developed by Jason Bernagozzi and Eric Souther, Pellathy created an homage to *La Région Centrale* (1971), Michael Snow's groundbreaking, epochal film of a remote arctic landscape shot with a rotating camera controlled by a robotic arm. Defying the carefully ordered vistas of traditional landscape painting, Snow's camera spins and rolls to create a dizzying, hypnotic experience of the technological sublime. For Pellathy's *Horizon Line*, also a meditation on landscape, she similarly deployed her camera to capture footage of the rural terrain outside of Alfred, New York, then used the

*Trace* app to regenerate it as a series of digital signals. In altering these she offers a further act of translation, rendering the lush countryside as a pattern of undulating, pulsating lines. Pellathy views her process as an exploration of vision and its affect upon experience. In this case, by translating the natural world into a digital sign, she transforms normal modes of perception to advance a deeper understanding of vision that, in turn, may foster a deeper understanding of place.

Waddell's *Damaged Emergency Blanket (for B. McQ.)* (2015) and *Goldenhot Butterfly McQueen* (2015) are glittering tributes to the actor most well-known for her role as Prissy in *Gone with the Wind*. Waddell chose McQueen as a subject upon discovering a wardrobe still from the film of her with her more famous co-star Hattie McDaniel. McQueen's stance in the photograph struck the artist, compelling her to see "a young woman looking beyond her present station to contemplate what's ahead," who persisted despite social and cultural forces "in reimagining a life of nuance and free-range possibilities." McQueen's history becomes a means for Waddell to explore her cultural heritage and its impact on her own identity. *Damaged Emergency Blanket*, crafted by applying gold and aluminum leaf to folded paper to resemble a Mylar space blanket, functions as a shield or suit of armor, an empathetic gesture of protection against those very forces, for McQueen as well for the artist herself. In *Goldenhot Butterfly McQueen* Waddell casts McQueen in the guise of another resilient black woman in history, Saartjie Baartman, known as the Hottentot Venus, who, taken from her African homeland, toured Europe as a theatrical curiosity in the early nineteenth century. Appropriating a historical image of Baartman, Waddell transforms her into a brilliant, life-size luminosity by gilding her sepia-toned body and surrounding her with golden butterflies that alight on her breasts and arm and flutter across an expansive blue-washed background. Gilding makes precious devalued subjects and mundane materials. It also, Waddell explains, creates interesting optical effects. As the light changes, it simultaneously illuminates and eclipses different elements of the artwork. Further, the viewer is drawn in as a shadowy presence manifested through light. In transforming Baartman's body into a reflective, mutable screen, Waddell denies any easy, immediate interpretation of the artwork by forcing multiple shifts of perspective. Uncertainty occurs, possibilities open to suggest the artist's experience expressed in a letter she wrote to McQueen: "The first time I saw you I didn't recognize you. It was sometime much later that I realized that we are nearly the same person or perhaps headed for the same end."

— Jessica Dallow, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Art History  
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