

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Repainting the Readymade

by [William J. Simmons](#) on November 6, 2014



Installation view, 'Melissa Gordon: Mimetic Pleasures' at Boesky East (all images courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery)

Marcel Duchamp's original iteration of "Fountain" was lost shortly after its making. The first "Fountain" survives only as a photograph taken by Alfred Steiglitz in 1917, which was followed by a series of replicas. At the core of the readymade, then, is a central loss highlighted by photographic reproduction. In fact, the myth of modernism, as it relates to the breach ushered in by Duchamp's sculpture, depends for its life on the photograph as a remnant of its existence, a tombstone that marks it for us to find retroactively. Modernism — and with it, all of those grand, masculinist tales — thrives on its own inability to fully materialize or substantiate itself.



Melissa Gordon, "Material Evidence (Tray)" (2014), acrylic on linen , 23 1/2 x 31 1/2 in (click to enlarge)

In [*Mimetic Pleasures*](#) at Marianne Boesky Gallery's new outpost, Boesky East, Melissa Gordon takes up this history in a critical, but never alienating, fashion. Gordon begins by photographing the wayward brushstrokes and marks from cleaning her tools in the studio – on the floors and walls, even in her paint tray. She then repaints them with acrylic on linen, and translation becomes her medium. By starting with the errant, accidental marks that are the refuse of the painterly act, Gordon roots her project in a readymade of her own: the pigments that emerge, as if of their own will, from the flotsam and jetsam of the studio. By photographing these curiously biomorphic forms, Gordon makes another kind of readymade: a documentary image that creates a unified record of the scattered traces of the artist's hand. This begets a doubled trace, pulling us farther away, with each iteration, from the act of creation. However, Gordon once again asserts the primacy of the "original" creative act by repainting these marks as autonomous pieces. The author, once irrevocably dead, returns from an inter-media netherworld, dragging with her the baggage of a multilayered representational mode.

As we take this journey with Gordon, it becomes increasingly difficult to categorize these objects. They have the conceptual heft of a sculpture, the chance function of a photograph, and the gestural presence of a painting. Moreover, Gordon's work is at once elevated to high art and shown to be composed of autonomous reproductions of base materials, much like Duchamp's seminal piece. And there is not just a discursive operation here; each painting contains its own material resistance to the transparency imposed by concept, and the medium, be it photography or painting, acts as an interlocutor of Gordon's transformations.



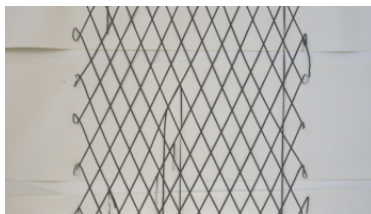
Melissa Gordon, "Material Evidence (Wall)" (2014), acrylic on linen, 23 1/2 x 27 1/2 in

It seems possible to think more critically about the postmodern dogmas with which we have grappled since the 1970s — the loss of authorship and the end of medium specificity. For Gordon, the author and the medium are simultaneously present and lost, begetting a melancholic oscillation between death and life, stasis and regeneration — a drama enacted on the painting's surface. This performance is never fixed, and Gordon leaves us searching in vain for a sure visual or thematic foothold. She pairs "Material Evidence (Wall)" (2014) with "Material Evidence (Wall Zoom In)" (2014) — the latter a painting from a zoomed-in photograph of the former — and, in so doing, creates another realm of signification. The two paintings only become related upon close observation, giving each its own unique, but precarious, authorial status. Gordon's readymades neither reify nor reject the significance of artistic intention or medium integrity, inviting us to critique the multitude of constructed metonyms that have led to the present art historical moment.

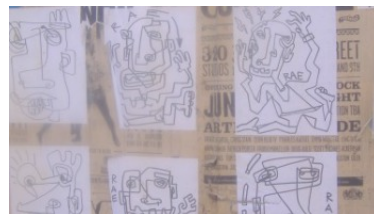
[Melissa Gordon: Mimetic Pleasures](#) continues at Boesky East (20 Clinton St, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through November 9.



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