

Valerie Snobeck's "Reservoirs"

BY DARRYL WEE | JANUARY 11, 2016



Valerie Snobeck, Reservoirs With Stains, Dust and Burns (Filled and Folded)

Like post-industrial readymades with a whiff of perfumed ruins about them, Valerie Snobeck's most recent sculptures of fluid reservoirs extracted from cars have been painstakingly recreated using blown and powdered glass.

These ambiguous, anti-heroic objects are memorials to disused components of now-obsolete technologies, as well as an investigation into how objects acquire different symbolic and associative charges when "translated" across materials.

Born in 1980 in Minnesota and based in New York, Snobeck is an artist on the rise. Her nuanced explorations into the specific material qualities of our contemporary urban environment have won her several invitations to high-profile exhibitions around the world in recent years, including Basel Parcours in 2013 and the 2014 Whitney Biennial in New York.

In advance of her first solo exhibition in Asia at Simon Lee Gallery, Snobeck kindly offered an elaboration on certain aspects of her artistic process, and the carefully calibrated lighting and display conditions that often encase her works.

Your most recent Reservoirs series consist of fluid reservoirs taken from cars and refabricated using blown and powdered glass. Did your interest in these objects and materials come more from their physical, textural qualities or their symbolic, associative ones?

I chose the reservoirs for their use, their hidden placement, and their discreet presence. They vary in shape, yet all of them are designed to perform the same mundane function: to clear up what obstructs our vision.

Metaphorical and associative interpretations are allowed. I tried to make them an aggregate of attributes that could embody both the internal and the external, the cause and the consequence.

So they are made of what surrounds and fills them: the glass, the speed, the burns, solvents, and dust.

Some of your earlier works, such as the partially erased mirrors at your first New York solo show at Renwick Gallery in 2010, were augmented by various skins, sheets, and membrane-like surfaces in various materials, such as crumpled printed plastic, and the clear films used to protect computer and smartphone screens. What do you find fascinating about these various textures, coverings, and pliable surfaces?

These membrane-like surfaces and crumpled printed plastic are the same materials that I used for the Peels, which were shown later, melted onto the walls.

What I find striking about these materials is the fact that we always see through these invisible barriers, yet forget about them. Of course, we can't *fully* see them. Our polished, transparent surfaces accumulate dirt and grease. And we only look at them when it's necessary to clean them.

I think the car windshield is the sublimation of this observation of mine. All the fury of the natural elements is unleashed at it, yet we keep looking through.

Your 2012 show “They Seem Removed” at Thomas Duncan Gallery in Los Angeles featured shiny semi-transparent wall-like diptychs that changed in appearance from gauzy and reflective to impassive and opaque, depending on the time of day and the lighting conditions. Do you respond sensitively to the particular qualities of light in different galleries and cities?

“They Seem Removed” was about blocking the audience's access and vision. If I have not consciously focused on the lighting conditions of my work, I expect that obstructions and transparencies make us re-evaluate these things.

And what can viewers expect for this show in Hong Kong? Will the lighting conditions be calibrated very conscientiously to achieve a certain effect?

For the exhibition in Hong Kong, the lighting will allow for a perfect visual perception of the works.

At your last exhibition with Simon Lee Gallery in London in 2014, “Le Monde, Le Continent, La France, etc..., etc..., La Rue de Bizerte, Moi,” you referred to your series of image transfers of ink jet prints as “skins”. Do you view these as primarily physical, textural entities, or progressively degraded images?

The Peels separate the ink and burlap into temporal layers, and at the same time they combine them with the plastic.

The plastic becomes one with the burlap weave and the photograph, which then becomes one with the wall when melted onto the layers of paint, and so on. Rather than “degraded,” I tend to see them as progressive in their transfer.

“Valerie Snobeck: Reservoirs” runs January 13 through February 11, 2016 at Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong.