

ARTFORUM

Isabelle Cornaro

BALICE HERTLING | PARIS



View of “Isabelle Cornaro,” 2015. Foreground: *Golden Memories*, 2015. Background, from left: *Homonymes IV*, 2015; *Homonymes IV*, 2015; *Homonymes IV*, 2015. Photo: Aurelien Mole.

Isabelle Cornaro’s exhibition “*Homonymes IV*,” the latest in a series that began in 2010 at this same gallery, included four bas-reliefs: three in shades of gray and one, on the opposite wall, in black. These inverted triangular sculptures, covered with various objects, gradually become lower in relief near their bottom points. This structure gives the compositions a more dynamic, even precipitous, rhythm than in the artist’s earlier quadrangular panels.

A long way from a desire to collect and from the Surrealist focus on unique and fetishistic *objets trouvés*, Cornaro’s objects of preference—coins, pieces of silverware, shells, stones, vases, lightbulbs, jewelry, lipsticks, perfume vials—often exist in multiples. As in a film, the elements of this bric-a-brac are not present as such; once accumulated, they are cast together in Hydrocal, transubstantiated so that only a viscous magma remains, a gray, opaque patina that deprives the objects of any Pop

overtones. They seem covered with lava, preserved following a sudden eruption—not still lifes, but fossils of bourgeois civilization.

Despite the formal, material, and chromatic heterogeneity of the original objects, they end up resembling synonyms in a dictionary. It makes no difference if they were found in shopwindows or thrift stores, destined for the home or wider use, items for sale or those that have already been discarded, precious or cheap, unique pieces or items created in series, merchandise or artifacts. They take shape and become nameable only at close range, and are expressed in an anonymous language, free from the personal gesture of the artist who has selected them. Completely unlike merchandise on display, these reliefs bring to mind Baroque tympana reconsidered with a Minimalist sensibility. It is no accident that, in 2011, Cornaro created casts of the facades of a Baroque church, manifesting her fascination for the depth of their surfaces. This work, however, does not look only at the history of art, particularly if one stops to consider what Jean-Luc Godard, one of Cornaro's influences, says in *Goodbye to Language* (2014), paraphrasing Céline: "What's difficult is to fit flatness into depth." For the French director, in other words, there is less depth in 3-D technologies than in a frame from *Citizen Kane*.

One formless sculpture, little more than a crumpled cloth, rested on the floor at the center of the space. There was no sense of gravity, but another Baroque element was present: the fold, wherein the artist's intervention was barely legible. This work, *Golden Memories*, 2015, creates painting beyond the canvas, like an abstract fresco (in blue, red, and purple, the colors of her film *Amplifications*, 2014) that, detached from the vault of a chapel, or more likely from the rough ceiling of the gallery, has fallen to the floor, along with the plaster onto which it had been affixed.

In fact this is a tarp the artist used to protect the floor while she was working on "Reproductions," 2010–15, a series of wall paintings executed in spray paint, in which the forms, in turn, reproduced stills from her abstract film *Floues et colorées* (Hazy and Colorful), 2010. In a succession of recyclings, what we see on the floor are scraps from one work derived from another, a translation of the film to photography to wall painting to sculptural installation, where something is always lost and gained. This gigantic multicolored stain becomes an image of memory, a chromatic breeding ground for the surrounding grisaille, for those objects on the walls that seem to want to resist their fate as mute surrogates.

—*Riccardo Venturi*

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.