

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

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Amie Siegel. *Simulacra In Search of Lost Time*



Amie Siegel, *Fetish*, 2015, view of the exhibition, South London Gallery, London, HD video, 10', color/sound.

"We love only what we do not wholly possess" wrote Marcel Proust in the *The Prisoner*, the fifth volume of his masterpiece *In Search of Lost Time*.

Similar thoughts emerge by observing the works by New York based artist Amie Siegel, presented in her recent exhibition *Strata*, at the South London Gallery.

By analyzing the mechanism through which objects and materials are imbued with powerful cultural and symbolic values, Siegel's complex videos reflect on how the logics of speculative and commercial production act on the constant, typically human desire to own stuff, as a form social and economic statement.

Quarry, the video projected on a cinematic scale in the main room of the gallery, retraces the industrial and vital cycle of a block of marble: originally extracted from deep quarries in the area of Vermont, the raw material reveals its ultimate destiny when transformed in designer furniture adorning a luxury penthouse in Manhattan.

Recalling the symbolic value of beauty and nobility attached to the marmoreal matter since antiquity, the shiny white alabaster shown in *Quarry*, is the element that conceptually links the two main spaces within the film the deep underground and luxury apartments. Between them, Siegel present a solid reflection on the production of value according the criteria of real estate.

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The rigorous formality of the image, along with the dramatic tone of the orchestral soundtrack, create a compact narrative that recounts the diverse hierarchical stages of the marble, from being a simple rock to a luxury item – as if mirroring the unfolding of the tale of the American dream.

But Siegel's work is even more complex than this: through the use of strategies of representation and simulation, *Quarry* is the result of an elaborate combination of original video material and architectural renderings that plays on the rift between fiction and reality. Evoking a feeling of glacial sensuality, the vision of highly polished marble surfaces used to decorate kitchens, bathrooms and floors, and yet not touched by human life, echoes the typical aesthetics of brochures for domestic architecture, or even the interior shots in movies and TV series such as *Shame* and *Black Mirror*. By reclaiming the glossy photorealism proposed by the real estate market, Siegel reflects on the relationship between desire and production, while casting a critical glance on the commodified nature of the aspirations that are deep-seated within potential buyers.



Amie Siegel, *Fetish*, 2015, view of the exhibition, South London Gallery, London, HD video, 10', color/sound.

This combination of an erotic element, with a profound analysis of power dynamics in its various fields – weather social, economic or psychological – characterises Siegel's entire poetics, and it is ultimately realised in the creation of sophisticated cinematic experiences.

On the upper room of the gallery the exhibition continued with a second video, *Fetish*. It documents the annual, meticulous cleaning of Sigmund Freud's entire house in London, transformed into a museum since 1980. Shot in a limpid HD, *Fetish* dives deep into the collection of marvellous artefacts that belonged to the psychoanalyst. Small bronze and ceramic sculptures of Buddha, Sphinxes and Sibille are lined up in the foreground; after that, we see a sequence of images showing furniture details, precious tapestry and ancient vases of the Classical Period. Meanwhile, diligent restorers are dusting and polishing the objects before putting them back again to their placements.

The liturgical repetition of gestures, the careful disposal of the objects on the shelves, the deathly silence broken only by the rhythmic sound of gliding bristles on the surfaces, bring to the fore a deep resemblance between the act of conservation and those ritualistic techniques that usually belong to the religious field.

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Throughout the video, the almost absent human figure is perceived only as labour force, devoutly subjected to the cult of the God-object. Siegel's choice to show such a deliberately obsessive care treatment, replete with religious undertones, right in the house of the controversial psychoanalyst, should be seen as no coincidence. By presenting a morphology of obsessions, *Fetish* shows to the viewer, spaces and objects that are normally accessible only by the employees of Freud Museum. The exclusivity of a world made of beautiful artefacts tickles the fantasy of the public: the viewer, however confined to a voyeuristic role, cannot escape the desire to possess these objects.



Amie Siegel, *Fetish*, 2015, view of the exhibition, South London Gallery, London, HD video, 10', color/sound.

In between *Quarry* and *Fetish*, the third room of the gallery hosted Siegel's recent work, titled *Dynasty 2017*. Leaning on a plinth, the viewer encounters a luscious fragment of pink Italian marble coming from the atrium of the Trump Tower in NY. Personally selected by Ivana Trump, the piece was later auctioned and bought by the artist on Ebay. As if reversing the process of *Quarry*, the marble in *Dynasty* loses its decorative function to return to be a stone with no immediately useful purpose.

Following a thematic line that runs through all of Siegel's works, the elegance of her artistic production is articulated along the tension between the formality of the image and the fleetingness of the (s)objects: despite a deep immersion in the stories of her objects, they never wholly reveal themselves. As a sort of platonic demiurge, Siegel recreates perfect copies of the hermetic world in which the truth of things lies. Aware of being unable to fully capture their essence, the human being – of which the artist acts as a spokesperson – therefore struggles in the process of production and representation in the hope of finding his lost time: [the one spent] in desiring only the gleaming, misleading reflection of reality.

<http://www.artecritica.it/onsite/amie-siegel-eng.html>

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