

Isabelle Cornaro

October 12th through November 24th, 2018

opening on Friday, October 12th
from 2 to 10 PM

For her fourth exhibition at the gallery, Isabelle Cornaro's display of plinths and paintings evokes a landscape, flickering in the light of dusk. Twilight colors, which the artist describes as "both natural and anti-natural," dominate the sharp planes of her five spray-painted plinths (*Untitled, P#14–18*, 2018) and the matted surfaces of her six paintings framed in brass (*Golden Memories*, 2018). The artist's blues and violets are electrified as her yellows and reds fall towards ashy greys and fertile browns.

Color has always been important in Cornaro's work, but perhaps now even more. In preparing this show, she thought about "color anamorphosis" and the impact a change of viewpoint can have on the intensity of a color, and thus the legible identity of a material or object. Twilight has a radical effect on perceptions of color, shape and distance, that fleeting moment before everything goes black. Meanwhile, painted in the bruised palette of menacing clouds, the forms of the artist's plinths are emphatically minimal. Newly separate, they are no longer displayed clinging together in groups, once evocative of the stage or landscape, but as austere, autonomous forms.

Cornaro uses the word "phantom" to describe the paintings *Golden Memories*. A "record of a process, almost like photography," the artist explains that these works capture "a residual aspect of painting, the recording of a moment in the studio." Cornaro has treated *Golden Memories* "like dust, a residue of another practice," and in fact, the paintings, realized on synthetic or wool? floor covering, carry traces—particles of sprayed paint, dust and glue—of the materials the artist used to realize the plinths. With a spray gun, she painted these wooden works, yielding a surface of tiny specks of paint that, from certain angles, recalls a grainy clip of film. "It's a vibrating surface," Cornaro explains, which she likens to a cinematographic "color flicker" by embellishing some of the plinth's horizontal surfaces with clusters of shiny objects (stone and fake stones; metallic bars and chains; plastic animal masks, cut fingers and blood stains). These objects, like those of childhood collections, sparkle in the sunlight but contain no real value.

The elements that Cornaro places on the plinths make reference to materials, such as metals and stones, that are mined from the ground. The physical labor necessary for their extraction generates an added value that multiplies as the materials are processed and put into circulation on global markets. Cornaro's inexpensive, mass-produced objects, are falsified to a certain degree when she dips them in nickel (a key ingredient of pocket change) or otherwise manipulates them in an echo of the forms of objects of greater value. These shining treasures glisten in contrast to the darkness of the underground. Here, for the first time, some of Cornaro's plinths do not carry anything at all. The artist has lightened their loads, allowing their purpose to shift as they stand alone like stellae, tombstones, or weathered monuments. Although Cornaro backs away from expressionism, and any hint of the hand or body, we are emphatically transient amongst her works.

In his recent experimental novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, George Saunders imagines the American President's thoughts as he mourns the loss of his young son: "I was in error when I saw him as fixed and stable and thought I would have him forever. He was never fixed, nor stable, but always just a passing, temporary energy-burst. I had reason to know this. Had he not looked this way at birth, that way at four, another way at seven, been made entirely anew at nine? He had never stayed the same, even instant to instant. He came out of nothingness, took form, was loved, was always bound to return to nothingness."

Cornaro reminds us of the instability of landscape and of color, the violence and fragility inherent in the human condition. What Erwin Panofsky described as the elegiac in the landscapes of Nicolas Poussin, an artist that provides ongoing inspiration for Cornaro, seems present here as a poetic lamentation of form and color. Perhaps life is a color flicker: complete chance, pure brilliance. It is about the "materiality of the thing that you imagine."

- Lillian Davies

- Artist's quotes from conversation at the artist's studio in Paris, September 2018.
- George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, New York: Random House, 2017. p.244