

# BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

ArtSeen

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## (Not So) Still Life

by Kim Power

GLYNDOR GALLERY, WAVE HILL | APRIL 5 – JULY 4, 2016

When Alice crosses over into Wonderland on the other side of the mirror in *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice Found There* (1871) “she began looking about, and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible. For instance, the pictures on the wall next the fire seemed to be all alive.”

The Glyndor Gallery’s exhibition *(Not So) Still Life*, displays the work of fourteen artists who share their interpretations of still life through the mediums of ceramics, photography, video, glass, and paint. Set in Glyndor House at Wave Hill in the Bronx (previously a private home), the show feels very much the mirror image of another well-known institution, the Mauritshuis art museum in The Hague, also once a private residence, which houses several Dutch still life masterpieces of the Golden Age.

In what was once a family dining room, a table is set for a sumptuous meal, Sue Johnson’s *Banqueting Table* (2007 – 16) is just missing the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse from *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). A farcical banquet is laid out in the form of thickly glazed ceramic creations of such dishes as turtle soup (in which a small turtle swims) and a vegetable soup, which is complete with a carrot and its own version of Sprout (from the Green Giant Company) floating on his back. The Pillsbury Doughboy lies



face down in the butter dish, topped with a pat of butter.

Two Mr. Potato Heads lie tête-à-tête awaiting their untimely demise with a look of stunned surprise. Johnson has created a croquembouche-style centerpiece using actual Happy Meal toys at the summit of which stands a vintage Planters Mr. Peanut Butter Maker (ca. 1967). A tablecloth printed with cutlery creates an artificial trompe l'oeil completing this tableau.

Beth Lipman, *Cut Table*, 2014. Glass, wood, glue, and paint. 80 × 72 × 26 inches. Courtesy Claire Oliver Gallery, New York.

Jarring us back from the world of whimsy, the sound of shattering glass sounds from the adjacent room. Ori Gersht's *On Reflection* (2014) is an installation of three high definition screens, each of which play an ongoing loop of a scene of creation and destruction. Created in homage to Jan Brueghel the Elder's colorful and painstakingly realistic paintings of complex flower arrangements, Gersht assembles finely crafted artificial flowers into a bouquet, which is then ensconced in a box of tempered glass that splinters in a crashing symphony of breaking glass that he induces through the application of an electrical current. The process is photographically documented and orchestrated in a random choreography of imagery reflected in the slowly falling glass, which takes on the color of fallen ashes, as it descends into ever decreasing particles only to rise like a phoenix and become whole once again—repeating ad infinitum. It is mesmerizing.

Sensitized by the dissonant sounds in Gersht's videos you would not be blamed to be set on edge by Beth Lipman's *Cut Table* (2014), a precariously arranged clear glass sculpture of bowls, plates, candle holders, and flowers set atop a white table that appears to have been sawed in two. The objects defy the laws of gravity and time, frozen in a silent waterfall as if newly arrived from another dimension in a jumble of rearranged atoms. The manipulation of the laws of physics and reality that take place in Alice's Looking-Glass world seem to exist here as well.

What would the Dutch masters make of this topsy-turvy world? Would they be lured to play with all the technological toys of our epoch? What would they think of our fast food society? Stepping forward through the invisible barrier of history, it seems apropos that the concept of the ephemeral nature of life is portrayed through the technical means of our time to describe the fragile and artificial reality of the 21st century.

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#### CONTRIBUTOR

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