artscope

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THIS IS US:

PORTRAITURE IN SPRINGFIELD

COPLEY SOCIETY CLASS OF '21

STRONG SHOWING IN ATTLEBORO

B. LYNCH'S NEW GILDED AGE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021 Free or $5.99 mailed copy

TIME-BENDING PUPPETRY

B. LYNCH'S SCI-FI WORLD COMES TO LIFE

Fisherman on the Lonely Sea, blue theatrical gels over lights, blue tulle fabric, varnished paper over a bent wooden frame.

I entered the College of the Holy Cross' Cantor Gallery to see B. Lynch's "New Gilded Age: A Theatrical Installation" with the expectation of seeing a collection of work unlike almost anything I've seen before. Built around what Lynch calls, "My fictive universe," one filled with puppets depicting "the Reds and Greys," I've been trying to fully grasp the concept of her work for years. Having watched a number of the online presentations tied to the show since it opened on October 13, I knew I'd be experiencing a multi-media treat for the senses, the culmination of many years of creative experimenting in how to best present her ideas.

I knew I'd be seeing something I'd never forget, and even before entering the gallery doors, that observation came true. The main focal point of "Fisherman on the Lonely Sea" was an exceptional piece in its own right; its placement over fabric intended to create the feel of being out in the large ocean only added to the sensation.

Soon, my attention would be pulled in endless directions – a collection of puppet shows, cutout figures, illustrations framed on a wall and the piece that pulls it all together – a collection of videos featuring all the characters in the show in a collection of skits that gives each an identity that would have otherwise been left to the imagination of the viewer. In doing so, Lynch has created a blueprint for all artists searching for ways to explain their work to potential audiences that might otherwise take one look and, if they don't connect with the piece, would move along. This is a show filled with double takes, especially where things that you've seen earlier in your visit show up in other works.

I think this gives, and will give, her work a lasting quality that you equate with artists with reoccurring themes – think Marc Chagall with his farm animals – or how fans of a movie series like Star Wars, where the characters and the outfits they wear and the items identified with them, become forever important to the lives of those who find great meaning in them. There's something about this show in which Lynch has taken a lifetime of ideas and found a way of presenting them in which they become iconic.

They also give us insight into Lynch herself. "I can experience good, bad, violence, talent, hard work and leisure all through my characters," she said. "Although my personal, political and ethical choices aren't in sympathy with all of the characters, having them enact their little dramas allows me to postulate their motivations and gives me creative permission to walk in their shoes."

Now for students at Holy Cross and the rest of the world to see to see the Reds and the Greys for themselves.

Brian Goslow

REVIEW

NEW GILDED AGE: A THEATRICAL INSTALLA BY B. LYNCH

IRIS AND B. GERALD CANTOR ART GALLERY

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

O'KANE HALL

ONE COLLEGE STREET

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

THROUGH FEBRUARY 5

HOLYCROSS.EDU/IRIS-A B-GERALD-CANTOR-AR GALLERY

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MEREDITH FLUKE AND B. LYNCH

After visiting the "New Gilded Age: A Theatrical Installation by B. Lynch" exhibition at the College of the Holy Cross, Artscope managing editor Brian Goslow exchanged email questions with Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery Director Meredith Fluke and Bridget "B." Lynch about how the show came together, how they adapted to the challenges of a semester where the Holy Cross campus opened, and then soon shut down, turning the show into a by appointment only exhibition, and how in the process, explored numerous new ways to present an exhibition that normally would serve as a backdrop to the college's art programs.

MEREDITH FLUKE, DIRECTOR, CANTOR GALLERY AT THE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

EXHIBITIONS AT THE CANTOR ALWAYS HAVE A MAJOR EDUCATION COMPONENT WITH PARTICIPATING ARTISTS GIVING A SERIES OF LECTURES, GALLERY TALKS AND TOURS TO STUDENTS AND VISITORS; YOU AND THE GALLERY HAVE DONE A GREAT JOB OF SHIFTING THOSE PRESENTATIONS ONLINE. TAKE ME THROUGH THE PROCESS OF WORKING TOGETHER WITH BRIDGET TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN AND ALLOW, IN A NON-TRADITIONAL WAY, THE SHOW TO GO ON.

MEREDITH FLUKE: In the summer, we were expecting the students to return to campus for fall semester, and so had imagined the primary viewing experience for "New Gilded Age" to be in person. With the pivot to online learning in August, we made the decision to mount the show regardless, and to create an accompanying, integral online exhibition. Due to the nature of Bridget's work, I did not feel that the exhibition should be entirely online – rather, we needed to situate the figures in context, and give them space and lighting in order to create the videos and photographs that we needed.

We were lucky that Bridget was such a visionary partner with which to conceptualize both the gallery and online components, and that there are so many talented people on campus – the videographer, film editor, web and graphic designers, etc. – that were willing to create online components that could serve as a true resource for our visitors and the Holy Cross community.

WHAT WAS YOUR EXPECTATION AND IMPRESSION OF THE SHOW AS IT WAS COMING IN AND HOW DID IT CHANGE ONCE IT WAS INSTALLED?

I had done a studio visit with Bridget last year when I first arrived at Holy Cross, and my first impression was

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THROUGH FEBRUARY 5

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B. LYNCH
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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY ART MUSEU
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JANUARY 12 THROUGH FEBRUARY 26

Middle gallery view includin *Grey's Camp Scene with Cook*, Specs, Pail Lady and Musician (left) Queen (right figurine, 42".

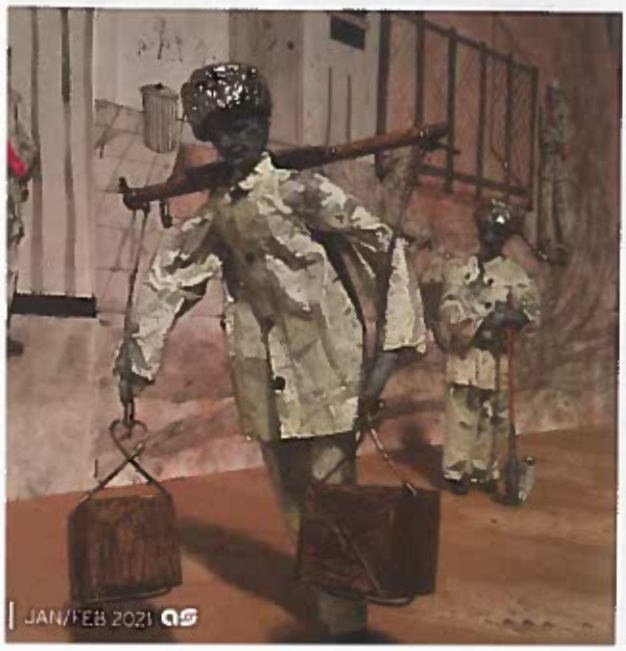
TOP: *Red Baiters Act 1*, 201
HD video, 2:57; *Vaneeta an*
Dandy, figurines, 42" each.

BOTTOM: *The Greys at Work (Bully Boy "Akimbo," Stevedore, Digger)*, On the Wharf Street Scene, 3D figures, ink painted backdrc

that the work was magical, and ripe with possibilities for thought-provoking conversations. I was particularly interested in Bridget as an artist who sets rigorous rules for her work, and then allows the world to build itself. As we installed the pieces, though, I was very surprised by the affective quality of the figures, as though they took on more complex and more human capacity when we put them into their vignettes.

HOW HAS YOUR VIEW OF IT CHANGED AFTER LIVING WITH IT FOR THREE MONTHS?

For me the most important aspect of living with a show is the opportunity to talk to various visitors about it. I have noticed that everyone becomes attached to the various characters of "New Gilded Age" – perhaps they identify personally with the social situation and attachments of a particular character, or perhaps sustained observation increases the character's intrigue – this is especially true if you watch the films many times. Since the world has been built by Bridget over many years, it's difficult to take in all the complexities and nuances at once. I believe that knowledge of the world is cumulative, and that viewers create understanding through sustained engagement.



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THIS PROCESS THAT WILL BE BENEFICIAL IN THE EXHIBITIONS AT THE CANTOR THAT FOLLOW? HAS THE MORE UNIVERSAL PRESENTATION ONLINE HELPED DRAW MORE ATTENTION TO THE SHOW?

I have enjoyed working on virtual programs, and am especially interested in exploring their capacity to reach larger audiences, and to be a resource that can be encountered casually, repeatedly, asynchronously. As we move forward, I am thinking about how virtual presentations can capitalize on those strengths and become something that has different, though related, goals from that of in-person exhibitions. Like many art lovers, I am very devoted to the physical object, and will likely always consider online programs as only a piece of the larger puzzle.

ARTIST BRIDGET "B." LYNCH

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING ON THE CONCEPT OF THE REDS AND GREYS AND WHERE DID THE IDEA ORIGINATE?

Pail Lady (Lily), figurine, 42"; *Aeronaut with Ballo*
Shovelman, figurine, 42"

B. LYNCH: I got started in 2012 when I made the first figurine, the Red Vizier Horseman. But it was around a year later I understood that inequity of power and wealth between the factions of Red and Grey was the driving force. As the project has grown I have used my delight in details of their material objects to express the philosophical underpinnings of the project. This time-bending sci-fi world exists improbably, where somehow the gorgeously attired Reds live in the 18th century while at the same time the Greys appear to occupy a nebulous but future time and space of ceaseless work.

HAD YOU HAD ANY PAST EXPERIENCE WITH PUPPETRY?

I studied traditional Japanese puppetry, Bunraku, while I was a student in Japan as an undergrad. Several of my projects have had performative objects, but the Reds and Greys have pushed me forward. I have reveled in being the "puppet master" as I create my fantasy world.

LEAVING THE GALLERY, I REALIZED HOW FEW ARTISTS GET TO BRING AN IDEA TO FRUITION IN THE PUPPETRY/CHARACTER FORMAT THAT YOU WORK WITH (WHAT I FIRST THOUGHT OF IS HOW, AT SOME POINT IN TIME, THE CREATOR OF STAR WAR: HAD A SIMILAR VISION AND ONLY A FEW TRULY UNDERSTANI WHAT AN EXTENDED ENDEAVOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS IS LIKE IN A SINGULAR FORMAT, YOU EITHER GET THE CHARACTER: OR YOU DON'T; HAVING THE OUTLET OF VIDEO HAS GIVEN YOU THE ABILITY TO BRING THEM TO LIFE AND GIVE THEM TH FEATURES THAT OTHERWISE MIGHT ONLY EXIST CLEARLY II YOUR MIND. WHEN DID YOU START WORKING ON BRINGIN YOUR CHARACTERS TO LIFE IN VIDEO FORM?

That is an excellent comment regarding how video allows layers c interaction and meaning that a single work does not. From the very star of the project I knew I would want to explore them eventually in vide form. But I needed enough characters and in-my-head back-story for th video component to be viable. The Red Baiter series videos were made i 2019 and 2020. I had created a series of digitally composed photograph starting in 2017 using my large-scale cut-out figures against especiall indicative architectural backgrounds. These manipulated photos opene the mental door for me to explore video using 2D and 3D representation of the characters.

Sound is very important to my process. Often, I compose and lay down the soundtrack before I insert the video element. Since they lack dialogue, the sound sets the emotional journey of the short video.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE PIECES WAS "FISHERMAN ON THE LONELY SEA" ...

I am very fond of the Fisherman. He is one of the few Greys with autonomy. He is working, to be sure. But he escapes to the sea where he is the master of his fate. The use of blue theatrical gels over the lights creates a mood. The airy blue tulle fabric was bunched and draped to suggest water. The underwater blue-light sea cucumber – or whatever it is – adds to the mystery. The boat is made of varnished paper over a bent wooden frame made of sticks from my back yard.

WHO ARE "BAITER" AND "HAULER" AND HOW DID THEY GET THE UNIQUE UNIFORMS THEY WEAR AND HOW YOU DECIDED TO PLACE THEM SO THAT THEY "REAPPEARED" ON THE SCREEN BEHIND THEM.

When imagining the world of the Greys I decided that not only would they necessarily need to be more numerous but also because of their social position in my imagined world, their clothes would be almost a uniform. Each Grey would have the signifier of their job. The men wear a tin pot on their head and the women wear a long black skirt (except for Saltimbanque). They share a uni-sex jacket. So, the Hauler wears a heavy yellow belt so he can attach himself to his jitney, as a human-powered taxi for the Reds. Lily the cleaning lady is undercover for in the palace because she is beneath notice.

Making the various characters again and again in different media expands my comprehension of them. The video makes them almost mythic as their original 10-inch size becomes larger than life-size.

"VANEETA" ALSO COMES "ALIVE" IN YOUR VIDEO; SHE'S CALLED "A WOMAN OF WEALTH" BUT SHE SEEMS QUITE LONELY. IN YOUR OCTOBER TALK, YOU TALKED ABOUT HOW SHE HOLDS A MIRROR THAT YOU SEE AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY ...

Vaneeta is the embodiment of self-regard. She is in a bubble of her own. Her vision of how society functions is reflected in the mirror, everything is interpreted through her lens. I think it is a metaphor for many of us, as the internet functions as a mirror. Our online choices are self-affirming.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL BACKDROPS TO YOUR VIDEOS AND INSTALLATIONS?

I love traveling and since the beginning of the Reds and Greys, I have been collecting photos that reflect their habitats. Vienna, Augsburg and Madrid all have luscious Baroque buildings. Stockholm's tiny alleys, MASS MoCA's abandoned industrial buildings, and the graffiti covered watchtowers on Gooseberry Island all suggest the make-do atmosphere of the Greys.

HOW HAS HAVING YOUR WORK COME "ALIVE" IN VIDEO FORM HELPED YOU IN SEEKING FUTURE VENUES TO PRESENT YOUR WORK? COULD YOU SEE EVER PRESENTING IT WITHOUT VIDEO ACCOMPANIMENT AGAIN?

The video world of the Reds and Greys is more fully realized as a stand-alone piece, so it is easier to explain the project to a new curator. I think it is now such an integral part of my project I would be loathe not to include it.

NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

HELEN FRANKENTHALER

Late Works, 1990–2003

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Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), whose career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the greatest American artists of the 20th century. She was eminent among the second generation of postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting.

Helen Frankenthaler, *Solar Imp*, 1995, Acrylic on paper, 78 x 59 3/4 in., Collection: Helen Frankenthaler Foundation © 2021 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo credit: Roz Akin, courtesy Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

Helen Frankenthaler Late Works, 1990-2003 is part of 2020/20+ Women @ NBMAA presented by Stanley Black & Decker with additional support provided by Bank of America.