

Erin Shirreff

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We experience most art through photographs, and that was true before the days of virtual installations, online viewing rooms, and Instagram. As we learned during the past two years, with limited access to museums and galleries, that's not always such a bad thing. But what is lost in translation from object to image, and can anything be gained? Erin Shirreff has been wrestling with such questions for 15 years, with interdisciplinary projects that merge photography, sculpture, and video. Without passing judgment on the restless images that have proliferated around us, she examines and mobilizes what she calls the "space of not-knowing"—the missing information inherent in any photograph.

The bronzes and photographic assemblages presented in "Sculptures and their shadows" (on view through December 18, 2021), continue Shirreff's longstanding engagement with large-scale abstract sculpture from the mid-20th century. These concerns are exemplified by her ongoing dialogue with Tony Smith's Minimalist monoliths, works designed to be felt in relation to the body. Beginning in 2006, Shirreff created a series of videos with cardboard maquettes that she fashioned after single photographic views of Smith's *Die* (1962), *Amaryllis* (1965), and other sculptures. For her first public commission, Shirreff produced *Sculpture for Snow* (2011), a full-scale painted aluminum version of her miniature *Amaryllis*. Since *Sculpture for Snow* only resembles Smith's original from the angle captured in Shirreff's source image, it is, as revealed in the round, a façade, an intentionally hollow representation of its subject.

Maquette (2019), the angular, eight-foot-tall bronze sculpture at the heart of Shirreff's current exhibition, is similarly concerned with exploring the gaps generated by various object-image translations. Initially appearing solid and voluminous, *Maquette* is actually a staggered collection of thin planar forms, precariously arranged and barely held together. Belying the industrial materiality and art historical heft of cast bronze, the sculpture has humble origins as a foam-core-and-hot-glue construction, just like the small maquettes that Shirreff produces solely to be photographed. *Maquette*, in fact, stems from the split-screen photographs of earlier series, such as "Signatures" and "Monographs," for which Shirreff fused two disparate images of her miniatures. The resulting pictures depict disjointed, hybrid entities that nevertheless align along their central axes, which are created like book spreads. *Maquette* is her first attempt to give spatial form to these photographic mash-ups. From one vantage point, it closely resembles a composite image from *Monograph (no. 2)* (2012), but Shirreff derived the sculpture's forms from a range of available photographs, and the finished work reflects its patchwork origins. As one circles *Maquette*, it transforms, like *Sculpture for Snow*, into several other, somewhat distinct sculptures—each angle its own snapshot.

Shirreff's practice has always resided between mediums, and here she pairs her image-mediated sculptures with a series of sculptural photographs that employ vibrant, oversaturated colors to almost painterly effect. Resembling the steel forms from her "Drops" series (2014–15), the photographic fragments that comprise works like *Standing fawn* and *Alpha* (both 2021) derive from scanned reproductions of anonymous abstract sculptures, which are printed on aluminum and cut into irregular shapes that resemble scraps of paper. Shirreff assembles the cut metal prints inside deep-set shadow box frames, leaning and stacking them against colored backdrops to create layered compositions in which form and imagery fall apart as soon as they appear to coalesce.

Standing fawn, which contains the most discernable imagery, resembles a Cubist construction, but more often these works resist order, as Shirreff embraces the fragmentary nature of her crowded, disveiled arrangements. Each assemblage combines details from different sources, and there is little correspondence between the imagery and the cut shapes. Yet each seemingly random amalgamation has its own character: the arced forms and warm tones of *New Moon Construction, Number 10* (2021) are set against a deep cerulean backdrop; and the architectural *Alpha* features an image of a green I-beam cut into a rectilinear arch that frames the other elements of the picture. Both are bisected by bright red bands that disrupt any fleeting sense of cohesion or even illusion.

Three large-format cyanotypes (all *Untitled*, 2021), illustrated and discussed in the accompanying e-catalogue, are curiously absent from the exhibition. It's a shame they were not included. In each one, Shirreff expertly employs negative space and modulates exposures to create a level of depth not typically found in photograms. They also display an experimentation that feels lacking in the more conceptually rigorous works, which are so self-referential that they can feel a bit too familiar. Neither body of work pushes Shirreff into uncharted territory, but they do illustrate the progression of her practice, which, while not exactly reiterative or recursive, is endlessly recombinatory and ever-evolving.