BLANTON EPUBLICATIONS: GALLERY GUIDE

Contemporary Project 6

Lily Cox-Richard: She-Wolf + Lower Figs.

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This gallery guide accompanies *Lily Cox-Richard: She-Wolf + Lower Figs.* (July 27–December 29, 2019) at the Blanton Museum of Art.

Lily Cox-Richard: She-Wolf + Lower Figs. is organized by Claire Howard, former Associate Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, Blanton Museum of Art.

Major funding is provided by Suzanne McFayden.

Lily Cox-Richard investigates the history of materials to illuminate hidden systems of production and social values. This installation responds to the Blanton's William J. Battle Collection of Plaster Casts, a set of nineteenth-century replicas of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. Such casts were once an integral part of artistic training throughout the Western world. For nineteenth-century viewers, classical statues—and their casts—embodied aesthetic and cultural standards of taste, beauty, democracy, and learnedness. By the mid-twentieth century, however, plaster casts were devalued as mere copies, and the Battle Casts are one of the few remaining collections of this kind in the United States. Cox-Richard's sculptural installation invites us to consider the legacy of these objects, raising questions about their role in perpetuating notions of physical "perfection" and "whiteness" as ideal.

Many Greek and Roman marble sculptures were originally polychromed—brightly painted, gilded, or otherwise embellished—although little of this surface decoration has withstood the passage of time. This creates the false impression that these sculptures, and ancient people, were all white. Plaster casts reinforced the myth of the sculptures' original whiteness. Cox-Richard subverts this fiction and the attendant "ideals" by adding color to sculptures she made utilizing 3D scanning, a modern technology that offers near-perfect reproductions of artworks, as plaster casts once did.

Cox-Richard proposes technicolor alternative narratives for the casts of ancient objects. She used scagliola, or marbleized plaster, to create a sculpture of a she-wolf based on scans of casts taken from the bronze original in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. The she-wolf confronts the viewer from a concrete sidewalk pushed upward by an oozing substance, suggesting a rupture in historical narratives. Cox-Richard ground down the corners of the concrete slabs to reveal a colorful aggregate and fossil-like fragments made using 3D scans of the heads of Battle casts.

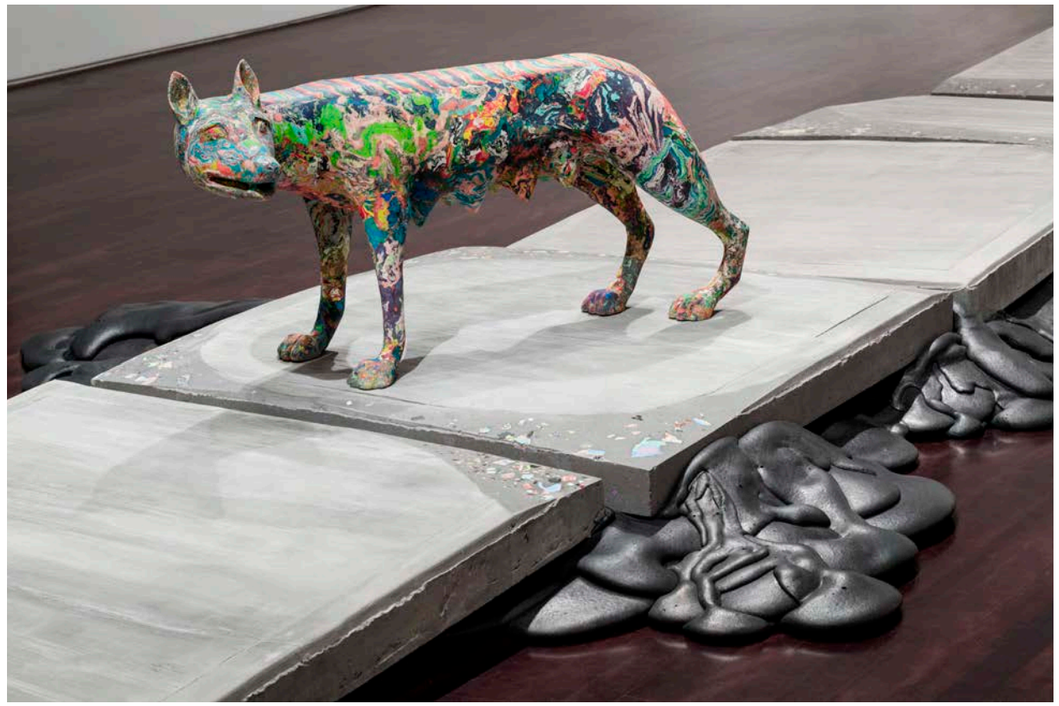
The sidewalk extends from two separated sections of a Battle Collection cast of a sculpture of the goddesses Dione and Aphrodite that originally decorated the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. The figures have been swathed in brightly colored fabric to remind us that the original sculptures were once painted. Cox-Richard's installation evokes classical sculptures' and their white plaster casts' journeys through history and asks how we can disrupt the legacies of oppression that they have helped to perpetuate.

Cox-Richard's sidewalk sculpture, *Ramp*, echoes the shape of the platform displaying the Battle Casts in the Blanton's Osborne Seminar Room; in the Contemporary Project space, it also functions as a barrier. *Ramp* visualizes the Western canon of art and civilization—founded on the models of ancient Greece and Rome—as a form of infrastructure. Systems of maintenance hold such structures in place, but groundswells, such as alternative historical narratives, challenge the linear (and exclusionary) trajectories they trace. *Ramp's* corners reveal a colorful aggregate, or mixture of materials, and cast fragments of hair made using 3D scans of the Battle Casts' heads, suggesting the variety of perspectives we should enlarge the canon to contain.

Lily Cox-Richard
Vienna, Virginia, 1979–Richmond, Virginia, present
Ramp, 2019
Fiber-reinforced concrete; aggregate including glass, shell, brick, and concrete fragments cast from models of Battle Cast hair; urethane foam; pigment
Seven slabs total, each 48 × 48 × 4 in. (121.9 × 121.9 × 10.2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Unlike the paint that originally decorated classical sculpture, the colorful scagliola that Cox-Richard used to produce this *She-Wolf* would not wear away—its pigment is integrated into the material. Ancient Romans used scagliola as an imitation marble, and sixteenth-century Italian craftsmen revived the technique to decorate architecture and furniture throughout Europe.

Cox-Richard's brightly colored *She-Wolf* appears without the suckling figures of Romulus and Remus, Rome's founders, that accompany the original bronze sculpture. While central to the she-wolf's mythic status as the mother of Rome, these infant twins were later additions, produced in an entirely different style in the fifteenth century CE. In contrast, the original she-wolf sculpture has been dated as early as the fifth century BCE (though recent scientific analysis indicates creation in the eleventh or twelfth century CE) and may have had nothing to do with the founding legend of Rome. Cox-Richard's colorful *She-Wolf* adds yet another layer of meaning to this historic object.



Lily Cox-Richard
Vienna, Virginia, 1979–Richmond, Virginia, present
***She-Wolf*, 2019**
Scagliola (plaster, rabbit skin glue, pigment)
Approx. 23 × 45 × 18 1/2 in. (58.4 × 114.3 × 47 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

The marble sculpture from which this two-part cast was produced was originally located on the outside of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, but have been held by the British Museum in London since 1817. Athenians built the Parthenon almost 2,500 years ago as a treasury-temple to honor the goddess Athena and house the city's wealth. The sculptor Phidias designed these representations of Dione and Aphrodite (circa 438–432 BCE), which occupied a corner of the Parthenon's eastern pediment—a triangular architectural detail atop the building's columns—as part of a sculpture group depicting Athena's birth. Cox-Richard's draping of the casts in brightly colored fabric not only suggests their original polychrome, but also adds an ironic echo of the "aura" that original works of art bear to this plaster replica.

Lily Cox-Richard
Vienna, Virginia, 1979–Richmond, Virginia, present
Figs., 2019
Synthetic tulle netting, storage pallets, *Goddesses from the East Pediment of the Parthenon*

Workshop of Phidias
Athens, Greece, circa 490-430 BCE
Goddesses from the East Pediment of the Parthenon: Dione and Aphrodite, 19th-century reproduction
Plaster cast from original
48 × 97 × 24 in. (121.92 × 246.3 × 60.9 cm)
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, The William J. Battle Collection of Plaster Casts, 2004.40.1/2–2/2

Lily Cox-Richard
Vienna, Virginia, 1979–Richmond, Virginia, present
Figs., 2019
Synthetic tulle netting, storage pallets, *Goddesses from the East Pediment of the Parthenon*

Workshop of Phidias
Athens, Greece, circa 490-430 BCE
Goddesses from the East Pediment of the Parthenon: Dione and Aphrodite, 19th-century reproduction
Plaster cast from original
48 × 97 × 24 in. (121.92 × 246.3 × 60.9 cm)
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, The William J. Battle Collection of Plaster Casts, 2004.40.1/2–2/2

Lily Cox-Richard
Vienna, Virginia, 1979–Richmond, Virginia, present
Weave, 2019
Scagliola (plaster, rabbit skin glue, pigment)
Approx. 20 × 22 × 16 in. (50.8 × 55.9 × 40.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Artist Lily Cox-Richard draped this cast in a synthetic tulle fabric as an extension of her Contemporary Project installation. Cox-Richard's project engages the history of the Battle Casts as replicas and teaching aids and challenges the idealization of "whiteness" and physical "perfection" that plaster casts have helped to perpetuate. She reminds us that the original Greek and Roman marble sculptures were brightly painted, though little of this surface decoration has withstood the passage of time. Their casting in plaster has reinforced both the myth that ancient sculptures (and people) were all white and the dangerous equation of "whiteness" with purity. Cox-Richard's intervention in the Battle Collection gallery encourages us to see and discuss these objects differently.

Caproni Brothers
Active Boston, Massachusetts
Demosthenes, 19th-century reproduction
Plaster cast from Roman marble copy of bronze original by Polyeuktos, circa 280 BCE (Vatican Museum, Rome)
81 × 32 × 21 1/2 in. (205.7 × 81.3 × 54.6 cm)
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, The William J. Battle Collection of Plaster Casts, 2004.29

August Gerber
Active Cologne, Germany
Apollo Belvedere, 19th-century reproduction
Plaster cast from Roman adaptation or copy of a bronze original by the Greek sculptor Leochares, circa 330 BCE (Vatican Museum, Rome)
90 × 63 × 36 in. (228.6 × 160 × 91.4 cm)
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, The William J. Battle Collection of Plaster Casts, 2004.10

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