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Kayne Griffin Corcoran **HYPERALLERGIC**

Toward a "Herstory" of Minimalism

Two gallery shows currently on view in Los Angeles place women artists in conversation with a period of contemporary art history that has been primarily shaped by the output of male artists.



Beverly Pepper, Selected Works 1968-2015, installation view at Kayne Griffin Corcoran (image courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles; photo by Lee Thompson)

LOS ANGELES — A few recent efforts have been made to weave a “herstory” of Minimalism and, by extension, Post-Minimalism — movements that have been understood largely to be the realms of men. LACMA will soon open *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959-1971*, which highlights the massive influence of art dealer Virginia Dwan on our understanding of American postwar sculpture. And two gallery shows currently on view in Los Angeles — *Beverly Pepper: Selected Works, 1968-2015* at Kayne Griffin Corcoran and *Escape Attempts* at Shulamit Nazarian — also place women artists in conversation with a period of contemporary art history that has been primarily shaped by the output of male artists.



Escape Attempts, installation view (image courtesy of Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles)

When I think of Cor-Ten steel, Richard Serra comes to mind — not Beverly Pepper, though she has also utilized the material in her practice since the 1960s. In the high-ceilinged central gallery of Kayne Griffin Corcoran, the enormous Cor-Ten steel work “Drusilla Senior” (2014) dominates, placed near a group of slim totem-like sculptures and the dynamic, geometrically rigid “Dallas Pyramid” (1971). Pepper has long resided near Rome, and her work often engages with ancient architectural and sculptural forms. “Erased Presence” (2000) is a large stone sculpture, precisely and cleanly cut in the center, which conjures up a vision of the temple Al-Khazneh at Petra in Jordan. Smaller sculptures in Cor-Ten steel, “Junia Prima” (2014) and “Medium Ascension” (2008), are muscular swoops and kinetic curves that energetically fly off their plinths. A group of four stainless-steel geometric sculptures from the late 1960s and early 1970s populates the garden outside, glinting brightly when the sun bounces off their hard polished corners.

Seriality is a feature of Minimalism, and a number of the objects in Nazarian’s *Escape Attempts* also follow this model. Carmen Argote’s “Folding Structures” (2016) are flimsy, deconstructed boxes sitting on the floor of the entrance gallery, made of papier-mâché and acrylic plastic core with solid black border lines painted from corner to corner. Susan Hefuna’s “Grid Drawings” (2014–15) are bronze wall works whose crisscrossing lines recall Agnes Martin canvases, here skewed or adjusted to appear slightly off-kilter, throwing off the modern indexicality of the format that art historian Rosalind Krauss once identified. Hefuna’s sculptures intend to evoke *mashrabiya* screens, which mark discrete public and private spheres in Middle Eastern and North African domestic spaces. Cindy

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Hinant's *Upskirt* series (2016) utilizes existing paparazzi images of Hollywood celebrities who have been invasively photographed from the bottom up, illustrating the ever-scopophilic tendencies of the camera. The darkened photographic prints are hung on the length of the wall, and the viewer is made to observe the details closely.



Carmen Argote, "Folding Structures (pool)" (2016), papier-mâché, paint, and acrylic plastic core, dimensions variable
(image © Carmen Argote and courtesy of Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles)



Virginia Overton, "Untitled (Waterfall)" (2016), trunk with decal, tissue box, and white noise machine, 21 x 16 x 16 inches, installation view at Whitney Museum of American Art 2016
(image © Virginia Overton and courtesy of White Cube, London; photo by Ron Amstutz)

Though the exploration of repetition and reduction is vaguely noted among the seven artists, the exhibition's installation does not feel visually coherent. There is a commitment to tidiness and politesse that clashes with the disruptive sensibility of some of the work on view. Sarah Meyohas's two large photographs are hung diagonally from each other, but the deep three-dimensional space suggested in the work does not feel immersive in the space. Virginia Overton's "Untitled (Waterfall)" (2016) pumps white noise through the gallery, emitting from a decaded trunk resting on the floor. While Overton's work feels like it is more overtly quoting the work of artists such as Donald Judd and Larry Bell than that of the other artists featured, the collapse in the historical trajectory seems less brought on by intention than by carelessness.

We have seemingly landed in an era that regards commercial galleries as proponents of so-called museum-quality exhibitions, yet neither of these shows quite succeed in providing an alternative to the art-historical record. The Pepper retrospective is, once again, a refined display reminding collectors and historians that, yes, a women artist is capable of producing monumental sculptural work that contends with the work of her male contemporaries. This gesture is a serviceably elegant endeavor, which mostly serves to electrify the speculative art market, always hungry for the next artist to revive.

In particular, I have quibbles with *Escape Attempts*, which was curated by art historian Kathy Battista. *Revolution in the Making* this is not, and the thematic strain uniting the works on display at Shulamit Nazarian is wobbly. The title of the show was lifted from the preface of the 1997 reprint — not 1972, as the press release incorrectly states — of Lucy Lippard's *Six Years* (originally published in 1973). In this "occasionally critical memoir" of an essay, Lippard contextualizes the initial project by providing a historical outline of the postwar milieu of artistic production that she helped define. The legacy of Minimalism has often hinged upon the limitations of its accepted denotation, and framing *Escape Attempts* as a counter to the body of work by postwar sculptors who have been recognized time and again does not complicate its legacy. The reconsideration of cultural and political roles that triggered the "dematerialization of the object" famously recounted in *Six Years*, was deeply considered, for example, in SculptureCenter's 2008 exhibition *Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s*.

Commercial galleries are not necessarily gatekeepers or caretakers of complicated histories, but the veneer of social and political awareness could have been more rigorously worked out in these shows. There are opportunities to be recuperative without being exploitative. Hasn't "feminist art," like contemporary sexual politics, evolved, too?

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(image courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles; photo by Lee Thompson)

Beverly Pepper: Selected Works, 1968–2015 continues on view at Kayne Griffin Corcoran (1201 S. La Brea Ave, Los Angeles) through March 18.

Escape Attempts continues at Shulamit Nazarian (616 N. La Brea Ave, Los Angeles) through April 8.

- Hyunjee Nicole Kim