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## MODERNPAINTERS

ART ARCHITECTURE DESIGN PERFORMANCE FILM MAY 2013

**INTRODUCING** // LIZ GLYNN



## What She Finds

Histories through objects

BY EMILY ELLIS FOX



INSIDE A NONDESCRIBT building in L.A.'s Chinatown, Liz Glynn apologizes for her studio being too clean. She prefers to work in a certain amount of disarray, but an acquisitions committee recently paid a visit, prompting the artist to tidy up the usual mess. Still, there remains ample evidence of previous and future projects spread between her two rooms: a discarded chandelier on the floor, charred ceramic vessels, a box of finished and unfinished bronze rings, books everywhere, and, tacked on the walls, drawings with arrows that Glynn calls maps of her thought processes for potential installations.

Objects—and the monetary and emotional significance we give them—are central to Glynn's work. Previous exhibitions included her re-creating Viking hoards, buried Trojan coins, the city of Rome, and Rodin sculptures. "We arbitrarily assign value to things all the time," she says. "Meanings evolve and become attached, and what we invest

in certain things is disproportionate. Using ancient objects is sort of a pretext to point out that something we think is brand-new has actually been happening for a long time—like this larger history of profound desires around objects." Her replications are purposefully imperfect, shaped by Glynn's scrappy DIY attitude and her use of humble materials, including cardboard, plaster, shipping pallets, and papier-mâché. "I think about the way the fake is real. Histories are malleable and handmade and highly constructed."

Clues to Glynn's installation for Frieze Projects New York this month can be found in the Kafka and Borges tomes stacked on her desk. Glynn spends up to three months researching a project before she begins to work on it, and at the time of our interview, she was very much in the planning stage for her project at the fair. She proposes to build a bar within Frieze, behind a secret door, to which a random





LEFT:  
Performance  
of [de]lusions  
of Grandeur:  
*The Myth of  
Singularity (after  
Rodin)* at the Los  
Angeles County  
Museum of Art,  
2013.

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:  
Detail of  
*Lost and Found  
(Vale of York  
Hoard)*, 2012.  
Pit-fired ceramic  
and painted  
plywood,  
41 x 32 x 20 in.

Liz Glynn in her  
studio, 2013.

selection of visitors will be allowed entrance. This speakeasy's layout takes the shape of a bank vault, with rows of safe-deposit boxes lining the walls. Each entry token will prompt bartenders to open a specific box, which will contain garnishes for cocktails and objects that relate to the Kafka and Borges texts. The contents of each box will prompt the bartenders to recount a story based on the readings.

The context of an art fair seems a natural fit for Glynn's explorations of assigned value as it relates to commerce—"I can't not respond to that in some ways," Glynn says, laughing. Her proposal derived from "thinking about the era when business transactions were conducted over drinks. This era of the gentleman and going back to a gilded age before the crash."

The Kafka and Borges stories are fairly bleak, and Glynn is contemplating what she wants to edit or add. Many of the sculptures she's envisioning for the boxes will be

based on architectural elements found in the texts. "In Kafka, there are tons of doors, but in Borges there are staircases. Borges I almost feel is the literary version of an M.C. Escher drawing—there are ways that the story leads back onto itself, and the spiral staircase, in particular, has that." Similarly, Glynn imagines that the architecture of the bar will influence a complex experience, engendering its own social dynamics and creating, perhaps, a bit of welcome chaos. "The bar is sort of a pretext for this set of things to happen. The way these objects get activated through narrative and the idea of this being the inception of something. The sculptures don't propose to be an end unto themselves. They're woven into a larger history and they're a starting point or a point along the way, but they're never an end."

Originally from Boston, Glynn studied at Harvard before moving to Los Angeles to attend the California Institute of the Arts, where she received her MFA in

2008. She finds it an easy place to work on a practical level: There's lots of space to be had and materials are plentiful. Yet her installations don't always fit into the Southern California aesthetic. "I find there's an earthy quality to the work that's so not L.A. in a sense," Glynn says. "It's heavier. And I don't do plastics either." Despite this, one could say her inclusion as a Los Angeles artist became official last summer when her work was featured in the Hammer Museum's "Made in L.A." exhibition, a survey of work being made in the city at the time by both established and emerging artists. The show drew attention for the Mohn Award, voted on by museum visitors, for which Glynn was a finalist. Glynn says the experience was so anxiety producing that she started going to the gym twice a day to deal with the stress. The way people "read the work is kind of the least interesting thing to me," she says. "It's much more about controlling the context around the





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work—the environment and the space.”

Glynn prefers to let the viewer take the lead, experiencing the work “in the first person.” For this purpose, her “Made in L.A.” installation subverted the usual institutional prohibition against touching artworks. Drawing parallels between objects locked away in the Great Pyramid of Giza and those confiscated from smuggling tunnels leading to the Gaza Strip, Glynn encouraged visitors to engage in their own version of trafficking: They could open the drawers in a large colorful chest to handle—or even walk around with—cast-lead sculptures of objects from the tunnels. These items ranged from the necessary to the sentimental, from garlic cloves to a wedding dress to recreational



drugs. “What allowed me to feel I could do a piece that related to the Gaza Strip,” Glynn explains, “was the fact that it felt like the crisis is a human problem. With the smuggling tunnels, they have found a means to an end, regardless of the politics. Whatever way you want to

describe the political situation, the fact is that it’s produced this whole other thing,” an alternative economy.

Glynn sees performance and participation involving the objects as crucial to her work; these are the elements that ultimately allow her sculptures to reflect their contemporary significance in the light of the histories of their ancient counterparts. “I can’t just walk in here and make a ceramic vessel,” she admits. “I’m interested

in some sense of an embodied reality—what happens when events are made real in some way or you’re put in a position where your subjectivity becomes implicated. I want to give people space to walk around a world and decide how it should look.” MP

FROM TOP:  
*Black box (Bar)*, 2012. Stained wood, 100 unique numbered glazed ceramic mugs, 11 stools, Xerox copies, and acrylic medium, 16 x 14 x 6 ft.

Installation view of *Anonymous Needs and Desires (Gaza/Giza)* and *Passage (Giza/Gaza)* in “Made in L.A.” at the Hammer Museum, 2012.