

TERESA BRAULA REIS

White Helmet

October 7 – November 18, 2017

Baert gallery is delighted to present *White Helmet*, the first solo exhibition by Teresa Braula Reis with the Gallery.

Teresa Braula Reis draws attention to the oft-overlooked affinity between construction and destruction. Her work envisages the building not simply as a site of stability, but of mutability. The notion of temporality, and with that obsolescence, assume significance in her careful considerations of the structures she inhabits. In her first solo show *White Helmet*, Braula Reis presents installation, sculpture, video, and image transference prints that delve into different aspects of decay, precarity, and shaky ground as related to the built environment. With these themes in mind, she reveals the slippage, similarity, and overlap between these realms.

The concrete block structure at the center of the gallery, fabricated to resemble a construction site, forms the conceptual linchpin of *White Helmet*. This piece, *The Passing Hour*, is destined for wreckage, wherein the work will partially self-destruct in a live performance at the exhibition opening. During this event, specialized materials used in the construction of the wall will expand, causing tiny cracks to form on the concrete, leading slabs to fall and break off in pieces. As the very composition of this façade drives the concrete to break, the wall becomes its own downfall. The collection of shards and dust will remain intact throughout the run of the show, as both evidence of this performance and the transience of our surroundings. Contemplating the fragility of our environment here, we are reminded of our own human fallibility.

In Rising Column, A Sense of Absence, the artist presents a three-sided wood mold that resembles the pillar structures that hold up buildings. Her iteration, however, is merely a partial replica of this form, an unfinished section of scaffold. Typical pillar form works are filled with concrete, and enclosed with wood on all sides. These concrete and wooden pillars are the elements that support the weight of a building and when that cracks, the building breaks. Braula Reis presents her form work in fragment form—an echo, or an etch of the bona fide structure. Sans concrete and gaping from one side, viewers may grasp the shoddiness of this support. At the same time, Braula Reis also dwells on the form work as a site of potential. The intricacy of this piece manifests in the way that the shapes of the surrounding slats of wood imply the missing components. What is there is just as important as what is not.

Braula Reis' suite of concrete cast construction helmets explore related motifs. These concrete replicas represent the accouterment of the construction worker, produced in the very material of the building itself. The artist renders this quotidian object heavy and useless, dangling on the wall as a sculpture rather than as a practical component of a blue-collar uniform. Further, by displaying the helmet in varying shades of grey concrete, Braula Reis dwells on the materiality of the article, underscoring the object as an aesthetic material, where factors like color and curvature make these works a site not for use but for looking. And yet Braula Reis' infatuation with the helmet extends beyond the aesthetic; while the construction helmet is used by workers to erect buildings, it is likewise used to raze them. It is the duality of the helmet, its use in both construction and destruction, that is most compelling to the artist. Braula Reis' image transference works consider parallel subjects, juxtaposing construction sites with explosions in quarries.

The artist also inserts her own working environment into this show. Concrete reappears in *If Only I Could Stay (Protective Boots)* where she places her own work boots in concrete blocks. Here she ruminates on notions of heft, weightiness, immobility, and concrete's diverse connotations. In another piece, *If Only I Could Stay (Work Trousers)*, a pair of her own work pants hang nearby and add to this personal flourish. By portraying this paraphernalia, Braula Reis reflects on her own working process. She analyzes these ideas on a macro level in the sculptural triptych *To Define a Place, to Hold it Still* (2017), where she renders casts of

floor, brick, and roof tiles in white plaster.

Braula Reis' video work *00:04:54* (created in collaboration with James Lake) depicts a choreographed exchange of sand between the cupped palms of two people. The sand slips through the cracks and crevices of their fingers as they transfer the material back and forth, repeating the process until the granules are depleted. The artist provides two angles on this process—the transfer act between the two figures and a top-down perspective of the steady stream of material as it slowly, almost imperceptibly, falls into a small pile by their feet. As these tiny pieces gather on the ground, one might regard the falling sand as a mode of destruction. At the same time, the sand that falls forms little mounds. These mounds are structures. Mountains, one may recall, are destined to become boulders, rocks, and, finally, sand itself. Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, for Braula Reis, construction and destruction can so easily be conflated.

Simon Krug, Los Angeles, 2017

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