LEAH FLOOK

Leah Flook’s sculptures, composite sculptural installation environments, and the illustrations that she calls “drawings” create worlds. What worlds is a question she seeks to probe in ways that are both liminal and highly constructed.

For Flook, agoraphobia is a substratum: her works’ takes on the interior, peopled with decapitated guardian dogs and lamps that slither like snakes, are, quietly, an investigation of paranormal experiences that have propelled a rich landscape, full of foreboding, a series of puzzle rooms that reassure and raise questions.

They are portals into a world laced with symbolism, but a quietly personal symbolism. Like the small, still world of a poem, “I feel like I make these spaces that I find calming,” Flook says. “I like this idea of being able to create spaces that allow me to escape.”

Multiple reference points’ underpinnings throw the viewer into a visual iconography rife with the dislocations of mysterious cat-and-mouse scenarios, the unsettling overlaps of horror film and slapstick, the implied realities of Rube Goldberg contraptions (machines of hilarity or death traps), the trope of the “final girl” of film theory, who never dies (presenting a pregnant immortality, fictional and painful). Flook is the dramatis persona in her own work and also deus ex machina, bearing a sort of witness like Horatio in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. To the paralyzing “almost-deaths” (how do we survive them?) of Ophelia’s psychological unwellness, she would pit Looney Tunes’ Wile E. Coyote, creating portals, escaping and evading, fabricating reality. Her implied viewer-participant is kin to the distraught heiress of the Winchester Mystery House, who built staircases to nowhere, rooms to evade the spirits that would ensnare us, leading us to more questions.

A through-thread of death insinuates itself through the trope of the still life. An installation can be a beautiful purgatory. In the installation Close Call, Ophelia (2019), a television screen plays an almost-still video of fruit, grasses, and candles against a backdrop where the wind is blowing; a portal to another time or to no time at all, somewhere that never decays. A staircase leads to freedom and constraint. On either side, like guardians—like her other instances of Cerberus, watchdog of the underworld—stand a white column and a tree built of wire, plaster, and black flocking; the trunk rebar and epoxy putty; the leaves wire and blue tape—a specter, not so much black as a void—there and not there.

In these works, death is never really there—or perhaps only in the incomplete mimesis of life.

A young Flook imagined furniture or spaces as whole new houses, built doll houses. Now, “I make spaces I feel comfortable in. I make them that way so I can explore the uncomfortable,” she says. That duality is ever-present.

Even when there is not anything particularly terrifying occurring, there is a feeling, unsettling, almost intangible, that amid architectural symmetries of weight and volume there is something off-kilter. She peoples her “drawings” with cockroaches or eyes, like the engines of surveillance, watching for malfeasance. Ultimately, her works are spaces of protection, where you can confront your demons and mortality.
TITLE
CLOSE CALL, OPHelia

MEDIUM
MIXED

YEAR
2019

SIZE
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE
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