

LEE, ASHLYN

We forget to be delighted. That the objects of the world are ornamental before they are anything. As the toddler in the sandbox gathering twigs and rocks together understands—Oh my, will you look at that! Has there ever been a pile of twigs and rocks like that before? No. Certainly not. Nor anything like it since—except, perhaps, for the occasional startlement from the likes of Andy Goldsworthy or Richard Tuttle. Such a strangely delicate matter, getting back to the primitive moment—formalizing, in a way, that deeply accidental/ornamental insight prior to meaning—without losing the delight. Without just settling for the “look”, as many do, of the profundity. It must be something like the tracker’s instinct. Something like Robert Penn Warren’s “fearful glimmer

of joy like a spoor.” I think of Goldsworthy’s “Rain Shadows” that require this inward double-take to see below what seems, at first, a sort of arty trick (you think “rain angel” like “snow angel”) into regions where such impulses arise.

So, what have we here? You see the barbed wire and you fear some topical commentary. Nope. It’s just your typical rural fencing. And, depending on where you’re from, your typical catfish heads atop your typical U-posts sunk in concrete. I have seen these catfish fences in East Texas. And, I swear, no rational explanation serves. “It helps in cleaning them, to hang them on a post.” Right. Then just leave them there to mummify, turn black and pretty spooky in your headlights driving down those roads at night.

There's something very close to that primordial moment, prior to meaning (if there's meaning, I don't think I want to know it), and she's got it. Formalized it. Tracked it. Brought it forth into the conversation. As a very delicate matter.

Five thin, green-enameled U-posts—just enough to support the idea—with minimal three loose strands of rusty wire between. The fence is a given—not to belabor. Not to distract from the proper dialogue between the heavy cylindrical concrete blocks that anchor the posts (and formalize that sloppy mix that usually holds them in the dirt), and the concrete catfish heads on top. Five upward-gazing concrete catfish heads. Some less ill-cast than

others although pretty much identical and barely—like those blackened aging ones—identifiable. So, what sort of dialogue? Between the catfish heads and the represented ground? I'm not quite sure—but surely something rather delicate, uncomfortable. Our ancient bottom-feeding fascinations anchored firmly, elevated and presented as a boundary. How can brutal be so delicate? And ornamental, frightening? One wonders what that boundary separates. The uniformity of components suggests an easy extendability. Allows us to imagine it stretched out—and even continuing Christo-like forever, clear across the landscape on and on and through the dark, delighted heart of us.

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