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THAT WHICH REMAINS... : SHEILA GALLAGHER **April 2 – May 8, 2011**



DODGEgallery is pleased to present Sheila Gallagher: *That which remains...*, a solo exhibition of new work including smoke paintings, plastic paintings, ink drawings and found objects. A hybrid practitioner known for exhibitions of disparate materials, laborious inventive processes, and strong conceptual bookends, Gallagher displays the same rigor and delight in material juxtapositions and manipulations, though this time enlisting ambiguity to host thematic tie-ins. All of the works in the show not only have back stories, but forward and side ones as well.

Gallagher has selected objects and imagery excavated from her own personal and familial history, a plastic napkin holder, old Lego, a 19th century drawing of Hart's Island by an unknown artist, and a postcard from the 1972 Munich Olympics to serve as the literal, visual, and conceptual content of her show. Reflective of her experience of spending the last ten years researching and archiving a family collection of 650 historically significant Civil War drawings that had all but been forgotten, *That which remains...* asks questions about object survival and inter-object communication.

Meaningless and meaningful, innocuous and loaded, the resonance of these collected objects exists in the space between their personal and cultural histories, and in the shift from their intended meaning or function to a new symbology. Gallagher is struck by how these objects have persisted in actuality (they haven't been tossed) and in a collective mind-space. Gallagher describes her work as "the physical manifestation of associations" revealing hidden histories and relationships.

Employing objects that, as Gallagher says, "refuse to go away", she is investigating what Walter Benjamin called "the mute magic" of things. For both Gallagher and Benjamin, "things are never just inert objects, passive items or lifeless shucks at the disposal of the documentary gaze. But they consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, which keep being exchanged."¹ This holds as true of the objects in the gallery that display text. The concretism of these personal vestiges lies in poetic contrast to the intangibility of their full meanings. For Gallagher, this translates to a kind of spirituality, lending "theological weight to things themselves." Harnessing the symbolic and poetic potential of objects and images that have somehow survived the trash heap or vicissitudes of history, Gallagher's works themselves offer complex resonances.

The tension between subject and medium is often present in Gallagher's choice of material. In *Blue Flocked Mary*, painting with smoke expands and contradicts the "thingness" of a cheap piggy bank in the form of a religious icon. In *Deute*, (Greek for "now again"), a large painterly landscape made of hundreds of melted plastic objects from Gallagher's house, a small image of a classical column is both framed and overwhelmed by the garden made of junk.

Grounded in the quotidian, yet framed by a wider view of historical events, Gallagher's work asks us to explore how objects define us and to be awake to their shifting literal, symbolic, and poetic relationships. Inspired by Ann Carlson's translations of Sappho's fragments, the conscious gaps in the exhibition point to incomplete knowledge and the inexhaustibility of interpretation, welcoming the viewer to be aware of what is absent.

¹ HILO

² BEAVER