

studio international



Artwork by Marie Kaus

Marie Kaus: 'I have this inherent need to leap'

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by ALEXANDER GLOVER

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In the latest show at the Cob Gallery, artists Adeline de Monseignat (b1987) and Marie Kaus (b1988) have produced works inspired by their engagement with the landscape and horizon of the American south-west. The works in the exhibition are a direct result of an artist's residency that they went on at separate times. When they got together back in England and discussed their experiences, they realised that they both felt strongly about the human relationship to the landscape. The works that surfaced – according to the press release – “stem from a reflection on the human being's state of mind while returning to the natural world”.

De Monseignat's contribution to the show includes her piece *The Skin of the Earth* (2014), a series of 12 mirrored-photographs of horizons taken at the Great Salt Lake, Utah. As beautiful and serene as these photographs are, it is her sculpture *In the Flesh* (2015) that truly encapsulates the essence of the human-nature relationship. This perfectly spherical marble sculpture is a physical representation of how she felt when confronting the horizon. The artist answered the impression indelibly made on her by the landscape by leaving her mark on nature – the stone.

Marie Kaus's *Fall Piece* (2015) is one of the most interesting works in the show. It essentially documents her interaction with the gallery space itself. Her piece *13th August 05:08 GMT/12:08 MDT* (2014) is her other key work and is a merging of moving image and



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photography. It features moving images of Kaus doing a headstand while on top of the Smithsonian Butte in Zion National Park (Utah). Behind the screen displaying this is a large still photograph of the same landscape, but all over the gallery wall. Although both mediums possess a flatness, they somehow suggest the three-dimensional when one is placed in front of the other.

Alexander Glover: How did you and Adeline meet?

Marie Kaus: We met at the Slade summer school about five years ago. Since then we've been really close friends and have followed each other's practice. What brought us together again for this show was a residency we did. Adeline went to America for a year and then I did the same residency a year later. When I came back, we looked at each other's work and Adeline was showing me her pictures of the horizon. We talked about the experience of confronting the landscape and how demanding it can be. I was trying out this image of the headstand – which is the background – and telling Adeline about my frustration in engaging with the landscape as well, spending so much time sitting down and looking at it and trying to document the experience. We thought there were enough points of contact between her photographs and mine that there was a good starting point for a show.

In a way, it also helped us digest the experience of the residency because, when you go on trips like this, it's really quite overwhelming. When you get back to London, it takes a while to register what has just happened and to understand what you can do with all the material.

AG: It seems as though you made the most of that particular residency. Are you always on the lookout for interesting residencies or projects of this variety?

MK: Definitely, yes. One of the main parts of my practice is the idea of departure. It's a way of life outside of my practice, too. Every year, I'll just leave everything and go. It's really essential to take yourself away from an everyday setting – it changes the way you think about things. But you will only find that out if you take that risk of leaving.

AG: Do you think leaving is more important than arriving?

MK: Yes, definitely. I wrote my degree thesis about the horizon. When you're at point A trying to get to point B, but you never get there. You always come back to yourself in a way. This happens quite a lot with me because I have to be back in London for work and it's where most of my practice takes place.

AG: Does this mean that the gallery space is point A and is, in fact, something you're trying to get away from?

MK: On the contrary, I'm very interested in the gallery space. In the show, for example, behind the headstand piece, you have the picture of the American horizon plastered all over the wall. I very much like to engage with the space in this way. I've done it before, for my degree show, and it's something I'll keep on doing. I think when you think about the horizon, you think of it as something quite exotic, vast and open. In fact, the horizon most of the time is that white wall in the gallery space. I like having those two different horizons interacting with each other – one man-made [gallery space] and the other natural [the horizon].

AG: Why did you choose to do a headstand as your physical gesture when interacting with the horizon?

MK: I'm not really sure. When I'm in London, I try to do yoga because I'm a bit hyperactive so it gives me something else to do. This was something I was doing for a year before I went to do the

residency in America. When I was there, I became really frustrated with just sitting there for five days, more or less still and in a remote area. I spent days and days trying to capture the landscape and I was in this cycle. That passivity, in a way, made me feel frustrated. I just put the camera down and did the headstand. It was very instinctive and felt like a natural thing to do. It wasn't a planned work, though. My process is to just document everything wherever I go. I keep everything without editing. The work came out of this documentation. It's quite an organic process. It relates quite well to the now without being planned. This is why most of the works have a date and time in the title.

AG: Could you talk about your work entitled Fall Piece (2015)?

MK: I'm still trying to understand what it is. I guess after making the headstand in America, it led to me blending photography and video, to add some movement to the stillness of the photograph with the headstand video placed in front of the photograph. I thought that this was something I wanted to carry on. When I arrived at the space [Cob Gallery], the first thing I wanted to do was photograph the gallery wall – where an action was going to take place. I didn't know what action beforehand, though. With Adeline's photographs, we were already thinking of having her images in that room and there was something very linear about it. I really wanted to engage with the verticality of the horizon as a response. When I arrived at the gallery and saw that there were two levels with a drop, I thought it was so unusual for a gallery to have this. The first thing that I had in mind when I saw it was to jump from the top level and on to the bottom. I dive every week at the Olympic pool. It's something I started doing when I came back from America. I have this inherent need to leap.

AG: Fall Piece features a crash mat with a suspended speaker above it playing the recorded sound of you falling on to it. How did this come about?

MK: Well, I didn't want the piece to feature an image of my body falling on to the mat for two reasons. First, I think it's a very intimate and very personal experience to do this. I don't want to be seen as a performance artist as I wouldn't do it in front of a crowd. It's performative in terms of the action and the gesture, but I'm not interested in staging anything. Second, I think sound was the best way to bring the viewer – or indeed the listener – back to having a more physiological experience with the work. There is a tension there, too, because you can see the image of the space [the print], but you can only hear the action or performance. I wanted to transcribe the feeling of falling. It would have been odd for me to include the image of my body, as it would have narrowed down the concept. When you hear the sound of somebody falling and the impact, it's more alerting than an image.

AG: The press release says the exhibition was an exercise in exposing the artists' success and failure in interacting with the gallery space. How do you measure success and failure within this context?

MK: The large print near the entrance – of the gallery wall – could be seen as a success. But when I say successes and failures, Fall Piece could be seen as a failure. I was only supposed to do one fall, but we couldn't get it right and I had to do it again. I don't like repetition, you see. But when I did it the second time I hurt myself quite badly and had to see an osteopath. That's definitely a failure. But the piece itself is a success. It all worked out fine. I guess everything in the show is a bit of both.

AG: Can you discuss a little further the collaborative process for this show?

MK: When I was making Fall Piece in the gallery, Adeline was in Italy making the sculpture that's in the show. I knew what a strain it was for her to make that beautiful, round object. I also knew

that she had to hit that rock hard in order to get it to that outcome. The physical demands of our projects were not something we had thought about beforehand. There's something really interesting, though, in that physical strain we both went through. We have different practices, but at the same time they really meet in many ways.

AG: So you both started off making 2D works for the show, but then both ended up making 3D works. Was the latter born out of a frustration with the flatness of the 2D works?

MK: I don't think it was frustration. It just sort of happened naturally. Adeline had planned to sculpt for a while, too.

AG: Let's move on from the exhibition now. How did you get involved with the department of physics and astronomy at University College London?

MK: I went to a talk at the Royal Astronomical Society – they have lunchtime talks. I was outside the lecture room afterwards, having a cigarette, and Professor Ofer Lahav [Perren Chair of Astronomy at UCL] came out of the talk and I went over to speak to him. I wanted to discuss with him this book I was reading about creativity and science. The book was in the form of a correspondence between David Bohm and Charles Biederman. Anyway, I really wanted to ask him if he knew about these things. We had a positive series of meet-ups to talk about things like this. I found out that he had a passion for art. We were meeting about once a month to chat about creativity and science. This then led to me being the artist in residence in the UCL Department of Physics and Astronomy. I was commissioned to do an artwork and it's now in the UCL observatory.

AG: Can you envisage further collaborations with Adeline?

MK: Oh, for sure. We said that we would do another duo show in five years.

Adeline is curating a show called Whispers, which will be at the Ronchini Gallery, London, from 11 December 2015 to 16 January 2016. I'm going to be part of the second round of this, which will be in 2016.

Points of Contact: Marie Kaus and Adeline de Monseignat is at the Cob Gallery, London, 8-31 October 2015.