

BIENVENU STEINBERG & PARTNER

Stefana McClure

I See You Seeing Me (Meeting the Female Gaze)

November 4 - December 11, 2021

Bienvenu Steinberg & Partner is pleased to present *I See You Seeing Me (Meeting the Female Gaze)*, Stefana McClure's 8th solo exhibition in New York. The exhibition will be on view from November 4 through December 11, 2021. Translating, transposing and decoding the synesthetic structure connecting text and image, McClure unveils the layers of embedded information to which we are constantly subjected and brings to light the complexities and the aftermath of violence on societies.

The women we now see looking back at the world are women we can identify with and believe in: strong, independent, non-fetishized. *I See You Seeing Me* meets this gaze, celebrating films, poetry, novels and comics made from a female vantage point and embracing a feminist sensibility. Upon entering the space, one is confronted with a mighty double-string necklace strung with Italian ruby spring twine. It is made of ten vintage steel axe heads, wrapped with the poetic prose of Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*. As Franz Kafka famously said "A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us".

Five sculptures on a table are the centerpiece of the gallery. Deconstructed books reconfigured as continuous balls of string, the paper sculptures are shown here for the first time, a massive undertaking McClure has been working on since 2018. The sculptures are complete reconstructions of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's five major novels, *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed*, and *A Raw Youth*. These behemoths are collectively known as *The Five Elephants*, a phrase coined by Svetlana Geier, perhaps the world's greatest translator of Russian literature, who spent her life retranslating these texts into German, offering a new reading of the masterpieces.

Much of McClure's practice involves using processes more often applied to textiles than paper. She has created a series of finely woven objects reminiscent of wall tapestries. *Wonder Woman*, one of the most powerful superheroes in the DC universe, battles an evil group of mermaids created from tiny sharks. The comics, cut into strips and hand knit back together, are transfigured into a delicate fabric, weaving alternate storylines that are barely perceptible.

Also on view is a discreet installation of invisible hair net sculptures inspired by the admonition to carry one's knowledge lightly. The ultimate in self-effacement: "you are the only one who knows you are wearing it," these text depositories, magic knit of sheer nylon yarn and woven into a self-conforming and durable ultra-invisible mesh, enable the wearer to bear their learning quietly on their head.

Emily Wilson's fabulous translation of *The Odyssey* — the first English translation of the epic poem by a woman, has been deconstructed and reconfigured into a ball of cut paper as well. It stands as a single sculpture, a complete world unto itself. *Coal from Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein is placed on a single shelf reminiscent of a Ryoan-ji rock garden. Taken from Gertrude Stein's enigmatic collection of experimental poems describing everyday objects, it consists of chunks of anthracite, a hard, compact coal with a submetallic luster, word-wrapped and polished.

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An installation of Protest Stones occupies the wall. These hurling weapons hang with braided twine. Made of either two, or three poetry-wrapped stones, the sculptures are nestled in knotted and tied Irish linen twine, or polished Hungarian hemp cord. Reminiscent of gaucho bolas or Arctic yo-yos, the stones are bolstered by the weighty words of iconic poets Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Joan Jordan, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Eavan Boland and Forough Farrokhzad.

A selection of Films on Paper punctuate the show. A body of work McClure has been developing over the past twenty years, the drawings are minimal compositions of two blurred lines at the bottom of a monochromatic field. McClure traces scene after scene of spoken dialogue, removing pigment from the paper with each transcription, ultimately condensing the entire text so that it can be viewed at once. The female gaze is central to Yasujiro Ozu's *Noriko Trilogy* (*Late Spring*, *Early Summer*, *Tokyo Story*), named for the female protagonist of all three films played by the inimitable Setsuko Hara. Ingrid Bergman is the abused wife manipulated by a diabolical husband to paranoid extremes of self-doubt and anxiety in George Cukor's 1944 film *Gaslight*. Patty Jenkins' film celebration of *Wonder Woman* is presented in DVD form with Japanese subtitles. Films made from a female standpoint, (as measured by the Bechdel test), are remarkable by their scarcity — despite the recent history of the art form, the representation of women in fiction film is still extremely confined to assigned roles.

Born in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, Stefana McClure lives and works in New York. She has exhibited extensively at museums and galleries internationally. Recent exhibitions include: The Immigrant Artist Biennial, New York (2020), Carlow Arts Festival, Carlow, Ireland (2020); The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2019); CENTRALE for Contemporary Art, Brussels BE (2018); Kunst Palais Liechtenstein, Feldkirch, Austria (2017) and Dublin Contemporary Biennial, IE (2011). Select collections include: The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, DE; Kunstmuseum Bonn, DE and The Machida City International Print Museum, Tokyo, JP.