

APPEX

DAWN CERNY

October 28, 2017 – February 11, 2018



Detail of *Abiquiu for the Common Man*, 2017.
Photo by Mark Woods. Courtesy of Henry Art Gallery,
Seattle.

APEX: DAWN CERNY

Often appearing as vaguely recognizable furnishings or figures, Dawn Cerny's colorful sculptures are deceptively approachable, presenting the viewer with a precarious dilemma in how to engage them. Two opposing efforts inform the artist's practice: on one hand, her work is formal and reductive, while on the other, she humorously responds through an absurdist production to the "rationale of modernity."¹ Cerny likens her work to that of actor Buster Keaton, who contrasted comedic physical performances and sight gags with deadpan expressions.

Similarly for Cerny, therein lies the tension of the sculpture's manifestation. She considers the physicality and composition of

her forms, and further reduces them with monochromatic color. But she also expresses unease or perhaps an apprehension through a seriousness of play. From each work, Cerny creates banter between these two thoughts.

Her titles provide a clue to her view of our relationships to objects in our everyday lives. *Lerágafrøgmer; our first nice thing together. A fight in Ikea* (2015) includes a made-up Swedish name for a product and a descriptor that sums up the famously humorous relationship tension that couples experience while navigating the attractive model rooms in the home furnishings store.

Other works such as *Contrapposto bookshelf in light green*



SHOWROOM at Seattle University, 2017. Photo by Elisa Pickett.



Dawn Cerny's Outdoor Studio, 2017. Photo and courtesy of the artist.

(2017) and *Figurative console (in orange)* (2017) are direct references to the body. They are poses that echo parts of furniture as much as they are bodily forms that remind us of the structures around us. They also recall Cerny's earlier performative work from 2016, in which, dressed in black, she literally tries to adjust and distort her body to be furniture.

Viewing as a whole, Cerny's sculptures are not far removed from the opening scene of the Nouveau Roman film *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961): As the film opens with a repeating narrative of the architecture of a baroque château, the frozen figures encompass as much of the architecture, whereas the architecture embodies more of a corporeal presence. Cerny works through this tension in her sculptures through abstraction and affecting the figure.

Cerny's struggle with the figurative in her work is refreshingly transparent as much as her embrace of the pejorative languages associated with domesticity, décor, the maternal, and what has historically been women's labor. Some of her sculptures reveal the tiny, gnawing concerns of daily life, and the trail of rubbish that attests to our state of existence, of where to place knick-

knacks and everyday items—these things to occupy and hold more things—as expressed in works such as *Blue structure for things and house keys* (2016) or *Orange chair with holes and change dish* (2017). Even Cerny's materials betray the efforts of her formal concerns in sculpture—paper, plaster, fiberglass, foam, and theatre paint constitute many of these works.

Cerny's process is also about a search that she leaves for the viewer to see. Though visual elements are obviously present in her work, the sculptures are perhaps much more about their physicality in space. Art historian and critic Herbert Read argued for sculpture to be understood in this way:

The specifically plastic sensibility is, I believe, more complex than the specifically visual sensibility. It involves three factors: a sensation of the tactile qualities of surfaces; a sensation of volume as denoted by plane surfaces; and a synthetic realization of the mass and ponderability of the object.¹

Cerny's sculptures invite this ponderability of a very present moment of modernity and the messiness of daily life that exists through this physicality, offering a metonymic experience.

—Grace Kook-Anderson
The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art

¹ Conversation with the artist, July 27, 2017.

² *Last Year in Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*) is a 1961 film directed by Alain Resnais, who also co-wrote the script with Alain Robbe-Grillet. The film takes place in a single location, an elaborate hotel, whose architecture takes on as much importance as the narrative.

³ Herbert Read, *The Art of Sculpture*, A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 71.

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BIOGRAPHY

Dawn Cerny (b. 1979) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Seattle. Cerny's work has been exhibited at many venues including most recently at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle, Or Gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia; Night Gallery in Los Angeles; and Derek Eller Gallery in New York. She received a BFA at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle and earned an MFA in sculpture at Bard College in New York. She is currently Seattle University's Visual Artist in Residence. In December, Cerny will be included in an exhibition at Cooper Cole in Toronto, Ontario.

APEX

An ongoing series of exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists living in the Northwest. Presenting contemporary art in the context of the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Center for Northwest Art, this program continues the Museum's 125-year commitment to exhibiting, collecting, and celebrating the art of the region. APEX is supported in part by The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Endowments for Northwest Art.



Blue structure for things and house keys, 2016. Photo by Elisa Pickett.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works are the collection of the artist

Abiquiu for the common man, 2017

Tinted aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, paint, rocks, fabric
98 x 108 x 10 inches

Umbrella hanger (The last Judge takes a moment), 2016

Wood, foam, aqua resin, paint
76 x 35 x 6 inches

Leaning body wall station (in Navy), 2016-2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, wood foam, paper, acrylic paint
111 x 25 x 35 inches

Pink hat rack coat hanger clock, 2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, foam, wood, paper, paint
108 x 12 x 15 inches

Brown and Green Bookcase, 2016

Aqua resin, fiberglass, paint, wood, casters, felt
75 x 33 x 14 ½ inches

Red Bookcase, 2016

Aqua resin, wood, paper, acrylic paint
84 x 45 x 15 inches

Gray Wardrobe, 2017

Tinted aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, foam, wire, found objects
110 x 80 x 12 inches

Orange chair with holes and change dish, 2016-2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, acrylic paint, air-dry clay
35 x 28 x 18 inches

Side table (pink), 2016-2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, acrylic paint
20 ½ x 17 x 18 inches

Lerågafrøgmer; our first nice thing together. A fight in Ikea, 2015

Wood, foam, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint, Japanese prints
72 x 28 x 17 inches

Blue structure for things and house keys, 2016

Aqua resin, fiberglass, clay, wood, paper, foam, casters, paint, plaster,
found objects
104 x 44 x 15 inches

Contrapposto bookshelf in light green, 2017

Wood, cardboard, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
40 x 35 x 12 inches

Blue Screen (for sisters and friends), 2017

Tinted aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper paint, rocks, fabric
97 x 102 x 22 inches

Not Enough Mother, 2017

Tinted aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, paint, plaster
88 x 69 x 37 inches

MAM (in light yellow), 2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, foam, wood, paper, paint
93 x 11 x 33 inches

Biblelot Cart™ (in statue of liberty green), 2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, acrylic paint, casters
76 ½ x 32 x 27 inches

Figurative console (in orange), 2017

Aqua resin, foam, fiberglass, wood, paper, acrylic paint, casters
78 x 30 x 47 inches

Mother Miriam, 2017

Wood, cardboard, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint, casters
96 x 12 x 48 inches

Side Table for Dominique DeMenil, 2017

Aqua resin, fiberglass, wood, paper, acrylic paint
40 x 39 x 27 inches

Mother Philip (a mirror of things), 2017

Cardboard, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint, casters
67 x 18 x 8 inches

Orzo (the dog), 2017

Cardboard, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
25 x 19 x 19 inches

(navy window), 2017

Foam, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
29 x 21 x 2 ½ inches

(pink window), 2017

Foam, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
27 x 18 x 2 inches

Rome 2004, 2017

Foam, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
30 x 24 ½ x 2 inches

MOTHER I (mauve vent), 2017

Foam, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
17 x 25 x 1 ½ inches

MOTHER II (taupe vent), 2017

Foam, aqua resin, fiberglass, paint
18 x 24 x 3 inches

COVER:

Detail of *Blue structure for things and house keys*, 2016.

Photo by Mark Woods. Courtesy of Henry Art Gallery, Seattle.

