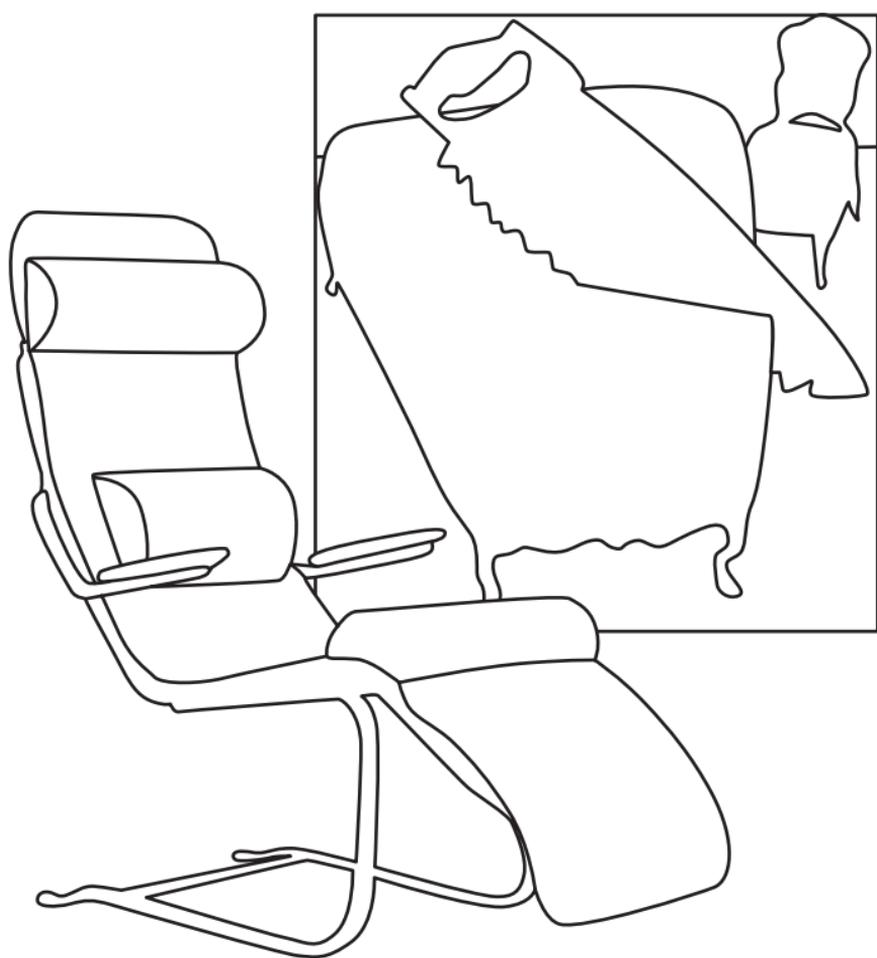


GINNY CASEY & JESSI REAVES
April 28–August 6



And thus began the rule of the upholsterer, a reign of terror that still gives us nightmares.

—Adolf Loos, “Interior Design: Prelude” (1898)¹

Consequently if our work embodies these beliefs it must insult any one who is spiritually attuned to interior decoration; pictures for the home; pictures for over the mantel...

—Letter to *New York Times* from Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb (1943)²



In this exhibition, Ginny Casey’s paintings and Jessi Reaves’s sculpture meet through the language of decorative and domestic objects. Casey “builds sculpture with paint,” in her words, seen most overtly in *Sculpture Studio* in which an array of semi-abstract three-dimensional objects—perhaps the ornamental sort you might find displayed on a bookshelf or coffee table—eagerly crowd the foreground. Often sanded down, Casey’s canvases quiver with life, radiating with texture and color. Reaves, who had once studied painting and worked part-time as an upholsterer, constructs her sculptures from a mixture of used materials and/or found frames of chairs, chaises, and shelves. Although her works double as both sculpture and functional furniture, their imperfect or embellished surfaces—the dark knots of wood in *More Personal Headboard* or patterned fabric of *Chair 1* and *Chair 2*—also accommodate painterly gestures as well as ornamental excess.

Decoration, however, in many ways has maintained a pejorative position within the orbit of modernism in art, architecture, and design. Architect Adolf Loos’s disdain for overstuffed and ornamented furniture popular during the receding Victorian era, for instance, resonates nearly half a century later with the contempt of artists Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb for the mere suggestion that their abstract paintings could resemble “interior decoration.” More specifically, certain registers of symbolic femininity, such as sensuality and superficiality, became negatively equated with the excessive, embellished surfaces of upholstered furniture and other objects in the home, the historical locus of women’s work. What if, however, “pictures for the home” were not so wildly different from pictures for the gallery, and the “rule of the upholsterer” was one likewise followed by the sculptor? What if we, like Casey and Reaves, took seriously domestic space and all the things arranged in it? The artists’ strange scenes of once ordinary stuff and space inhabit this very interval between interior and public, decoration and art, surface and structure, dependency and autonomy. Taken together, their work unravels differences between modes of display in the exhibition or the home, the world of art, and that of life.



Filtered through a quasi-Surrealist imagination of the domestic uncanny, this selection of Casey’s paintings revel in both the dreams and “nightmares,” to borrow Loos’s term, of formerly quotidian objects, found in the home but here furnished with lives of their own. Chairs, tables, figurines, and even fragments of fingers and feet commit

unruly acts or are endowed with unexpected affects. Vessels resembling owls engage in conversation; an oversized saw ominously slices through a blue table; and in *The Potter's Ear*, the eponymous organ floats underneath a chunky vase presumably thrown by an unseen potter whose tools lie on the table. The deliberate appearance of these instruments of labor in several paintings signals a human presence that nevertheless remains largely absent from scenes where objects, rather than people, take center stage. Insentient things flaunt anthropomorphic or animalized qualities; body parts, in turn, congeal into material objects. Casey's paintings stage dramas of animated objects, domestic desires, and an imaginative interiority derived from interior space and stuff.

Reaves's sculptures exhibit a vitality matched by Casey's inventory of enchanted objects. First and foremost, as functional furniture, the artist's work reminds us of our daily dependence on these structures of support, bringing human body and inanimate object even closer together. From *Dog's Toy Coat Rack* to *Smushed Butt Table* to *Shelf for a Log*, Reaves's titles further invest her sculptures with animation: the animality of a canine, the corporeality of a "smushed" butt, and the dignity of a log's obdurate objecthood, deserving of its own shelf. So, too, do her material choices and manipulation. Soft and brutal textures, colors and patterns—in short, what modernist architect, designer, and painter Le Corbusier might condemn as the "superfluous" character of "decorative art" and its "accidental surface modality"—carry Reaves's work beyond mere function and deliver something indelibly strange to these seemingly still and silent objects, sensitizing and even eroticizing the frames of modern furniture used in several sculptures.³ Emerging most forcefully in the 1920s and '30s, many modernist designers were concerned with unadorned structures, universal forms, and the standardized promise of the machine in contrast to their contemporaries in Surrealist circles of the same period.

Consider *Slipcovered Chair (Pink Gag)*, Reaves's reworking of Marcel Breuer's B64 armchair (1928), here covered in a decorative gauze of magenta fabric, a feminine scrim or surface through which to see the structure underneath. Or take *Kragel's Nap Chair*, a chaise lounge that loosely resembles the LC4 chaise lounge (1928–29) designed by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charlotte Perriand. Soiled upholsterer's foam and the harsher texture of rattan exude both a warmth and toughness that diverge from the indifferent affect of the LC4's sleek chrome and leather materials. Reaves's work demands recognition of the object's own sensuous specificity and record of unmaking and making, breaking and mending, often unavailable in the universal geometries and seemingly ageless forms of modern design. If a "chair has no soul," as Le Corbusier declared, then Reaves's furniture might intimate otherwise.⁴



When placed near Reaves's sculptural furniture, Casey's canvases function as art *and* ornament—singular paintings *and* one part of what could be a larger domestic decorative schema, department store vignette, or even theatrical set. In the company of Casey's paintings, Reaves's works also

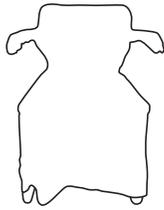
enjoy multiple states as sculpture *and* furniture; in this case, they act as surrogate museum benches, which usually provide few reasons to linger, devoid of the comfortable surfaces found on the artist's sculptures-cum-furniture.⁵ By improvising on intersecting histories of commercial, domestic, and museum displays, this exhibition insists on art's other life as decorative and domestic objects: loved and lived with; everyday and enchanted; ordinary repositories of dreams, nightmares, and fantasies that are embedded within, rather than removed from, the fabric of the world.

—Charlotte Ickes
Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow

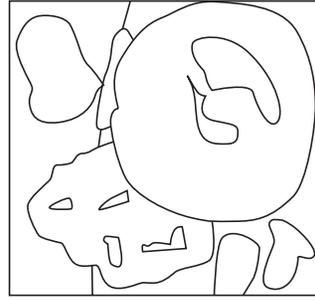
- 1 Adolf Loos, "Interior Design: Prelude," in *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998), 52.
- 2 Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb as qtd. in Bonnie Clearwater, "Shared Myths: Reconsideration of Rothko's and Gottlieb's Letter to *The New York Times*," *Archives of American Art Journal* 24, no. 1 (1984), 23.
- 3 Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James Dunnett (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 166, 114.
- 4 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1986), 142.
- 5 Three texts have been particularly influential in my thinking around the collision of interior decoration and exhibition installation as well as overlooked furniture of museums. For more information, see Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders, "An Aesthetic Headache: Notes from the Museum Bench," in *Interiors, CCS Readers: Perspectives on Art and Culture*, eds. Johanna Burton, Lynne Cooke, and Josiah McElheny (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College/Sternberg Press, 2012); Richard Meyer, "Big, Middle-Class Modernism," *October* 131 (Winter 2010); Helen Molesworth, "Louise Lawler: Just the Facts," in *Interiors, CCS Readers: Perspectives on Art and Culture*, eds. Johanna Burton, Lynne Cooke, and Josiah McElheny (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College/Sternberg Press), 20.



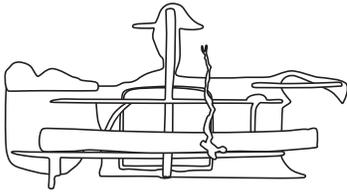
Jessi Reaves
sexy hazard ladder, 2015
 Canadian pine, red oak, plastic,
 and rubber
 Courtesy the artist and
 Bridget Donahue, New York



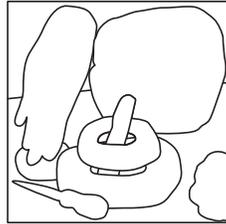
Jessi Reaves
Slipcovered Chair (Pink Gag), 2017
 Found chair, fabric, zipper, and thread
 Courtesy the artist and
 Bridget Donahue, New York



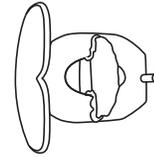
Ginny Casey
Sculpture Studio, 2016
 Oil on canvas
 Courtesy the artist and
 Half Gallery, New York



Jessi Reaves
Shelf for a Log, 2016
 Plywood, sawdust, cane chair seat,
 and ink
 Private Collection



Ginny Casey
Pressing Matter, 2015
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



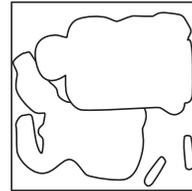
Jessi Reaves
Smushed Butt Table, 2016
 Plywood, pine, rubber, plastic,
 polyurethane foam, and ink
 Private Collection



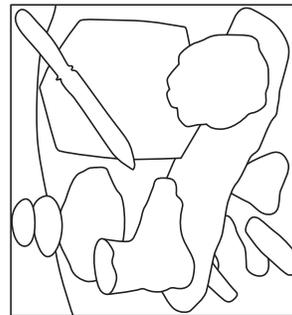
Ginny Casey
Broken Vase, 2015
 Oil on canvas
 Collection of Bill Powers and
 Cynthia Rowley



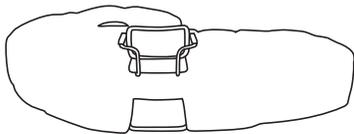
Jessi Reaves
Split Mess (Barley Twist Lamps), 2017
 Wood, metal, fabric, sawdust, wood-
 glue, upholstery trim, velour beads,
 thread, lamp wiring, and LED bulbs
 Courtesy the artist and
 Bridget Donahue, New York



Ginny Casey
Chatty Forms, 2016
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



Ginny Casey
Balancing Act, 2017
 Oil on canvas
 Courtesy the artist and
 Half Gallery, New York



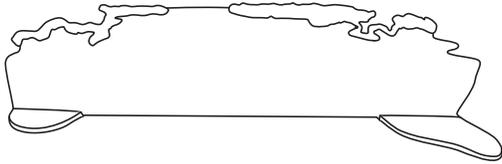
Jessi Reaves
*Ottoman with Parked Chair &
 Ottoman*, 2017
 Plywood, foam, fleece, fabric,
 hardware, and found furniture
 Courtesy the artist and
 Bridget Donahue, New York



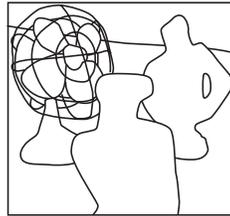
Jessi Reaves
Worthless Lump (Lamp), 2017
 Chair base, bun foot, plywood, sawdust,
 wood glue, driftwood, lamp wiring,
 and lampshade (steel silk)
 Courtesy the artist and
 Bridget Donahue, New York



Jessi Reaves
Kragel's Nap Chair, 2015
 Steel, rattan, enamel, polyurethane foam,
 cotton, ink, plastic glass, and hardware
 Collection of Susan Cianciolo



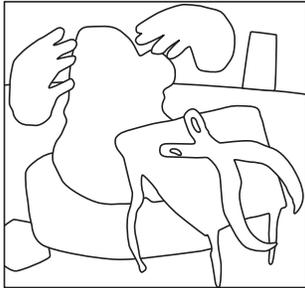
Jessi Reaves
More Personal Headboard, 2017
 Plywood, sawdust, wood glue, foam, silk, nylon cord, ink, and wood putty
 Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York



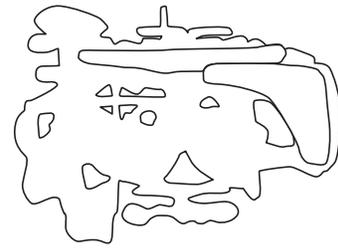
Ginny Casey
Fan with Jugs, 2017
 Oil on canvas
 Courtesy the artist and Half Gallery, New York



Jessi Reaves
Night Cabinet (Little Miss Attitude), 2016
 Plywood, wood, steel, silk, and zippers
 Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York



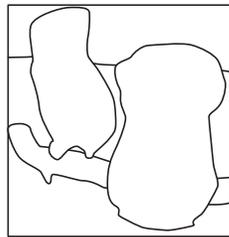
Ginny Casey
Moody Blue Studio, 2017
 Oil on canvas
 Courtesy the artist and Half Gallery, New York



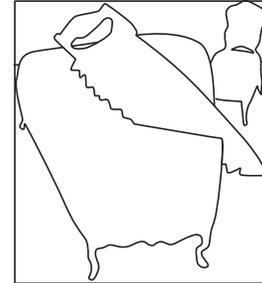
Jessi Reaves
Shelf with Pockets & Braid, 2017
 Plywood, driftwood, bond-fire wood, sawdust, wood glue, chair caning, metal, leather, velvet, silk, and ink
 Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York



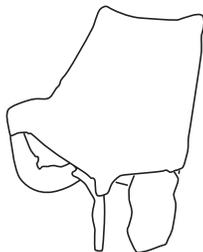
Jessi Reaves
Dog's Toy Coat Rack, 2015
 Canadian oak, steel, and varnish
 Private Collection, New York



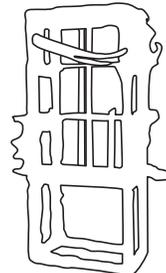
Ginny Casey
Purple Conversation, 2016
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection



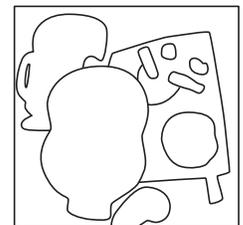
Ginny Casey
Blue Table, 2016
 Oil on canvas
 Collection of Half Gallery, New York



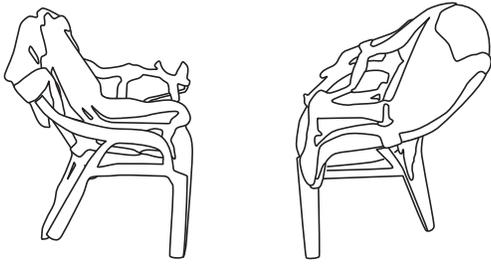
Jessi Reaves
Mutant Butterfly Chair, 2017
 Plywood, leather, plastic, hardware, wood, sawdust, and wood glue
 Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York



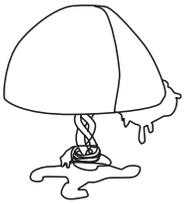
Jessi Reaves
Deals 3 Damage (Wicker Shelf), 2016
 Wood, wicker, plywood, studio dust, wood glue, polyurethane foam, ink, and hardware
 Collection of Scott J. Lorinsky



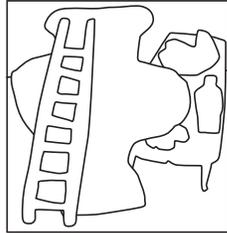
Ginny Casey
The Potter's Ear, 2015
 Oil on canvas
 Private Collection, New York



Jessi Reaves
Chair 1 and Chair 2, 2016
Plastic, driftwood, sawdust, wood glue, fabric,
cotton batting, and polyurethane foam
Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York



Jessi Reaves
Split Mess (Barley Twist Lamps), 2017
Wood, metal, fabric, sawdust, wood-
glue, upholstery trim, velour beads,
thread, lamp wiring, and LED bulbs
Courtesy the artist and
Bridget Donahue, New York



Ginny Casey
Blue Vase with Ladder, 2016
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

#GINNYCASEYJESSIREAVES

Ginny Casey & Jessi Reaves is organized by 2015–2017 Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow Charlotte Ickes. A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition, featuring new essays by Ickes and Julia Bryan-Wilson, Associate Professor, Department of History of Art, University of California, Berkeley.

Ginny Casey (b. 1981, Niskayuna, New York; lives New York) received her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. She has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Half Gallery and 106 Green, New York. Recently her work has been included in group shows at DC Moore Gallery, New York; Romeo, New York; and Radical Abacus, Santa Fe, New Mexico. This summer, her work will be on view in a solo exhibition at Mier Gallery in Los Angeles.

Jessi Reaves (b. 1986, Portland, Oregon; lives New York) received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. Her work has been included in group exhibitions nationally and internationally, in venues including Team Gallery, New York; Swiss Institute, New York; Herald St, London; and A Palazzo Gallery, Brescia, Italy. In 2016, Reaves presented her first solo exhibition with Bridget Donahue, New York, and her work is featured in the 2017 Whitney Biennial.

Support for this exhibition and for ICA's Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow Program has been provided by the Leonard & Judy Lauder Fund of The Lauder Foundation

Visitors are welcome to sit carefully on the ottoman and chairs located on the gallery floor.

RELATED PROGRAMS

Wednesday, May 10, 6:30 PM

On the Domestic Exhibition: Felix Burrichter and Esther da Costa Meyer present recent projects on the intersection of art, design, and interior decoration in a conversation moderated by curator Charlotte Ickes

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