GINNY CASEY & JESSI REAVES
April 28–August 6

THE EDNA S. TUTTLEMAN GALLERY
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 the seemingly still and silent objects, sensitizing and even eroticizing the frames of modern furniture used in several sculptures. Emerging most forcefully in the 1920s and ‘30s, many modernist designers were concerned with unadorned structures, universal forms, and the standardized promise 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.

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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.

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 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. 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 embodied within, rather than removed from, the fabric of the world.

—Charlotte Ickes
Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow

Ginny Casey

_Moody Blue Studio_, 2017
Oil on canvas
_Private Collection, New York_

_Ginny Casey

_The Potter’s Ear_, 2015
Oil on canvas
_Collection of Scott J. Lorinsky_

_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

_More Personal Headboard_, 2017
Plywood, sawdust, wood glue, foam, silk, nylon cord, ink, and wood putty
_Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, 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_

_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)_
Wood, wicker, plywood, studio dust, wood glue, polyurethane foam, ink, and hardware
_Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York_

_Jessi Reaves

_Night Cabinet (Little Miss Attitude)_
Wood, wood, steel, silk, and zippers
_Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York_
Ginny Casey
*Blue Vase with Ladder*, 2016
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

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
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.

Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania