

99 VALERIE KEANE OFF BASE

TEXT BY MIKE
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Five spotlit carcasses dangle in Valerie Keane's 2018 solo exhibition at Dallas Contemporary. They accrete tectonic dregs, stuff scrapped and dismissed. Steel-studded thermoplastic wisps of safety greens and burlesque reds glint in expression. Suspended by aircraft cables, these lacerated marionettes skew on approach. Fuming masses of glitz sag like cured flesh to be swallowed but not digested.

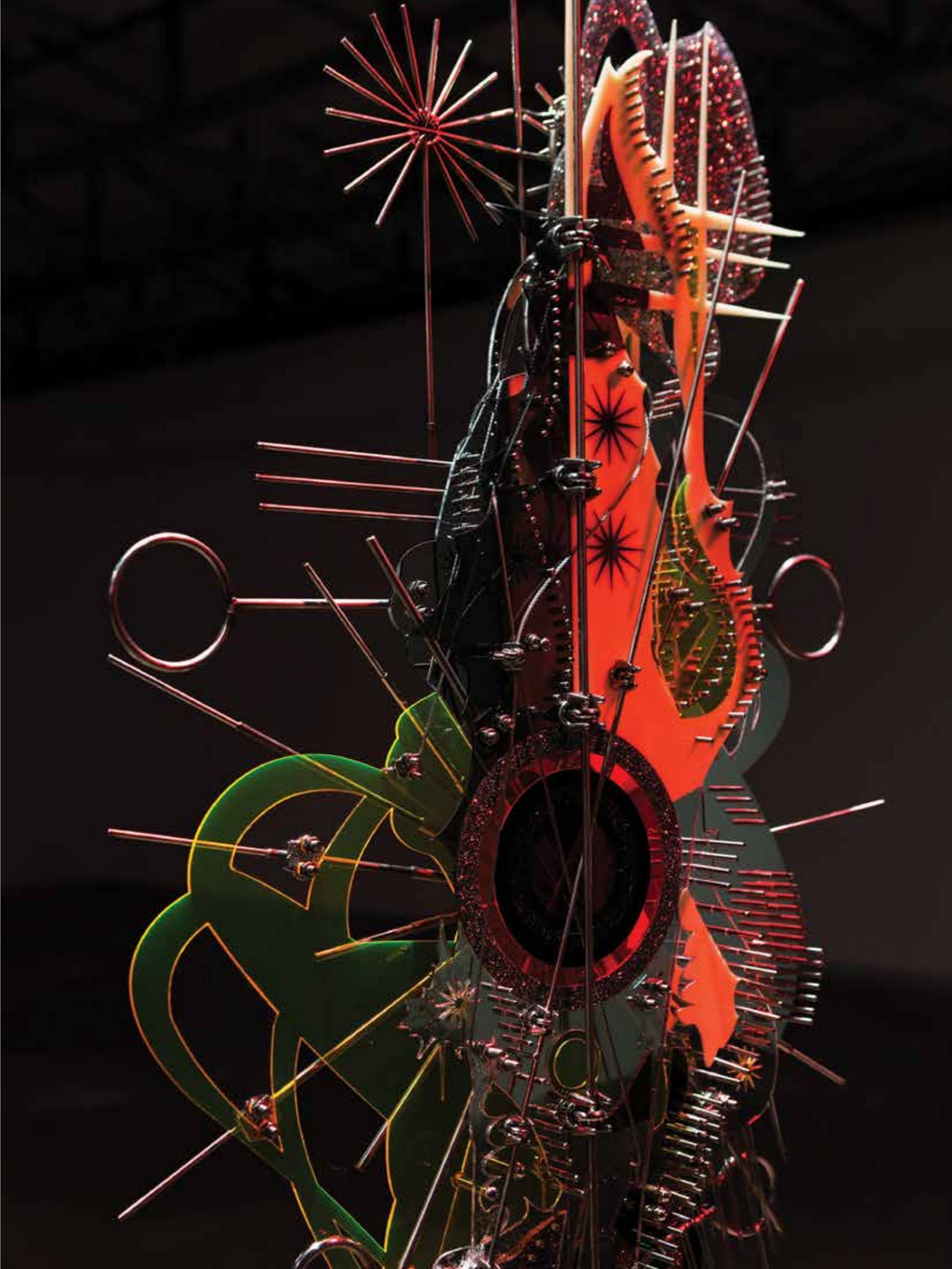
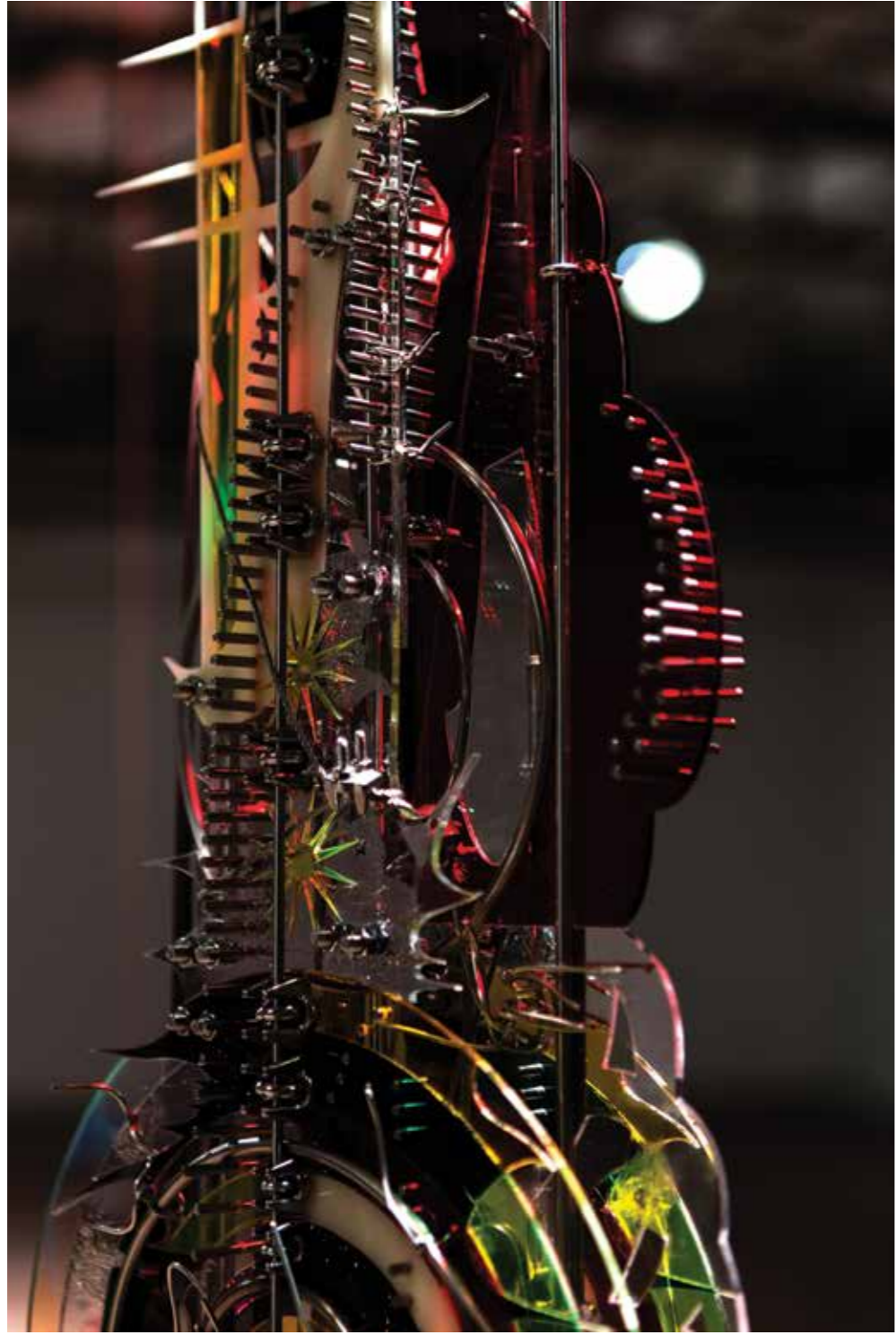
Dallas Contemporary's gallery becomes a sterile holding tank, a space of nonproductive consumption. There, architecture's economy of function measures against its expenditure, exposing the false consciousness of design's streamlines belying exploitation. Circuits of exchange are not closed; unassimilable glut seeps from the systems that bore them. Flayed abscesses ribbon and re-cauterize. They proliferate embellishment. Excess crystallizes in motifs of control as they unyoke subordinate ties to utility and enter vagary.¹ Under pressure is not ornament but use.

Utility is redirected, away from purpose and toward affect. Keane retools material forms by digitally drafting their virtual roles, rasterizing detached shapes. Software renders broadsheets whose full-scale prints are maquettes. Programmed and hand-edited, these plans interlock an aggregate of industrial, raw media. Acrylic sheets, steel spokes, grated swaths, rubber tubes, and nylon zips are laser cut, drilled, welded, linked, bolted, laced, and hitched. Disparate elements constellate abstractions that preserve a heterology of source and process. This precise manufacturing expropriates the logic of order its instruments prescribe, affording outlets for energies in disuse.

Fabrication implicates consumption—of things, of methods, of ideas. What is made edible joins a metabolic system of intake and discharge: whereas anabolic pathways generate tissue from simple proteins, carbs, and fats, other catabolic pathways excrete energy from complex substances. Keane interweaves both tracks, overriding constructive and destructive reactions to trim slagged byproduct. Homeostasis absorbs possessor and possessed, but the unowned remains strange; its forms inoculate and disgorge. Antiseptic globs sheen emetic lather. They instance what the built landscape spits in disregard, what it hangs, draws, and quarters.

If a contained community is defined by what it expels, Keane recombines the ousted. As her asymmetric louvers tint and attenuate, they evince their images' plasticity, their propensity to regurgitate signification. These images might operate what Pierre Klossowski calls "phantasms," which reroute conventions of utility and embody affect.² They drive his declared shift from a currency of utensils, or useful instruments, to one of erotics, where desire propels production. Flows of affective pulsions produce the industrial harness of lived experience. Desiderata clot snapshot composites which in turn inscribe subjectivity.

Propagated ad nauseam, phantasmic images accrue stereotypes that condition behavior in circumscribed space. Ripped idioms intercept and deflect individual wants to profligate ends. They litter the terrain of late capital as aftereffects of immaterial labor, prompting felt responses from inlaid subjects. Virulent syntax pervades architecture's visual and tactile schemata, broadcasting remobilized vernaculars of desire.





The nostalgic ease of kitsch: arabesque rails, swizzle sticks, ellipticals, stovetops, parasols, fireworks, tchotchkes, kites, darts. The wished narcissism of nightclubs: sequined dress, trance stabs, stemmed glass, disco tile, clipped bass, neon loops, stools, poles. The sunken rush of casinos: absent clocks, circadian glows, roulette whorls, grained veneers, vestigial shafts, chips, slots.

These morphologies sediment the unvariegated substratum of Art Basel Hong Kong 2019. Affixed to proprietary rods in the booth of Paris' High Art, Keane's slitted clusters unembed any hint of external reference. Sovereign forms are left to roil, divorced from the restraints of architectural context. This commercial matrix is rife of empty utility: unlike utensils that conceal Klossowskian phantasms under the guise of use, artworks eschew such pretext and express affect in the open. But no spatial transmission of affect is unmediated.

Keane dissociates from erected space and its modes of individuation. Her work treats affect as a force rather than a condition. Normative models of subjectivity colonize a passive ground whose intensities they neglect.³ Preset frameworks suppose subjects as irrevocably positioned to what accompany and contain them. This posture relates a kind of proprioception, a captive selfsameness that stabilizes identity at multiplicity's expense. But Keane's space is no mere repository. Unhoused and exhibited, her curlicues disconnect the affective grip of worn typologies, engaging architecture not as receptacle but as intermediary. Flushed husks with nowhere to go slump deposits of latent recharge. Filigree unsettles, as does sense. Off the Cartesian grid and its z-plane, cybernetic dongles deplete physical insert and speculate agency in unintelligible vacuum.

Matter aside, one way out of this dedifferentiated aporia is to overcode its light. In Keane's 2016 exhibition at LOMEX in New York, LEDs beam multicolor fields rippling an array of her incandescent figures, these especially skeletal. A mirrored wall reflects spillover glare, irrigating its drift across the intimate setting's walls, corners, and screens. Projected amid are Oto Gillen's photographs of street detritus, representations of nocturnal refuse that coagulate onto Keane's contours and disperse beyond them. Her choice plastic is Perspex, whose Latinate name promises a "looking through." It transmits up to 92% of visible light. The acrylic's 8%, its opaque remainder, makes legible cast images which register layered

residue. So in LOMEX's installation, any looking *through* betrays a looking *at*; volume ensnares surface. As light travels the show's media, it compounds refractive bends to access variable wavelengths, courses, and speeds.

Keane's webbed relays of translucent muck intervene circuits of reception in ways that recall strategies of scenography. Mixed fragments of extrafunctional architecture in German Expressionist film amplify in affect when framed by light. Collages of stairs, pillars, and arches preclude actionable use but release a dramaturgic energy that exceeds the pictorial. Tenebrous hazes of set lighting furnish these stagecraft rigs with a thickened mood. The lit proscenium coextends the delimited zone of its spectator and the pregnant void its actors flex. This approach to *mise en scène* aligns with Keane's use of light, deployed to recalibrate active depths of space and their slung affects. Vectorized flares incise provisional impressions and refract attendant afterburn.

Real-life intraocular applications of grafted Perspex consummate the brand's optic valence: looking *into* Perspex eyes permits the very transmissive potentials Keane's trussed cut-outs facilitate. The synthetic polymer's proxy as tissue grants paraprosthesis means to cement bone, smooth scar, and sculpt muscle. Prosthesis, like architecture, fashions the inorganic into vital systems. Its alien armature penetrates but is neither rejected nor engulfed, not unlike the type of metal that rivets and spines Keane's tendrils. 316 grade stainless "surgical steel" is preferred for medical implants, cosmetic piercings, and fetish constraints. It also undergirds the process of petrochemicals, food, and waste. A Ballardian alloy of chromium, 316 stainless resists corrosion, channels energy, and punctures lust. Effluvia still leaks.

Dry aging accelerates corrosion. Its purpose-built enclave catalyzes the desiccation and enzymic decay of connective mesh. Efforts to concentrate textural and sensory properties succeed when a desirous market subsumes the product. But if meat fails to sell, it joins its gutted entrails to rot. Keane's metabolics ravage muscle to reveal bone. Her standing reserves of artifice degrade but do not yet recycle.

1. Georges Bataille, *The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade*, in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, translated by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 91-102.
2. Pierre Klossowski, *Living Currency*, translated by Daniel W. Smith (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 45-78.
3. Elisabeth A. Grosz, *The Future of Space*, in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 108-129.



The desire to be everything, Dallas Contemporary, 2018 Installation views (pp. 100-103) Courtesy: the artist

Nightswimmer, 2019 Courtesy: the artist (p. 104)