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# Valerie Keane

By Allison Bulger





Humans love fire 'cause it mocks our rule. Cartoons incite the same ancient envy—to groove past our edges, to move with the logic of thought. But we are dumb, fixed. We cannot eject our eyes in panic or melt rather than take the exam. (Eisenstein called it “plasmatic motion,” this thing we can’t do.) So we like fire, steam and leaves ratched up by wind. And because we cannot groove, we stamp this desire on our industry. Odalisque fingernails issue from the Freedom Tower’s spire, now hardening into the carpet in the Carlyle’s lobby, now bending up four flights of stairs off the Bowery, and now—where are we now?

An art gallery on 6 March. Seedily overcast, leather weather. Valerie Keane’s sculptures are suckered into the ceiling, five examples of motion without predicate. “Ubu Noir,” her first solo show, is at Lomex, but location is, for Keane’s purposes, irrelevant. I’ve seen Keane’s works in a Chinatown sewing shop and the delusional Frieze art fair (with High Art), and they make every business Their Own Business. The sculptures are adaptive, ken to both the industrial and the parasitic. Aircraft cables allow for flexible configuration and Keane even adds new anchor points or hardware if the site so demands. At the same time, the scalpel-sharp curves, punked-out rivets and flashy colors deny their Keane-created past. The whisper: *I can do what you cannot!* At “Ubu Noir,” I follow rubber tubes as they dreadlock over the wooden floor, demanding human-to-alien respect. Oto Gillen’s photographs heat the room’s primary light source, an ouroboric projection of magnified textures and wavering urbanity—the neon skin through which *Kazu X* and *Glass Alibi* and *Spectre of the Rose* (all 2016) are made visible. I understand these titles without knowledge of their histories. This work, like fire, stands plaintively outside the language we give consent to describe.

### Examples of motion without predicate, these adaptive sculptures ken to both the industrial and the parasitic

Capitalizing on infatuation with primeval logic is by no means a new trick. Keane cops from not only the OG elemental, but also from the vogues of a changing shop window, from construction sites as they belly and cave. Her drafting program loses no detail when the silhouette is scaled to human size, and all the mechanically fastened, weight-rated hardware is 316 stainless—a.k.a. surgical steel, what is used to pierce and suspend flesh for both pleasure and necessity. So while from afar we see matte burlesques and ink snaking through fissures, when you close in, what you see is yourself. Glass cut down from the rectangles in police interrogation rooms and sex clubs, but at proximity that changes mirror into sign. The glass is the wrong shape for protected seeing. And once you do see, you are forced to scale up and down, to chase your reflection. The utility of this glass is no longer for you. In the absence of our industry is stillness, and we are threatened. The cut-out makes us believe in time travel. But where have we gone? Well, we know where we are not. We are not through Keane’s darkly-glass, in a freed man’s world. We watch shoulder to shoulder in a convex space. We use it like a television, and we arrive at the clearing and the source, and the caveman, always grinning because he knows action without predicate. But his fire dwindles, something hangs from the rafters, and now—where are we now?