

# BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

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ArtSeen

April 2nd, 2014

## EMILY NOELLE LAMBERT *Curio Logic II*

by Becky Brown

LU MAGNUS | MARCH 9 – APRIL 13, 2014

One of the few unpainted surfaces in Emily Noelle Lambert's exhibition *Curio Logic II* is a curved metal "sword" that partially delineates a swelling tapestry of works. This large contour, whose dark rusted surface stands out in a world of vivid and variegated color, is the most readily apparent evidence of her recent collaboration with blacksmith Peter Lambert (her brother). Working at his West Virginia shop and visiting local scrapyards, the female Lambert adds crafted iron and steel to her broad inventory of materials: paint, canvas, wood, styrofoam, plastic, and found objects.

The assemblage approach, which Lambert has practiced for years alongside painting and printmaking, took center stage in recent months with Isa Genzken's retrospective at MoMA. Genzken and Lambert both offer a surplus of sensory information: 2D/3D installations that span a vast spectrum of color, shape, and surface. While Genzken exploits factory-made objects one might find at Walmart (synthetic flower displays, Coca-Cola beach umbrellas), Lambert avoids corporate branding and other Pop references in favor of more properly "raw" materials not immediately distinguishable: everything is synthesized into a cohesive language that invites an immersive, and largely non-objective, experience. There are exceptions (the minuscule "bird" peeking out from within the towering pile of *Desire*) but, like the strongest artists in this lineage—Malevich, Rothko, Hesse, Benglis, Sillman—Lambert creates a unique visual cosmos that demands full participation on its own terms.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "curiologic" (adjective) as pertaining to a "form of hieroglyphic writing in which objects are represented by pictures, not symbolic characters." How do we draw a distinction between picture and symbol—literal and metaphoric expression? Rather than falling on one side or the other, Lambert proposes a language that allows for these registers to coexist: definite pictures whose content is tied to their physical form—direct, immediate, *literal*; yet rife with metaphorical possibility.

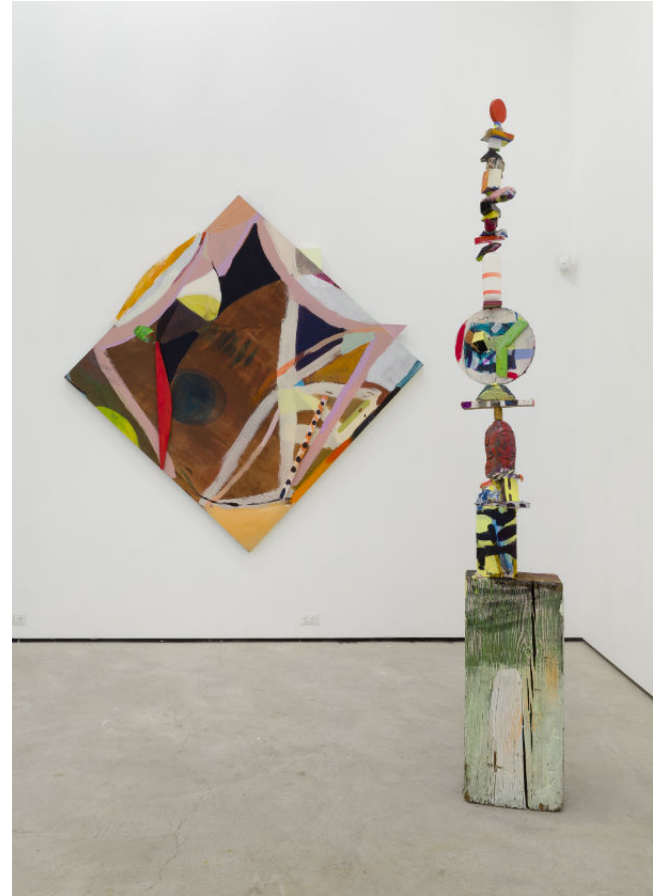
Her painting “Lean In” (2013) presents a cluster of elements leaning into the bottom left corner of a rectangular frame. Its



Emily Noelle Lambert, "Curio Logic II," 2014. Installation View. Photo: Etienne Frossard. Courtesy of Lu Magnus.

edges are emphasized with a fringe of three-dimensional wooden triangles, or detached “corners.” They stand upright on the surface, so that while their geometry is evident from the side, one’s frontal view is more akin to seeing the top of a fence or a jagged mountain range from above; though any threatening aspect is diminished by palette: pinks and lavenders with an occasional pale blue or green, all somewhere between neon and pastel. The leaning elements are diverse in size, shape, color and texture, and they struggle to form a coherent mass, like a motley crew of people, luggage, strollers, and bicycles pushing into a crowded subway car. The lean itself is into a corner, with one very tall acute triangle extending up beyond the frame. While the title is cleverly lifted from Sheryl Sandberg’s recent book on leadership strategies for women, it’s unclear whether these forms are leaning in or leaning out. There’s an urgency for them to coexist in a confined space, but their heterogeneity prevents them from making the most efficient use of it—like puzzle pieces that don’t fit.

Transcending the frame’s limits is a common motif for Lambert. “Kite Rib Space” (2010), is a rectangle with a black-painted diamond inside it. At the top, one of her signature wooden triangles completes the shape by extending it beyond the frame. This gesture becomes a playful rejoinder to Mondrian’s black gridlines that stop just short of the edge. Both Mondrian and Lambert call attention to the heavily-patrolled border between a painting and the world around it. If we recall Rosalind Krauss on centrifugal and centripetal logic in grid-making (or art-making in general), Lambert insists on the centrifugal—drawing attention outwards towards the world at large. And if, as Krauss points out, Mondrian’s abbreviated lines direct us back inside the frame, his diamond-shaped canvases of severed rectangular grids do just the opposite. Lambert inverts this gesture with “Kite Rib Space,” where the diamond sits within and beyond the rectangle, and offers a diamond-



Emily Noelle Lambert, Left: "Grind Whirl Stream," 2014. Acrylic and wood on panel, 91" x 91"; Right: "Desire," 2012 - 2014. Ceramic, wood, buoys, paint brushes and metal, 95" x 14" x 8". Photo: Etienne Frossard. Courtesy of Lu Magnus.

shaped canvas of her own (“Grind Whirl Stream” 2014) where vague traces of the grid give way to fluid curves and veils of color.

If we separate the term *curiologic*, we get Curio Logic, which points away from linguistics and towards the cabinet of curiosities: a collection of objects with no necessary commonality aside from intrinsically wondrous form. In his provocatively titled essay “Formalism,” Dave Hickey calls for greater attention to the “tangible patterns” by which all human information travels. It is this “logic of sensation” (Deleuze, via Hickey)—not source or content—that determines the cabinet of curiosities, and, I suspect, much of Lambert’s process as an artist. So when I step into her world and feel “an instantaneous sense of alien, patterned complexity,” maybe we’re both on the right track.



Emily Noelle Lambert, "Kite Rib Space," 2010. Acrylic on canvas and linen with wood, 80" × 68". Photo: Etienne Frossard. Courtesy of Lu Magnus.

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#### CONTRIBUTOR

Becky Brown

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#### RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

##### INCONVERSATION



## POST-LUNCH POEMS

### JOE PAN with ANSELM BERRIGAN

#### JUNE 2016 | BOOKS

Anselm and I first met through a mutual friend, the painter and collagist Jonathan Allen, whose artwork I’d exhibited and whose first art monograph I’d published through my press, Brooklyn Arts Press (BAP).