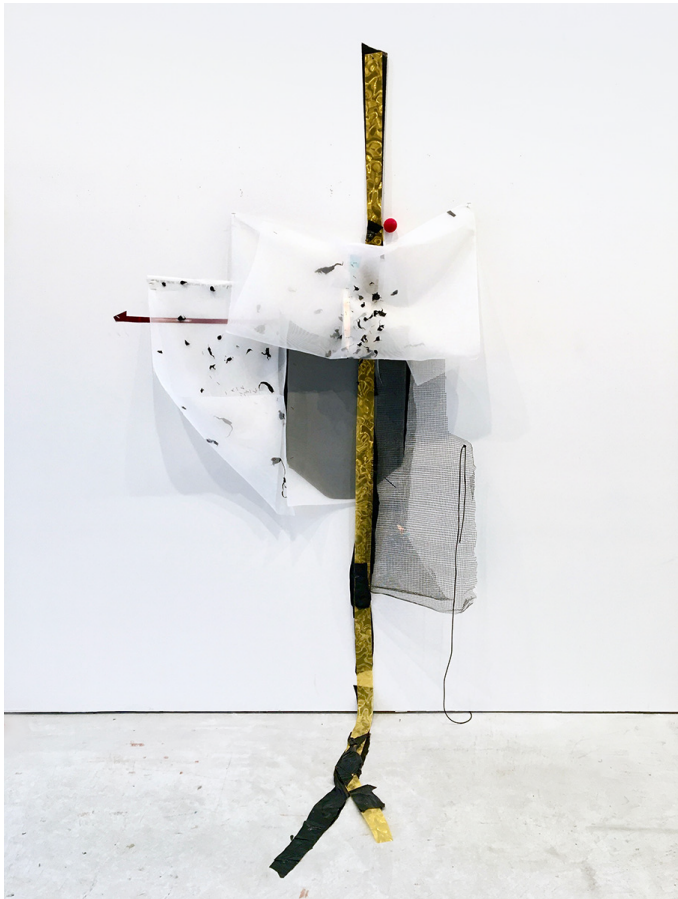

undercurrent

70 John Street /Brooklyn /NY /11201

/Thur /Fri /Sat 1-7 pm



GELAH PENN /Uneasy Terms

02.13 – 03.14 /2020

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 13, 6 – 9 pm

+ A conversation with Tom McGlynn and Gelah Penn: March 7, 2 pm

Gallery hours: THUR /FRI /SAT 1 – 7 PM

Undercurrent is pleased to present *Uneasy Terms*, a solo show by mid-career artist Gelah Penn. The exhibition will feature a 33-foot-long site-responsive installation, as well as monumental constructed drawings and small collages from two of the artist's ongoing series, *Stele* and *Notes on Clarissa (Volume I)*.

Throughout her career, Gelah Penn has challenged artistic conventions and the traditional concept of drawing by utilizing synthetic, lightweight materials such as Mylar, lenticular plastic, plastic garbage bags and mosquito netting. Her subtle and sophisticated wall works and installations stand out for both their unusual fragmentation and formal intelligence.

Working at the intersection of drawing, painting and sculpture, Penn's process reflects an optical and surface-oriented sensibility, favoring the visual language of modularity and materiality over narrative composition. Her analytical approach to abstraction is heavily informed by physicality and form, with an emphasis on the visual dynamics of the configuration rather than a literal narrative resulting from those shapes and structures.

Penn's work is also informed by her interest in film and fiction. In *Notes on Clarissa (Volume I)*, presented as a 21-foot-long installation in Undercurrent's main space, Penn has created a series of 99 collages derived from 4 x 6-inch exhibition cards of her recent installation, *Ebb Tide*, at ODETTA/Chelsea earlier this year. *Notes on Clarissa* is an ongoing project based on the 18th-century epistolary novel *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson. The story is told primarily through the correspondence between four principal characters, and details the drama of a young woman's seduction, betrayal, violation and death. Each collage corresponds to one of the letters in the four-volume novel. This considered manipulation of exhibition ephemera highlights Penn's interplay between materials used in her work and the photographic representation of that work.

The artist's large-scale drawings, the *Stele* series, further exemplify this concise yet nuanced dialogue between materiality and abstraction. These works are constructed from synthetic materials chosen for their malleability as well as their ability to activate light, creating a rich variety of shadows evocative of the low-key lighting characteristic of film noir.

Prologue is a site-responsive installation along Undercurrent's dramatic entry stairway wall. Penn's installations are developed off-site, then readjusted in situ. They deftly adapt, rather than execute, a plan, responding to the architectural parameters and curveballs of a particular space.

Penn's phenomenological approach to her work emphasizes atmosphere, form, and visual experience. In this exhibition, her lifelong examination of these issues yields a rich and exhilarating perceptual dialogue between material and space.

IMAGE I: *Stele #9*, 2019. 90 x 49 x 30 inches.

Polyester mesh, lenticular plastic, plastic garbage bags, plastic mesh, silicone tubing, staples, Styrofoam ball, Velcro, eyelets, T-pins.

IMAGE II: *Notes on Clarissa (Volume 1): I/XLIII*, 2019. Various dimensions. Installation of 99 collages. Exhibition cards, various synthetic materials.

About the Artist

Gelah Penn's recent solo exhibitions include the Baker Center for the Arts/Muhlenberg College (Allentown, PA); Amelie A. Wallace Gallery/SUNY Old Westbury (Old Westbury, NY); ODETTA/Chelsea, Foley Gallery, Bookstein Projects (New York, NY); and ICEHOUSE Project Space (Sharon, CT). Recent group exhibitions include the Center for Maine Contemporary Art (Rockland, ME); Felician University (Rutherford, NJ); Equity Gallery, Kentler International Drawing Space, The Yard (New York, NY); and Bibliotheque Municipale Louis Nucera (Nice, France). Her work is in the collections of the Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, NC), Columbus Museum (Columbus, GA), Brooklyn Museum Library (Brooklyn, NY) and Gund Library/Cleveland Institute of Art (Cleveland, OH). Reviews of her work have been published in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The New Criterion*, *artcritical*, and featured in *Sculpture Magazine*, *Art Maze Mag* and *Peripheral Vision Press*. Interviews with the artist include *Gorky's Granddaughter*, *Romanov Grave* and *Tilted Arc*. Penn has received a Tree of Life Individual Artist Grant and fellowships from the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony. She received a B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute. The artist lives and works in Connecticut and New York City.

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