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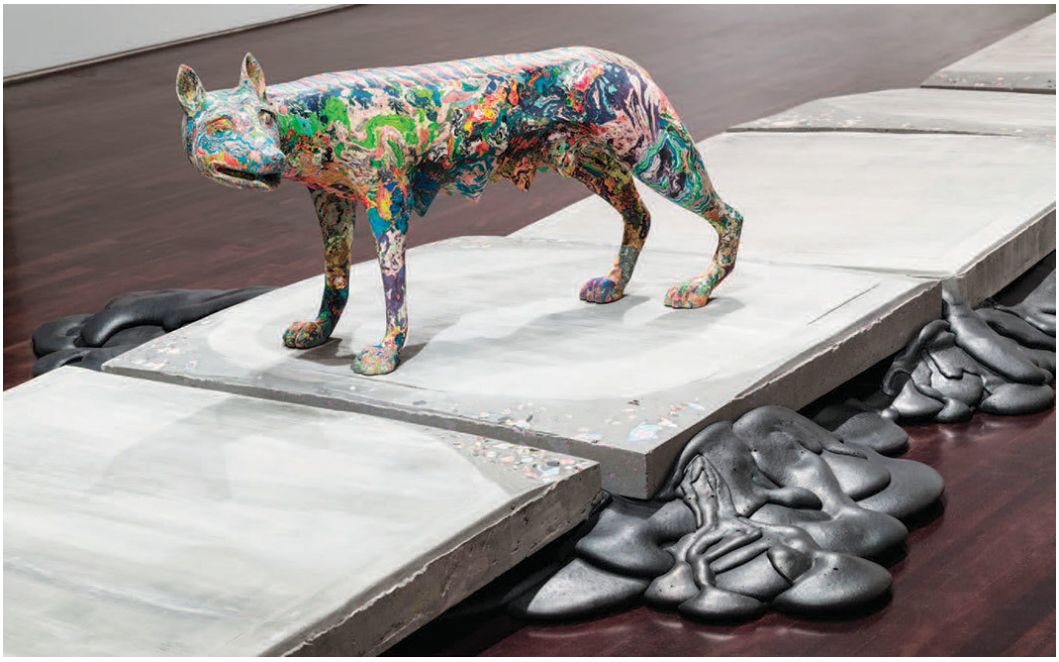

View of "Lily Cox-Richard," 2019, Center: *She-Wolf,* 2019. On floor: *Ramp* (detail), 2019.

Lily Cox-Richard

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

Once ubiquitous in museums, plaster casts have largely been relegated to storage rooms (or, as was the case with the plaster-cast collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, to the auction-house floor). The two interrelated causes might be identified as a shift in values around originality and righteous challenges to the notion of a stable canon of Western art history. Some institutions, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, have kept their plaster-cast collections on display. Growing up, I often visited what was then Austin's Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery (a scion of a railroad magnate, Huntington famously declared, "Wherever I put my foot down, a museum springs up"). I can recall certain works with clarity—Ellsworth Kelly's *High Yellow*, 1960; Gyula Kosice's *Hidroluz (Hydrolight)*, 1975; and Yayoi Kusama's *Sprouting (The Transmigration of the Soul)*, 1987—but the plaster-cast collection remains more general in my memory. More than the objects themselves, I remember groups of students gathered around reproductions of the ancient sculptures *The Dying Gaul* and *Apollo Belvedere*, carefully sketching contour drawings on large boards. This is precisely how most museums and educational institutions utilized plaster-cast reproductions—as objects of study, extensions of the academic models of art pedagogy.

The Virginia-based artist Lily Cox-Richard intervened in the Blanton's pale, male vision of art history and pedagogy by exposing the empty interiors of certain casts (in *Figs* and *Weave*, all works 2019) and dressing them (and one intact cast downstairs) in brightly colored lengths of semitransparent tulle. The hollowness is physical, but also perhaps philosophical: Questioning the figures' physiological and ideological "whiteness," Cox-Richard joins other artists who have turned to plaster casts as emblems of an exclusionary history (Louise Lawler and Fred Wilson immediately come to mind). In Cox-Richard's sculptural interventions, what at first appear to be loose and random drapings are in fact carefully constructed garments, loosely stitched together with colorful lengths of thread. This treatment highlights certain physical aspects of the plaster casts: The manner in which the tulle netting encircled the wrist of one of the lounging goddesses of the East pediment of the Parthenon in *Figs*, for example, suggests a bodily orifice. Elsewhere in the museum, in a room dedicated to the study and drawing of plaster casts, Cox-Richard draped *Apollo Belvedere* in a similar fashion, transforming the low length of the white platform on which it stands into an impromptu catwalk.

This platform was the inspiration for *Ramp*, a concrete sidewalk raised in certain segments seemingly by the force of the black urethane foam pooling underneath it. (The material is similar to that of Lynda Benglis's acerbic *For Carl Andre*, 1970.) The sculpture resembles the sidewalks of Houston, where Cox-Richard lived for a time and where swampy foundations have made pedestrianism practically impossible. In certain places, the artist has sanded away the corners of her sidewalk, revealing a multicolor matrix of glass, shell, brick, and concrete fragments of the artist's reproductions of the hair of sculptures in the Blanton Museum's plaster-cast collection (hair being a loaded signifier of cultural origins). Standing atop this herky-jerky runway is Cox-Richard's version of the She-Wolf of Rome, wildly polychromed using the technique of scagliola, which combines plaster, rabbit-skin glue, and pigment. Cox-Richard replicated this fearsome creature—integral to the myth of Rome's founding—not to justify the ancient "origins" of Western art history but to question that history's foundations and meanings in the present. Recent radiocarbon and thermoluminescence tests have determined that the Capitoline Wolf is neither as old nor as connected to Rome's fabled inception as was once believed. That Cox-Richard's multihued wolf stands on cracking ground is a sign that the hermetic and supremacist canon has been destabilized; art history will never be the same again.

— *Andy Campbell*

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