

VARIABLE WEST

Cammie Staros: What Will Have Being

January 16 - March 6



Shulamit Nazarian is pleased to present *What Will Have Being*, a series of new sculptures by Los Angeles-based artist Cammie Staros. This will be the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

The artworks in *What Will Have Being* draw the relics of fallen empires into discourse with contemporary political and environmental instabilities, considering the legacy of our species on

this planet. Creating a throughline between ancient past and possible future, the works suggest a museological exhibition of antiquities that has been forgotten and reclaimed by nature. Through twists on Greco-Roman works in ceramic and stone, and gestures that upend traditional display tactics – such as melting light fixtures, architectural interventions, and submerged vessels – the artist asks us to consider how we understand both the objects and ourselves along an unfixed or perhaps unmoored timeline.

Central to the exhibition is a series of vitrines that function as life-supporting aquariums. These self-illuminated display cases reference those found in the Greek wings of the Met and the British Museum. Inside, immersed in an environment of fish and plants, sit ceramic sculptures reminiscent of Greek vases and wine cups. The submerged ceramic forms appear distorted or conjoined, their zoomorphic shapes adapting to their watery habitats, as if sinking back to an organic state. The use of water contrasts the precious materials of art with those of life, and summons the existential threats of flood and drought. The drowned museological display flattens historical time, simultaneously referencing the ancient past, later underwater discoveries, and an impending ecological and environmental reckoning.

A new series of ceramic pot sculptures are transformed through the act of cutting, splitting, and twisting. Here, Staros pushes the boundaries of the material until the vessels become shell-like – undoing the object. For these intimate and vulnerable forms, and throughout the exhibition, the artist classifies her works using a poetic Latin taxonomy, as if identifying rare specimens in an eccentric natural history museum. Staros addresses the fragility of human power by making a cross species analogy of things we creatures leave behind.

A pair of stone wall works evoke classical ruins through the contrast of highly polished arches and rough, natural edges. Veins and cavities in earthy green onyx lend a sense of dissolution to otherwise architectural forms. Stone, a material parallel to ceramic in the legacy of the Greco-Roman world, is also formed by nature and shaped by humankind; it is the material of the planet and of ancient ruins; it is a fossil of both past geologic forces and past societies. In addition, the artist will present a group of new neon pieces installed directly into the gallery's light grid. Fitted specially for fluorescent ballasts, these neon artworks glow in otherworldly colors and droop out of their fixtures, evoking unknown forces on a space left behind.

Over the past decade, Staros has investigated the ways in which classical antiquities have come to represent an origin story of Western art history. While continuing to address the historical narrative surrounding these objects, the body of work in *What Will Have Being* focuses more on the prescience of ancient artifacts – how their treatment might foretell a possible future of today's

objects. Relics and ruins, which outlast the societies that made them, emphasize both the achievements and the hubris of humanity. But by shifting our contextual understanding of these objects, by considering how meaning is made, we can begin to understand an alternative narrative. The works in *What Will Have Being* not only question our understanding of contemporary political and environmental instabilities, they also poignantly consider how our current moment will be remembered, and what kind of world it will produce for tomorrow.

Cammie Staros (b. 1983, Nashville, TN) received her BA from Brown, Providence, in 2006 and her MFA from California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, in 2011. Staros has had solo exhibitions at Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, Lefebvre & Fils, Paris, and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles. The artist was included in the Craft Contemporary's second clay biennial in Los Angeles. Staros' work is featured in *100 Sculptors of Tomorrow*, a survey of contemporary sculpture, authored by Kurt Beers and published by Thames & Hudson. Staros was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship award in 2020.