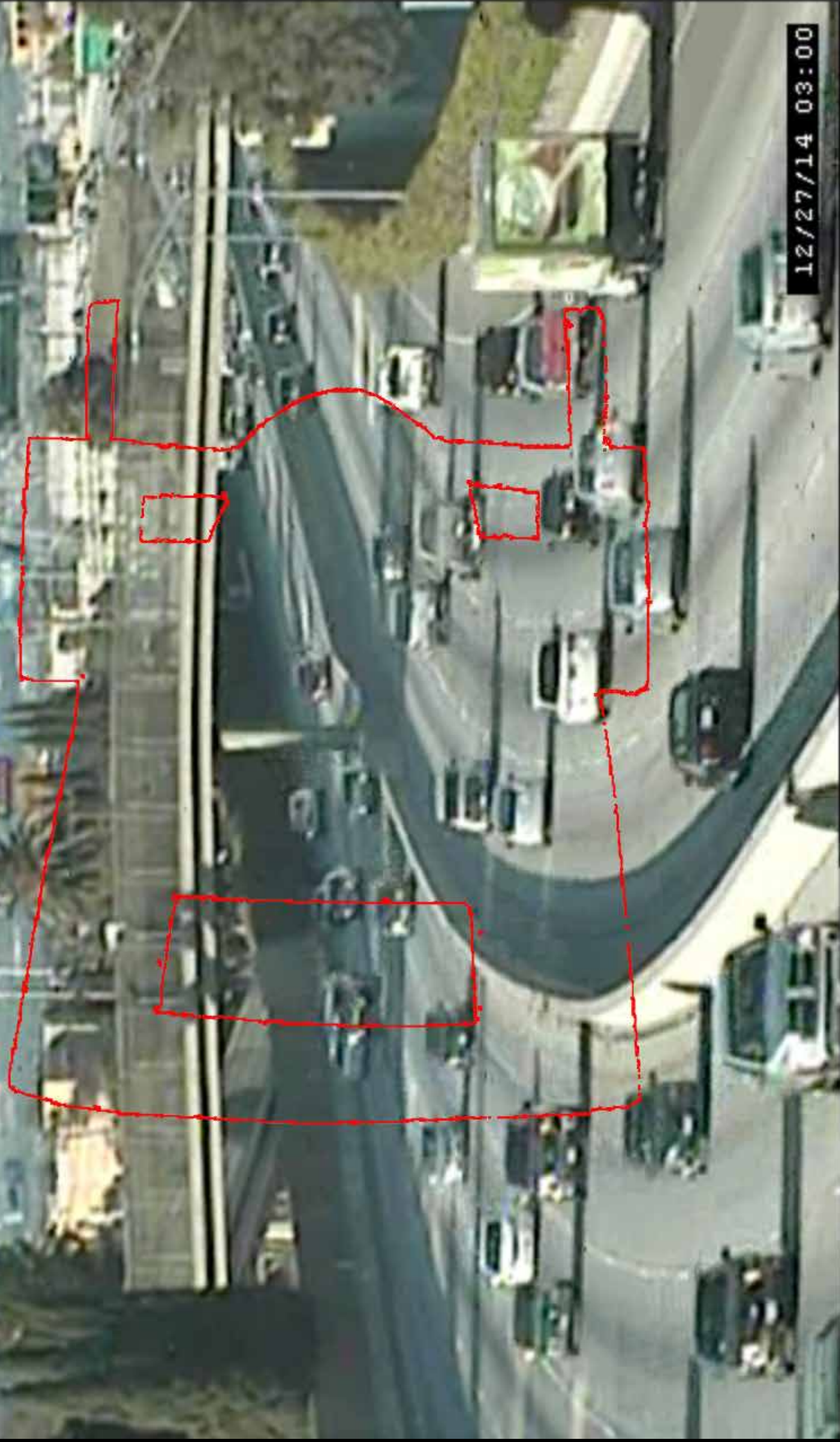


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Carol Jackson

Born in Los Angeles in 1962, Carol Jackson received her BFA with a concentration in painting and photography from UCLA in 1987. In 1990, she received a full President's Merit Scholarship to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she graduated with an MFA in 1992. Her awards include the City of Chicago Artist Grant in 1994, a 2002 Artadia individual artist's grant and the Illinois Arts Council Grant in 2003.

Her work has taken the form of fictitious businesses, sheet music, itinerant and real estate signage embedded with text from epic literature embossed into leather. Her recent work continues with hides carved into forms reminiscent of American Chippendale Rococo furniture and papier-mâché geodes that reveal celebrated landscapes of the West.

Jackson has exhibited throughout the United States and internationally. In 2006, she had a solo exhibition at Changing Role Gallery in Naples and was part of the Smart Museum's Drawing as Process show curated by Stephanie Smith. In 2007, she had a solo show at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Gallery 400. In 2008, her work was featured in Heartland at the VanAbbe Museum in the Netherlands.

Jackson's recent exhibitions include the 2014 Whitney Biennial by Anthony Elms, a solo exhibition at Threewalls. Other recent shows include Kunsthaus Specktrasse, Hamburg and Write Now at the Chicago Cultural Center. Her work has been featured in *Artforum*, *frieze* magazine, *The New York Times*, *Interview Magazine*, *Blouin Art Info*, *Art Fag City* and the *Chicago Tribune* among other publications.

Her work is in the collections of the Smart Museum at the University of Chicago, Ken Field of Boston, Deborah Lovely in Chicago, Mark and Judy Bednar, also of Chicago, and Cliff Diver in NY. She has published reviews in *frieze* magazine and has written catalogue essays for Pauline Stella Sanchez and Jim Torok.

In May 2015, she will have a solo exhibition at Tyler Wood Gallery in San Francisco.

Cleve Carney Art Gallery

Carol Jackson: *Pandemonium*

Thursday, March 5 to Saturday, April 11, 2015

The Cleve Carney Art Gallery/McAninch Arts Center would like to thank the artist, Carol Jackson, and the writer, Lise Haller Baggesen, for their generous contributions and creativity in developing this publication.

Barbara Wiesen

Director and Curator
Cleve Carney Art Gallery

Cover Image: *BANNER FIRE*, 2014, acrylic, papier-mâché, digital print, polymer clay, 19" x 14" x 14"

Image I: *Raaawrrmaa*, 2011, leather, enamel, polymer, acrylic, 26" x 20"

Image II: *Hungman* by Eleanor and Jonathan Ross, photo by Lise Haller Baggesen

Image III: *Midnight Carrows*, papier-mâché, acrylic, ink jet print, enamel, epoxy, 25" x 11" x 9"

Image IV: *Air Quality Control*, 2014, papier-mâché, acrylic, ink jet print, enamel, epoxy, 25" x 16" x 15"

Image V: *Fate Needs No Rudders*, 2011, leather, enamel, polymer, acrylic, 43" x 38"



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Carol Jackson
PANDEMONIUM

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The Ballad of Planned Obsolescence

I am looking at a small relief by Carol Jackson. The piece is hung on a cleat, lifting it a couple inches from the wall, and in the skylight of the stairwell, it appears to be floating, hovering, above my living room. Toiled into thick, rich lacquer-red leather with knives and stamps traditionally employed by saddle makers to adorn western saddles, bridles, chaps and cowboy boots, is a vista of an empty court yard, fenced in by a viaduct from outside of which I am looking in, so that one of its arches becomes the picture's gilded frame. Through these arches, in the distance, I can see the horizon behind a row of barren trees against a rusty sky. It's a little melancholy—to be true—the relief in the picture enhanced by the autumnal light pouring in from above. In front of this scenery a scroll is draped across the bottom of the work and fixed within the picture plane by a column on the right; holding up what in reality is just a primitive tassel, but in this context becomes a wilted fern in a saloon or a brothel. The work as a whole borrows its aesthetics from the elaborate front-pieces of sheet music played by the piano-man in such parlors. The scroll bears the inscription “RAAAWWRRRNAA” — which is also the title of the work.

RAAAWWRRRNAA is not a song I am familiar with, nor is it a language I speak, and that is the point. It is, to paraphrase Carol, a message from the point before language—or from the point where language breaks down and becomes obsolete. RAAAWWRRRNAA is the last utterance of a dying man, as recorded by his executioners.



Because what can you say, when words are not enough? RAAAWWRRRNAA.

The carefully considered calligraphy and the dedicated craftsmanship Jackson has employed to get this nonverbal message across, is of the kind that some people will snidely refer to as “occupational therapy.” I am all about that.

My mother was an occupational therapist, you see. She worked mostly with psychiatric patients. Crazy people. Much of what she did was rehabilitation—i.e. preparing the crazy people for reintegration into society. Society being what it is, that is easier said than done, and so a lot of them were known as “revolving-door patients.”

The psychiatric day treatment program was housed in an old farm situated on the hospital grounds. As the building was soon to be

demolished, to make way for a new state-of-the-art state hospital, much of its renovation had been left to the initiative of the users, as part of their rehabilitation and (yes) occupational therapy. It was on the way to the pony club I frequented, so I would often stop by, to have an afternoon snack and a cup of tea or a soda, and a chat with the clientele. Sometimes I would come there just to use the facilities, as the facilities in this facility were quite a treat.

The windowless space off the entrance hall was just big enough for a toilet and a sink. I don't know if it was its broom closet size that had inspired the interior decoration theme of “five minutes in heaven”—but I do know that, once inside with the door closed, the miniscule space would open itself up to another, deeper, inner. Its ceiling and walls were completely covered in photo collages of the heavens: deep space telescope images of nebulae, free will astrology charts, mythological creatures and religious idolatry of all denominations. With the crazy people smoking in the sitting room next door it was a good place to sit on an afternoon in your teens. A place of beauty and wonder, where the sewer and the cosmos would collide—or in Oscar Wilde's words a place where you could “sit in the gutter and look at the stars.”

The crazy people of my day, in many ways had it better than the crazy people of this day and age, in the gutters of America. Hospital beds being a scarce (and pricey) commodity, some go to jail, while others get in line for charity shelters or soup kitchens, like those we know from images of the great depression. The homeless vets I see when I take my car off the Kennedy Expressway, hold up cardboard signs advertising their misfortune, or blessings, or both. But they too are looking at the stars.

At the Fullerton Avenue underpass, where some sleep, there is a moisture stain on the wall in the shape of a Maria apparition, or vice versa. Every time I pass there are fresh flowers and votive candles. Even if I am not religious, that satin stain on that drab concrete wall has spiritual allure; like a portal to another cosmic dimension—a stairway from the gutter to the stars—it is a concrete reminder that the gutter and the stars are in fact made of the same dust. As are we.

Wrangling her craft from that dust, Carol points, empathically, to the thin line that divides all of us from the space where the language breaks down. She sings a different tune—a spiritual of sorts—of the eternal return to and from that dust; a tune that rings true in contrast to the pervasive jingle-jangle of the murder ballad of planned obsolescence.

The ballad of planned obsolescence is as old as depression. The Great Depression to be exact. The term was introduced by Bernhard London in his 1932 treatise “Ending the Depression Through Planned Obsolescence.” Herein he writes that:

“People everywhere are today disobeying the law of obsolescence. They are using their old cars, their old tires, their old radios and their old clothing much longer than their staticians had expected on the basis of earlier experience.

“The question before the American people is whether they want to risk their future on such continued planless, haphazard, fickle attitudes of owners of ships and shoes and sealing wax.”¹

As antidote to the stubbornness of the unwilling consumer he proposes the government to intervene with the lifecycle of products, to speed up replacement time and thus create jobs, in turn creating more cash flow, in turn creating a market for more consumer goods:

“I would have the government assign a lease of life to shoes and homes and machines,

to all products of manufacture, mining and agriculture, when they are first created, and they would be sold and used within the term of their existence definitely known by the consumer. After the allotted time had expired, these things would be legally ‘dead’ and would be controlled by the duly appointed governmental agency and destroyed if there is widespread unemployment. New products would constantly be pouring forth from the factories and marketplaces, to take the place of the obsolete, and the wheels of the industry would be kept going and unemployment regularized and assured for the masses.”²

Contrary to London's advice, in today's consumer society it is not government that has set itself the task of shortening the lifespan of our products, but the producers themselves. A paranoid consumption is at hand when dealing, for example, with our strangely intimate relationships with personal electronics. Numerous are the rumors going round about smartphones breaking down or getting sluggishly slow just as a new model is introduced. And let me tell you, it is not all in your head.

According to *The Economist*: “The strategy of planned obsolescence is common in the computer industry too. New software is often carefully calculated to reduce the value to consumers of the previous version. This is achieved by making programs upwardly compatible only; in other words, the new versions can read all the files of the old versions, but not the other way round. Someone holding the old version can communicate only with others using the old version. It is as if every generation of children came into the world speaking a completely different language from their parents. While they could understand their parents' language, their parents could not understand theirs.”³

There is an interesting synchronicity between the intergenerational breakdown of programming language, the business-as-usual recordings of death row inmate's last utterance, Carol's careful transcriptions of it, and the popular pastime of hangman, in which you have to decode a secret message and make some sense of it all, while your life hangs in the balance.



As between the still living and the walking dead, whose allotted time has expired, a generational divide opens wherein language falls and breaks down.

But the analogy doesn't end here.

In much the same way as the rest of us crave new wares—new cars, new clothes, new laptops, new light bulbs—the prison industrial



complex craves new bodies, and in much the same way that defenders of planned obsolescence praise the model for keeping the wheels spinning, the prison industrial complex is the new cottage industry in small town America when manufacturing of consumer goods is moved overseas and all the old factories close down.⁴

In its current iteration planned obsolescence perhaps best defines the difference, the thin line, between a live-and-let-live capitalism—a free-market economy in which value is defined by the forces by supply and demand—and a live-and-let-die economy in which value is primarily defined by devaluation: your riches against someone else's poverty, your freedom against the incarceration of others.

In this money-makes-the-world-go-round scenario everybody equates an economical unit, in the revolving doors of the commodity or fetish economy, as described in Marx's famous thesis Capital. In his essay “From Spectres of Marx” Jacques Derrida in turn breaks down this Capital by way of enigma and exorcism, of survival and perpetual motion:

“Would there be then some exorcism at the opening of ‘Capital?’ When the curtain rises on the raising of a curtain? From the first chapter of its first book? However potential it may appear, and however preparatory, however virtual, would this premise of exorcism have developed enough power to sign and seal the whole logic of this great work? Would a conjuration ceremony have scanned the unfolding of an immense critical discourse? Would it have accompanied that discourse, followed or preceded it like its shadow, in secret, like an indispensable and— if one can still put it this way—vital surviving, required in

¹Bernhard London: “Ending the Depression Through Planned Obsolescence” 1932 http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/27/London_%281932%29_Ending_the_depression_through_planned_obsolescence.pdf (Retrieved October 27, 2014.)

²Ibid

³“Idea: Planned Obsolescence” <http://www.economist.com/node/13354332> The Economist, March 29 2009. (Retrieved October 27, 2014)

⁴A useful, and pocket size, guide to this curious kind of home economics is “*The Prison Industrial Complex Is...*” published by The Jane Addams Hull-House in 2011, it contains a list of sources and comprehensive studies on the topic.

advance? A surviving inherited at the origin, but at every instant afterwards? And is not this surviving conjuration a part, ineffaceably, of the revolutionary promise? Of the injunction or oath that puts Capital in motion?”

Derrida famously claims that “the future belongs to ghosts,” but also explains how it “ghosts” in language itself as it breaks down and is lost in translation:

“‘Es spukt,’ difficult to translate, as we have been saying. It is a question of ghost and haunting, to be sure, but what else? The German idiom seems to name the ghostly return but it names it in a verbal form. The latter does not say that there is some revenant, spectre, or ghost; it does not say that there is some apparition, der Spuk, nor even that it appears, but that “it ghosts,” “it apparitions.” It is a matter [Il s’agit], in the neutrality of this altogether impersonal verbal form, of something or someone, neither someone nor something, of a “one” that does not act. It is a matter rather of the passive movement of an apprehension, of an apprehensive movement ready to welcome, but where? In the head? What is the head before this apprehension that it cannot even contain? And what if the head, which is neither the subject, nor consciousness, nor the ego, nor the brain, were defined first of all by the possibility of such an experience, and by the very thing that it can neither contain, nor delimit, by the indefiniteness of the ‘es spukt?’”⁵

Where a work like RAAAWWRRRNAA could be a bottled messages from a ghost of the past—hurling itself into the continued narrative of the here-and-now from the great hereafter—other works in Carol Jackson's production appear like stumbled upon fossilized remnants from a distant, post-apocalyptic future.

These objects hit some uncanny (death) valley between primitive fetishes, cargo cult relics, sci-fi props and high-end tchotchkes with the visual impact of a meteor or an amethyst hitting rock bottom—its dull exterior cracked open to expose its dazzling insides.

In Youth (2013), for example, is a starship-shaped enterprise trapped inside the body of a prehistoric amphibian, wrought from the barren soil of the American Southwest to alien effect. The juxtaposition between the bulky wood-and-papier-mâché painted in cracked, flat, earth-tone acrylics and the high gloss varnished digital print on its flat front, lends the piece an ambiguous aura. *Air Quality* (2014) shows a mirrored image of a gorgeous tropical sunset, yet also resembles a startled ghost or terrified satyr from a rite-of-passage gone horribly wrong—the two suns in the sunset doubling as the dilated eyes of the mask sporting both the floppy ears and the goatee of a kid-as-kid—its wide-open mouth frozen mid gasp.

Carol's most ambitious work of this type to date is the epic (yes, epic) *High Plains Drifter* (2014). Conceived for her solo show bearing the same title, for Threewalls in Chicago, it fills up an entire corner of the gallery space, floor to ceiling, its contorted red tendrils spill out in all directions. In an accompanying series of drawings, photographs of totaled cars—different models, but all in the same deep blood-red lacquer—are overlaid with decorative curlicue shapes. From the formal connection we can safely assume that what we are looking at is—if not a car crash in slow motion—perhaps a fossilized imprint of that moment where the language breaks down and the body hurls itself beyond time. Rather than the bloodied bodies that were surely pulled from these wrecks, the cars themselves are the main characters of the dramas we now witness the aftermath of.

These machines are haunted by ghosts: the ghost of the glory days of America, perhaps? An America defined by hope as an ever-forward motion: the manifest destiny, the wild frontiers, the homesteaders, the railroads and the mobile industry.

America's long engagement with jail and capital punishment runs as long and as deep as with that of free movement. Or, should I say that they are intertwined into the DNA of the country—as embodied in industrialization and capitalism; a shotgun wedding of sorts, from the time that Carol refers to as “the height of American culture.”



America wears its heart on its sleeve and its wild romance with this era—the late 19th century—is most visible where it counts: right on the money. Where the rest of the world's great nations has by now reimaged their currency in their own forward thinking, digitalized image, a freshly minted \$-bill, still looks like it rolled right off a letter press operated by some muscle man in a sweat tarnished leather apron. Crafty.

I imagine him singing—like some ghostly echo of yet another involuntary death row poet—looking up from his perpetuum mobile of a money-man-machine, at the stars: *Tell Everybody That I Love Everybody Keep Your Heads Up We Are All Family. This Stuff Stings, Man.*

—Lise Haller Baggesen

Lise Haller Baggesen left her native Denmark in 1992 to study painting in the Netherlands. In 2008 she relocated to Chicago with her family. In the meantime, her work evolved from a traditional painting practice toward a hybrid practice including curating, writing and immersive multimedia installation work. *Poor Farm Press* and *Green Lantern Press* published her first book “*Motherism*” in 2014.



⁵Jacques Derrida “What is Ideology?” in *Specters of Marx* (1994) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/derrida2.htm> (retrieved February 18, 2015.)