

New York

“Mirror Cells”

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
99 Gansevoort Street
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“Emo is on the verge of a comeback,” I told a friend not long ago. And wouldn’t you know it, the next day I heard the unmistakable wah-wah melody of Modest Mouse’s “Dramamine” thudding through my floorboards, courtesy of my neighbors. Though it is not exactly twee, we are living in a moment of confessional culture, bolstered by important discussions about the social consequences of identity. “Mirror Cells,” the first group show of contemporary sculpture in the Whitney’s newish building, acknowledges this personal turn. The exhibition brings together five artists who realize inner worlds through hands-on and collage techniques. As curators Christopher Y. Lew and Jane Panetta argue, this work contrasts with the art world’s recent obsessions with technology.

The sensibility at play is more hermetic than polemic. Win McCarthy’s low-relief tabletop installations loosely depict shabby cities in miniature. They recall Joseph Cornell in their ambition to capture a fleeting moment in time. They are adorned with newspaper headlines, voodoo-ish dolls, photos, poems in everyday language, and daily horoscopes (the artist was apparently born under the sensitive sign of Cancer). Elizabeth Jaeger’s nearly flat, cracked ceramic vessels on sawhorses, “Jack Jaeger,” 2016, pay homage to her grandfather. And yet, politics (of selfhood and otherwise) aren’t completely abandoned. Rochelle Goldberg’s installation *No Where Now Here*, 2016, evokes environmental disaster through animal forms coated with an oily glaze, staged on a sprouting bed of chia seeds. Four video sculptures by Maggie Lee, playing chapters from her experimental documentary about her mother’s sudden death, *Mommy*, 2015, hearken back to avant-gardists such as Nam June Paik but also call to mind the funereal shrines of various Asian cultures. Liz Craft, the oldest artist in the show, presents her creepy “Spider Woman” figures, 2014–16; a series of “Little Lips,” 2016; and speech-bubble sculptures. While some of the latter works are free of text, others contain searing messages directed at women—notably, *Your Pussy or Your Life*, 2015.



Liz Craft, *Spider Woman Purple Dress* (detail), 2015, papier-mâché, mixed media, dimensions variable.

— Wendy Vogel