

CEAM

CRISP-ELLERT ART MUSEUM

Staff. "Crisp-Ellert Art Museum to open exhibition 'Mirages,'" *Crisp-Ellert Art Museum*, August 26, 2021.



Katy Cowan
"whole rotation," 2021
Ink, Graphite and Enamel Paint on Paper
22 1/2 x 15 1/4 in
57.1 x 38.7 cm

Mirages are magical, disorienting, phenomenological, real to the eye, yet just a set of visual circumstances. They can suspend our beliefs and understanding of what is real versus what is perceived and force us to think about our relationship to time, space, and landscape. They are about the act of looking.

Mirages brings together the work of Atterbury, Bourque-LaFrance, and Cowan for the first time. Though geographically separated (in Portland, Maine, Los Angeles, and Berkeley, CA) their conversations over the last year have helped to shape the trajectory of this exhibition. The exhibition title makes reference to the process through which each of these artists transforms materials and objects (wood, paint, images, rope, canvas, aluminum, photography) in order to reinterpret and reimagine the familiar. The artists embrace a simple premise: can a thing be a thing but also another thing?

In Katy Cowan's *whole rotation*, a long white rope curves through the paper's center, where surrounding lines wind and unravel, orbs hover, and black or white values and mid-tones fluctuate between light, dark, and in-between. Made in ink, graphite, and enamel paint, the paper is almost entirely created from these grayscale colors, except for where green and red paint emerge from two hovering spheres, and unevenly speckle the surface with very tiny flecks of color. Cowan's textures change between soft inky washes to rough granite scribbles; lines are sometimes swirled delicately, other times rugged and eroded in appearance. With the rope at the center, everything about *whole rotation* seems to hover with energy, potential, and the supernatural, yet somehow the action is centered and stilled to one moment. Naturally, despite this motion, *whole rotation* is an unmoving art-piece, still and suspended on the paper. But perhaps it is this contrast between the moving and the inert which is peculiar and interesting to Cowan. To rotate completely says that where we started, we return to— relating to ideas as universal as a day-night cycle, the cycle of seasons, or simply an object revolving in space. But even if things end where they began, a rotation, at its core, suggests starting anew; it starts again. In a way, it is both old and new— different and the same.

Ropes interest Cowan because of how they form and unravel, linking to diverse ideas like bodies, landscapes, or physical motion. Her other works throughout CEAM's exhibition likewise explore the shifts between the untangling or liberation of the rope from its original state. What happens when something is intact, at once itself, and then also able to change to something beyond itself? *whole rotation* seems to explore how things can stay the same, but also transform— how something, for instance, can move from itself, but also return to itself. Like a mirage, *whole rotation*, might then gesture towards the confusion of this perceptual experience, but maybe also, the inherent validity within it.