



CEAM

no. 1

Information, essays and
interviews with Elizabeth
Atterbury, Strauss Bourque-
LaFrance, and Katy Cowan
about their exhibition *Mirages*.

Introduction:

The great joy of organizing this exhibition has been the collaborative and generative nature of the work. So many projects arise from the genuine desire of artists, curators, and arts workers to share knowledge and to support each other. The genesis of *Mirages* dates to early 2018, when friend and curator Staci Bu Shea introduced me to Elizabeth Atterbury's work, having included it in a group exhibition at CEAM entitled *heroic in its ordinariness*. Her work's spareness of form, and repetition of a handful of marks and symbols that made their way from two to three dimensions and back again, all drew me in. In the ensuing three years, Elizabeth then introduced me to Strauss Bourque-LaFrance and Katy Cowan's work. What was originally one relationship doubles, triples, quadruples, and after several phone conversations, a studio visit in Portland, Maine, and a handful of emails and zoom calls during a pandemic year, *Mirages* (on view at CEAM from September 3 to November 6, 2021) was born.

What happens when artists are given the freedom to make work that they might not have had the resources or capacity to make otherwise? A poetic accumulation of paint, wood, sand, and metal that reveals new connections between disparate artistic practices, and perhaps a reconsideration of materials, form, and content. *Mirages* accomplishes this, and just as importantly encourages the viewer to rethink familiar objects as well as bring their own limitless number of personal associations to the work itself.

During the course of this exhibition we hosted several first year seminar courses. We treated this as an introduction to CEAM, but quite often we were introducing contemporary art to students at Flagler College for the very first time. One student said that she'd never considered photography in the same light as painting and sculpture. Another student who had never before been to an art gallery or museum revelled in the scale of Elizabeth's *Folding Fan* and *Sandal*

sculptures, and stood with me in front of Strauss' painting *Charging Moons*, discussing all of the possibility contained within the work's collaged elements, marks, and gestures. Almost every student was struck when I explained that Katy's *sunbreaks pile, gentle and across* wasn't actually made of rope, but was a simulacrum, a trompe l'oeil—cast aluminum that has been lushly painted.

Every work in *Mirages* is a point of entry to talking about something else—what is contemporary art? How do these objects relate to the world around us and our own lived experiences? Does art matter? Yes! But why?

These sentiments are lyrically touched upon in the following essay by fellow artist and educator Roz Crews. The works included in *Mirages* resonated with her in a physical, visceral way. Each piece, from painting on canvas and paper, to peach pit, to metal sculpture, set off a litany of associations.

In this unconventional piece of writing, Roz leads us through the exhibition, describing the work through a very personal lens rather than in any sort of academically prescribed way. Roz juxtaposes the artist's words, gathered from email interviews, italicized and woven throughout, with quotations from various sources, creating a structure that reads more like a prose poem than an academic text.

This publication is the first of what will be a series of zines related to CEAM's regular exhibition program. Functioning as a combination of scholarly essay, exhibition document, project framework, and insight into the process of collaboration before and during the exhibitions, we hope that the series will provide another layer by which the community will engage with the work of these contemporary artists.

Julie Dickover
Director, Crisp-Ellert Art Museum
Flagler College

Katy Cowan, *clearing to blaring*, 2021,
Oil and graphite on cast aluminum, 31 x 30 x 2 inches,
Courtesy of the artist and Philip Martin Gallery, Los
Angeles. Image credit: Scott Cowan





Mirages, Installation View, September 2021





Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, *World in the Lasso*, 2021, acrylic, tempera, graphite, oil stick, tin foil, canvas collage, adhesive, 74 x 69 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York. Image credit: Ed Mumford

Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, *Facts or Future* (detail), 2021 acrylic, graphite, oil stick, canvas collage, adhesive 14 x 19 inches, framed. Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York. Image credit: Ed Mumford



things that become other things:

Roz Crews



**All the italicized parts are lifted from interviews I did with the artists via email, representing a fluid collaboration across equal parts. I've removed attributions and certain words to heighten the sense of horizontal teamwork between the artists which led to the completed exhibition. Of course there are non-quoted notions and ideas discussed within the interviews that are expounded upon here as well. There are discrete works in this show as there are discrete artists making those works as there is a circle of friendship that makes it all possible.*

*Suspending our beliefs and understandings of what is real is an act of refusing to think in terms of polarities—real vs not real, this vs that, questions vs answers, beginning vs end. It expands the potential terrain for thought, which can be exciting and also crippling. Philosophically speaking, I don't think this is dangerous.**

When I was seven, I discovered the meaning of “mirage” while watching a cartoon on TV. In the scene, the main characters are panting on a scorching hot day when they spot an igloo gleaming in

the distance.

As they draw closer, they realize it's a deflated volleyball on the asphalt. One says to the others, “It is just a birage. A birage is something that looks like something, but then it turns into something else.”

If something looks like something, but turns into something else, is it a deception? A transfiguration? A portal? Mirror images, things becoming other things, materials melting in the sun, a circle of knowing and not knowing. Within *Mirages*, the exhibition so lovingly crafted by Elizabeth Atterbury, Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, and Katy Cowan, there is an evident chain of communication and friendship echoing throughout the room. Each link a piece of the collaboration, a layer of their story together. When I walked in, I was

transported. Do we first see the mirage? And then the recognizable material?

I traveled to a few different places while I was standing amongst the work. Enthralled by the physical reality of being with each piece yet concurrently dreaming about other times: a national park in Wyoming, a harbor in Maine, and the elementary art classroom where I teach now. I felt my teacher-brain turn on, and I analyzed the exhibition through the pedagogical framework I've been taught to use with my students. It wasn't the smell of

the show

that transported me and it wasn't the feeling it gave me, and it wasn't the sound, and it wasn't the touch—sight was my transportation, not a train or a plane. Simply looking at the objects in the space made me move, like a wiggling hologram lifting off. Little wobbling heatwaves.

I flashed into memories that I hadn't accessed for months or years, and those past lives were filtered through another lens...I became someone else. It was as if I was seeing the materials for the first time, accessing the show from the perspective of a kid—what happens when we experience a recognizable material transformed into something totally new?

I saw so many colors. And I asked myself, what is that color between



Elizabeth Atterbury, *Beads V*, 2021, peach pits,
78.5 x .75 x .75 inches. Courtesy of the artist
and Mrs., New York

brown and white, between blue and red, between red and yellow? I know “there are only three primary colors, but red and blue make PURPLE, yellow and red make ORANGE.” I’ve seen tan in my coloring box, but I never thought about how it is also the color of wood and the sand and the back of mommy’s neck when I’m wrapped around her crying because we have to leave the beach. And the peach pit. *To refrain from applying any color other than the natural tone.*

I saw so many forms. The pearl necklace hanging in the closet, but now it is made out of peach

It’s getting new layers. It’s becoming itself again and again. By the end of a slow roll, it is rough like a cat’s tongue. But when the cat nuzzles, it’s soft like a cloud—so soft you want to take her home to cuddle. *Maybe things start to fit together like a puzzle, like a piece of velcro finding its match, scratchy meets fleecy.* When orange meets green, she gives her a compliment. Like the individual threads of a rope spun together, somehow creating thickness from thinness.

I saw so many shapes. If the pieces become a puzzle, there has to be an outline of something, but what

pits nestled atop the smooth rocks at Lewis Lake. It’s a sign that some other person had been there, eating a peach like me. A community of lost peach pits like shards of clunky ceramic bowls thrown from a shelf by the tall kid climbing for the marbles. *Constantly remaking the same thing—a new rope, a new board, a new piece of paper—it’s a very closed system that somehow remains very open.* Strung together like the pearls and the popcorn and the cranberries. A repeated form that shows us the same thing in different ways, some have become more smooth than others.

I saw so many textures. When something is smooth, it feels easy to touch like a marble. It rolls around collecting shells and debris and rolling further down the hill like a snowball.

do we do when *that thing becomes another thing?* One purple square. Three yellow circles. Three nude rectangles. An empty space. An organic shape means we don’t know about this shape already. A geometric shape has a name. If it is a squiggle, then it is a squiggle with a name? So how can it be organic? How can it be incomprehensible? A string that connects the unpainted slats of a fan, to the endless circle of a necklace, to the rope that binds you, to the threads of a canvas. Each one squiggling its way through the space searching for a hand...“the squeeze is passed around the circle, when it gets back to the beginning, the song starts...then we sing: make new friends, but keep the old, one is silver, and the other is gold, a circle is round, it has no end. That’s how long I want to be your friend.”

I saw
so many lines.

A single line: *I sometimes feel like I picked up where she left off and with this, my work is infused with the processing of this loss and a searching for meaning and healing through a boundless space of making.* A thread running through, running in our sandals. If our love for each other can extend endlessly in both directions, I think we're making progress.

And of course there was space and there was value. "Your support is of great value." Especially when you

give me space. *Scaling up and down*, each piece has its own area..its own privacy to live and be seen. But at the same time, we notice how the pieces weave in and out of each other's orbit. They are *things that become other things*, leading us into separate portals. Like when you blend the yellow oil pastel into blue and discover: green.

What is comprehensibility? For you what is comprehensible, is incomprehensible for me. This is a good thing to keep in mind when I'm teaching, and I feel like I'm picking up rocks and turning them over, spinning them around, adding one on top of another

Mirages, Installation View, September 2021



to see if it will balance, if it can show me a new perspective on an old bug that died, maybe a long long time ago.

The kids ask me why I have dead bugs on the window sill, and I never know what to say besides, "I put them there." Sometimes I wonder if that's the impulse that drives a person to make an artwork, it simply is because you had to put a thing on another thing, to see how that thing might respond. How it might cradle or burden.

Sometimes friendships can be like this, too. They can offer us solace in

a year of, "A global pandemic. A racial reckoning. A presidential impeachment. A monumental election." So says the people who read the *Washington Post*. *Suns pass, marks cover, layers layer, suns and wind go in and out of recognition—and this shows the slow movement of time that occurred this year.*

When time moves slowly, it gives us space to process. We might grieve with reasonable awareness. We might laugh with a gentleness that only comes with room. We might try on a new career



while the clock ticks over us, but we can always take off our watch on the weekend. We can learn to read without carrying around a hardcover copy of the latest chapter book, scoffing at the picture book section when we're in fifth grade. Instead the pictures become signals that lead to words that lead to understanding.

We can repeatedly shave wood in peace. We can add more and more layers to obscure the unforgettable until it becomes its own type of mirage. We can watch the *expressive capacities of molten metal* pour over and under and in between. Do it again, and again. Discuss. Call grandmother to see if she can send the fan, but you already have it in a safe place, waiting for the right time to honor her. A moment when calling may or may not be possible.

There's actually time for all those things in a slow year, and that is one of the reasons this exhibition is so special. It takes us on a journey through a circular friendship that can be made and remade like any good recipe, or maybe it's like a triangle that you ring when dinner's ready. When we can *simultaneously be hidden and shown, calm and exploding, searching and found, covered and glimmering*, then I guess we've made a mirage.



Katy Cowan, *sunbreaks pile, gentle and across*, 2021
Oil and enamel paint, graphite on cast aluminum
28 x 150 x 5 inches Courtesy of the artist and
Philip Martin Gallery, Los Angeles. Image credit: Scott Cowan



Mirages, Installation View, September 2021



Elizabeth Atterbury, *Bones*, 2014
Gelatin Silver Print
13 ½ x 11 ½ inches
Courtesy of the artist and Document, Chicago



Mirages

Elizabeth Atterbury, Strauss
Bourque-LaFrance, and Katy Cowan
September 3 – November 6, 2021

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?

Elizabeth Atterbury's work shifts between sculpture and wall-based work. With her sculptures, she appropriates and remakes forms pulled from

the world. The forms carry associations and meanings and together can be seen as a repository for Atterbury's memories (specific and fleeting). A wooden sandal, a folding fan, a beach breeze, a calligraphic shape. In their remaking they undergo a change, becoming more known and more mysterious at the same time. Atterbury plays with scale and repetition within her larger body of work, forcing the viewer to think about not only their relationship to the original object and its potential manifestations, but also to contemplate their own experience of the object's translation.

Katy Cowan's work blurs associations with material, subject matter, and viewer experience. By working in cast aluminum reproductions of common objects, and drawn responses to those very forms, she asks the viewer to look deeper, stranger, and with the ability to get lost within their own looking. For the past several years, Cowan's subject matter of choice has been rope because of its ability to reference things beyond itself. Cowan's sculpture/painting hybrids start out

as rope affixed to a plywood backing, that are then made into solid aluminum pieces, which result in vibrantly coated oil and enamel paintings. During the mold-making process, she either leaves the rope intact and recognizable, other times she unbraids or unravels the material, and other times she will cast the entire arrangement (wood and all) in aluminum. Cowan paints and draws on the cast's surfaces with vividly colored oil, enamel, and graphite, embracing the capability a surface has to hold, hide, and be consumed by her mark-making. Like her metal works, her drawings follow suit—absorbing marks, suggesting diversions, or entering a conversation entirely of their own making. Cowan's work suggests both the landscape and the body, fluid and unfixed. Rope spreads out, blown by the wind. Cobwebs, mopping, a head, river deltas, crossed legs, a spill of colorful entrails.

Strauss Bourque-LaFrance engages in a painting practice that is emboldened by painting's tactile and sculptural capacities. He draws on

historical and personal language for these vibrant works that embrace abstraction alongside representation, repetition, and transformation, cutting and arranging the picture to build something else. His most recent body of work explores scapes that are difficult to define; part landscape, part mindscape, part stage. Bourque-LaFrance's paintings are poetic and emotional, but simultaneously allude to real time and space. Directional paths painted in and scrubbed out. Courses re-routed. A view of a wall as a view of the world. The reflection of improvisation.

Embedded within the works included in *Mirages* remains the question: can a thing be a thing but also another thing? Together, Atterbury, Bourque-LaFrance, and Cowan reveal what is possible when materials and objects are transformed into one or more other things, and when ideas and interpretations aren't fixed, but rather can be experienced in a multitude of ways, through an act of close looking.

—excerpt from press release

Mirages

ELIZABETH ATTERBURY
STRAUSS BOURQUE-LAFRANCE
KATY COWAN



(from left) Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, Elizabeth Atterbury, and Katy Cowan. Crisp-Ellert Art Museum at Flagler College, September 2, 2021. Image credit: Julie Dickover.



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About the artists:

Elizabeth Atterbury

Elizabeth Atterbury (b. 1982, West Palm Beach, FL) received her BA from Hampshire College (Amherst, MA) and her MFA from MassArt (Boston, MA). Solo and group shows include Mrs. (Maspeth, NY); DOCUMENT (Chicago, IL); Kate Werble Gallery (New York) The Portland Museum of Art (Portland, ME); The Colby College Museum of Art (Waterville, ME); kijidome (Boston, MA); Western Exhibitions (Chicago, IL); The Luminary (St Louis, MO) Et al. Etc. (San Francisco, CA); Pulaski Park Field House (Chicago, IL); Able Baker Contemporary, (Portland, ME); Ida Schmid (Brooklyn, NY); TSA (Brooklyn, NY); Bodega (Philadelphia/New York) KANSAS (New York, NY); and The ICA at Maine College of Art (Portland, ME); among others. She lives and works in Portland, Maine.

Strauss Bourque-LaFrance

Strauss Bourque-LaFrance (b. 1983, Poland Spring, ME) earned a BA from Hampshire College (Amherst, MA); an MFA from Tyler School of Art (Philadelphia, PA); and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (Skowhegan, ME). He has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions T29 (Rome, Italy); the Northampton Center for the Arts (Northampton, MA); The Kitchen (New York, NY); The Clifford Gallery at Colgate University (Hamilton, NY); ICA Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA); The Contemporary Austin (Austin, TX); Abrons Art Center (New York, NY); and Sculpture Center (New York, NY); among others. The artist was a recipient of the Northampton Arts Council Grant (Northampton, MA); an Artist in Residence at Dance and Process, The Kitchen (New York, NY); and an Artist in Residence at Movement Research (New York, NY). He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY and Los Angeles, CA.

Katy Cowan

Katy Cowan (b. 1982, Lake Geneva, WI) received her BFA from University of Puget Sound (Puget Sound, WA) in 2004 and her MFA from Otis College of Art and Design (Los Angeles, CA) in 2014. Her work has been exhibited at venues such as Document (Chicago, IL); Philip Martin Gallery (Los Angeles, CA); Otis College of Art and Design (Los Angeles, CA); The Green Gallery (Milwaukee, WI); Kate Werble Gallery (New York, NY), Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (Madison, WI); Fourteen30 Contemporary (Portland, OR); and Kate Werble Gallery (New York, NY). Cowan's work is in public and private collections such as the Minneapolis Museum of Art (Minneapolis, MN); Lynden Sculpture Garden (Milwaukee, WI); and Art in Embassies (Maputo, Mozambique). Her work has been reviewed in "Artforum," "Los Angeles Times," "Architectural Digest," "Wallpaper*," "Artnet" and other publications. Cowan lives and works in Berkeley, CA.

Roz Crews

Roz Crews is an artist, educator, and writer whose practice explores the many ways that people around her exist in relationship to one another. Recent projects have examined the dominant strategies and methods of research enforced by academic institutions, schemes and scams of capitalism, and the ways authorship and labor are discussed in the context of cultural work. Her work manifests as publications, performances, conversations, essays, and exhibitions, and she shares it in status quo art spaces...but also in hotels, bars, college dorms, Zoom rooms, and river banks. As part of her exploration of the oppressive qualities of schools, she currently works as a full-time art teacher at a public elementary school in North Florida.

Mirages is on view from September
3rd through November 6th, 2021 at
the Crisp Ellert Art Museum.

Curated by Julie Dickover.

With:

Elizabeth Atterbury,
Strauss Bourque-LaFrance,
and Katy Cowan.

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