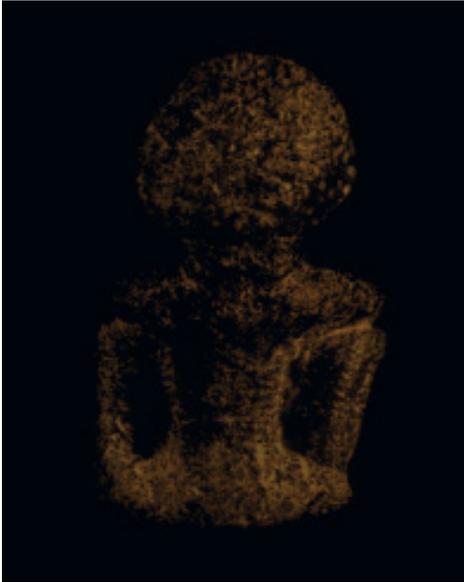


REPUBLIC GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 2020.09.05



Gwenessa Lam

Figure Unknown

September 26, 2020 - November 28, 2020

“Figure Unknown” is based on a 2000 year old, unidentified stone artifact found in Ruby Creek, BC. With facial features and markings distinct from any other of this region, archaeologists hold three competing hypotheses for its origins. All three hypotheses are possible, but each one radically changes the meaning and significance we ascribe to the artifact. Until further tests are done, its status as an unknown object offers space for speculation, allowing competing narratives to exist simultaneously.

These artworks investigate the uncertainty that often accompanies new knowledge. Despite the range of systems that have been used to document an artifact, no single representation seems able to contain the object’s meaning and significance. And in fact, the friction created by the presence of multiple image-making systems seems to further complicate our understanding. The exhibition cultivates this destabilizing experience in an attempt to reveal the assumptions and hesitations we all have when met with a historical or cultural unknown.

Incorporating drawing, painting, and photography, the works explore various representations of the Ruby Creek Stone Figure. Like archaeological documentation, they offer different perspectives intended to make the whole artifact evident. However, the multiple views and distortions complicate rather than clarify. Through translations and inversions between mediums, the artworks trouble the inherent values associated with different systems of representation.

Gwenessa Lam is a visual artist and educator. Her artwork stems from interests in perception and the compression of time and memory within images. Lam received her BFA from the University of British Columbia and MFA from New York University. She has taught at New York University, Alberta College Art and Design, the University of British Columbia, and is currently on faculty at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She has attended residencies at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Skowhegan, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Banff Centre. Her work has been exhibited at the Bronx Museum of Art and the Queens Museum of Art in New York.

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