

artscope



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**EDVARD MUNCH AT THE CLARK
EDWARD HOPPER AT CAPE ANN**

**ELLEN CAREY IN NEW BRITAIN
UÝRA AT THE CURRIER**

September/October 2023

Free or \$5.99 mailed copy

NBMAA'S EXPANDING COLOR FIELD

CAREY & GOURLAY SHOWCASED IN NEW BRITAIN & WEST HARTFORD

The large format experimental photography in "Ellen Carey: Struck by Light," on view at New Britain Museum of American Art (NBMAA) through January 28, 2024, delivers a feast of process for the eyes. Her work has the sensibility of color-field painting brought into photographic context relating similar minimalist simplicity, elegance and color-saturation. It is remarkable to see the physicality of Carey's nearly floor-to-ceiling unframed polaroid prints. The artist's "pulls" are installed pinned to the walls and hanging unframed, exposed and tactile. The beauty of her photographic experimentation keys to size and color, and the positive/negative aspect of showing both print and emulsion sheets side-by-side with equal emphasis.

Remembering NBMAA Director Brett Abbott's specialization in photography from my interview with him for Artscope's March/April 2022 issue, I asked NBMAA curator Lisa Williams how Carey's photographic sensibility reflects that interest. She responded: "Director Brett Abbott previously worked with Ellen Carey on her exhibit 'Ellen Carey: Dings, Pulls and Shadows' at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (in Fort Worth, Texas) in 2018. Her two-part NBMAA show 'Ellen Carey: Struck by Light' provides a wonderful opportunity for their continued collaboration, following Brett's move to the NBMAA."

Although a Hartford resident today, Carey was based in New York City for many years, even while as a professor at the Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford, a position that she still holds. Historically speaking, she was among a small group of pivotal artists in New York creating change at the ferment of experimentation in large format photography using Polaroid's 20" x 24" camera. She counted John Coplans and others amongst her friends within a tight community of peers defining the potential of this new art form.

Carey described the eureka moment of making her first large format Polaroid "pull" — a friend asking if it was art, and Carey knowing this was something special. Her husband at that time dubbed that first "pull" image, "Photography Degree Zero," a methodology or process used by Carey from 1996 to the present. The term degree zero refers to Semiotic theory, "Writing Degree Zero" by Roland Barthes, and means that with the absence of an equivalent signifier a thing exists as itself — "actual" rather than facsimile.

NBMAA's Williams related that it has 10 artworks by Carey in its permanent collection. The artist said that the count of pieces is higher but when a series of photographs constitutes a whole it might have a single numeric identity. "The museum acquired a major work [by Carey] in 2021, entitled 'Pull XL' (2004) but many of the works were generous gifts of the artist," Williams said. A key point is that everything in "Ellen Carey: Struck by Light" on the second floor is owned by the museum, which represents a significant, extremely interesting body of work spanning the artist's career.

Williams described Carey's show at NBMAA as "a two-part exhibition spanning first and second floor galleries. On our second floor, works from the early 1990s to 2000s explore the development

WANDERLUST

ELLEN CAREY: STRUCK BY LIGHT

NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
56 LEXINGTON STREET
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT

THROUGH
JANUARY 28, 2024

ELIZABETH GOURLAY: COLOR, CORDS, AND THREADS

DELAMAR WEST HARTFORD
1 MEMORIAL ROAD
WEST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

THROUGH
FEBRUARY 28, 2024

Installation view of "Ellen Carey: Struck by Light" at New Britain Museum of American Art.



of Carey's innovative career. This gallery features recent work from the last decade, including large-scale camera-less photograms and 'pulls' that demonstrate Carey's boldly experimental approach to image-making. Evoking a kaleidoscope of dizzying hues and shapes, 'Ellen Carey: Struck by Light' celebrates Carey's enormous contributions to the field of photography through her pioneering explorations of light, color, and shadow.

"Since the early 1990's Ellen Carey has created experimental and abstract works that defy photographic conventions. Today, she continues to reinvent photographic and visual language by pioneering forms and techniques that draw upon over 200 years of photographic history and techniques."



Cary's CV is substantial and reflects years of innovation and accomplishment. In addition to the show in New Britain, her works currently appear in "Light-Struck" at Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock Abbey, National Trust, Wiltshire, United Kingdom, where photography was born in 1835. New work by Carey, made at her Connecticut studio, is included in the show at Fox Talbot Museum; In Europe her work is represented by Galerie Miranda of Paris. Jayne H. Baum of JHB Galleries will feature Carey's work in booth #331 at PHOTOFAIRS, New York from September 8 through 10. This inaugural fair takes place alongside the Armory Show in the Javits Center in New York City.

After seeing Carey's exhibition, I made a side trip to view "Elizabeth Gourlay: Color, Cords and Threads," a NBMAA-curated exhibition that is on view through February 28, 2024,

at the Delmar West Hartford Luxury Hotel. The Delmar has its own rich private art collection and the guest experience there is further enriched by solo exhibitions through its association with NBMAA.

NBMAA curator Williams selected Gourlay's artworks for display in "Elizabeth Gourlay: Color, Cords and Threads," an exhibition that includes abstract acrylic paintings and works-on-paper, which visually mesh with the Delmar's interior, as if they were meant to exist there. Her choices give a sense of the artist's work over an 11-year span. Williams said that two of Gourlay's paintings and a work-on-paper have been acquired by the museum from the artist's NBMAA 2022/2023 exhibition, "Eclectic Threads."

Gourlay's work evokes atmospheric ambience imbuing a sense of visual vibration that complements the Delmar's interior.

TOP: Ellen Carey, *Crush & Pull with Hands & Penlights*, 2022, Polaroid, 20" x 24", Color Positive Prints.

BOTTOM: Installation view of "Elizabeth Gourlay: Color, Chords, and Threads" at the Delmar West Hartford.

Her paintings are visible upon entering the hotel and relate a sensibility of architectural geometry that serendipitously engages the design of the Delamar's plaid inlaid stone floor, seemingly adding vanishing point perspective to her portal-like compositions.

Williams said that the hotel was a strong setting for her paintings: "Elizabeth is a prolific artist whose work has evolved in a fascinating manner over the course of her career. The Delamar offered an exciting venue to showcase over 20 works that span multiple decades of output by the artist and introduces her work to new audiences."

Walking through the Delamar's public spaces, I saw small acrylic paintings by Gourlay near a piano — apt placement given the artist likens her creative process to striking piano chords or arranging musical notes. On the second floor there are textural compositions by Gourlay including "Blue Weave" and "No.1 Blue." Both were included in Gourlay's recent NBMAA exhibition, which focused on the artist's recent works.

The exhibition at the Delamar considers Gourlay's career in overview, her thinking and creative evolution. Gourlay said that seeing her work at the Delamar was the first time she'd looked at the works in relation to each other, because her studio doesn't allow for arranging things expansively. This exhibition is an invitation to intimately explore the artist's oeuvre.

When I asked NBMAA curator Lisa Williams what she enjoyed about curating the Carey and Gourlay exhibitions respectively, she said, "These visionary artists have honed their style and subject matter over multiple decades, and it is a thrill to trace the evolution of their careers through these two separate but concurrent exhibitions."

Suzanne Volmer