

# D A N E S E

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# C O R E Y

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Ellen Harvey

*Nostalgia*

October 27 – December 23, 2017

Reception: Thursday, October 26, 6-8 p.m.

*If art is a mirror, it's obviously a failed mirror. It cannot escape its own subjectivity. Perhaps as a result, I'm particularly interested in the idea of the mirror that lies—in the dark untruthful mirror that converts life into art. I've long been obsessed with the Claude Glass.... Of course, it's also important to remember that the black mirror is traditionally used for magic, in particular for seeing the future. That dark future is one that drives much of my work. There's a reason that the first painting I ever fell in love with was Rogier Van der Weyden's Last Judgment (circa 1451). That red-hot sword is coming for us all.*

—Ellen Harvey, *Museum of Failure*, New York: Gregory R. Miller & Co, 2015

Ellen Harvey's first solo exhibition with Danese/Corey brings together new and recent works in a multifaceted exploration of our problematic relationship with our past, where longing and revisionism both infect and inspire our understanding of our present and future. This diverse collection of works with its uncanny doppelgangers, lost Edens and myriad temporal dislocations serves as an overview of Harvey's ongoing obsession with art's function as a dark mirror, as a site of narrative failure and collapse.

The difficult relationship between an idealized past and a problematic present defines Harvey's monumental installation, *Arcade/Arcadia*, which marries a fun house hall of mirrors to a ¾ scale framework recreation of the London gallery that J.W. Turner built to display his work and which he kept (in increasingly decrepit condition) until his death. The thirty-four hand-engraved rear-illuminated Plexiglas mirrors inside the shack, replicate the arrangement of paintings found in Turner's gallery upon his death, as painted by George Jones in 1851. Together, the mirrors create a panoramic view of contemporary Margate, the town where Turner lived and which he celebrated for its idyllic natural beauties. The mirror engravings mimic the style of Turner's engravings, inserting the now run-down seaside resort with its shuttered shops and amusement parks into the aesthetic of a time before Margate's decline.

This sense of temporal schizophrenia also informs *Picture(sque)*, which couples a contemporary mirror with an antique Claude Glass, the small, black, convex handheld mirror used for eighteenth-century landscape appreciation, so named because it was thought to produce images reminiscent of the paintings of Claude Lorrain. The Claude glass's optical qualities both compress and expand the image, creating a theatrical distance between the planes and allowing for a much wider field of vision than the eye itself. It also produces a startlingly sharper and more contrast-rich view because it is a direct and not a silvered mirror: the image is produced on the surface of the black glass. With the advent of photography and a privileging of direct observation in art, the Claude Glass was all but forgotten; a few survived as curiosities. Here its superimposition on a contemporary float glass mirror serves both to highlight the Claude Glass's optical

properties and to create a contrast between a mirror whose purpose is accuracy and one whose purpose was beauty. *Looking Back*, which inserts a fractured car side mirror into a picturesque watercolor landscape, employs a similar strategy, contrasting a shattered attempt at objectivity with an idealized "artistic" view.

*Eclipse*, a recreation of attempts at photographing the recent eclipse in an iPhone, and *On the Impossibility of Capturing a Sunset*, an engraving of a sunset in several 16 rear-lit Plexiglas mirror panels, speak to the limitations of the contemporary versions of the Claude Glass in which we try to capture our past. *TV Rock*, in contrast offers a vision of a past where television served to create consensus rather than division. Here a piece of ulexite is inserted into painting of a mid-century television set in a living room. Ulexite is colloquially known as TV Rock due its unusual optical characteristics; flat polished ulexite will display an image of whatever surface is adjacent to its other side, much like a fiber optic cable, so that it functions as a natural screen.

Harvey's eponymous *Nostalgia* sets the stage for a show in which art serves as a problematic intermediary between past and present. She sets up a contrast between two gilded frames, one old and worn, framing the mildewed remains of a now unintelligible artwork, the other freshly gilded all over so that the "subject" of the work becomes gold itself. Here the aestheticized past becomes the ultimate luxury good; nostalgia as a signifier for art itself. This arbitrary assignment of value to the more "ancient" alternative is taken to its extreme in *Crack Craquelure*, an on-going series of paintings of cracked paint, where a focus on the decayed and damaged paint ends up creating paintings that hover uneasily between abstraction and representation.

The idea of the beautiful ruin also informs *Ghost (of Penn Station)*, part of an on-going series of paintings of buildings throughout the world that have been destroyed for reasons of war, greed or ideology. These paintings are conceived as funerary monuments to places that now exist only in memory. Penn Station is a particularly paradoxical example, in part because its neoclassical aesthetic lends a sense of inevitability to its destruction (returning it to the ruins that inspired it), and also because its destruction ended up being such a force for conservation in New York City. The endless mourning of New Yorkers for their lost Penn Station was the inspiration for this series of paintings of other iconic destroyed sites, of places whose loss cannot be easily accepted or rationalized.

Part of the fetishization of the past is a loss of faith in the future, the sense that the arrow of progress is moving backwards, creating ruins at an ever more frantic pace. *New Forest* appears to show a contemporary office that has been allowed to return to a state of nature. Abandoned computers litter the floor and trees push their way through the empty cubicles. It is unclear what happened to the office in question, which happens to be the newly renovated Internal Revenue Service Office in Andover, MA, an institution for which it is hard to imagine people feeling nostalgia, but which might indeed be missed if it were gone.

Ellen Harvey is a British-born artist living and working in Brooklyn. She is a 2016 recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in the Visual Arts and a graduate of the Whitney Independent Study Program. She has exhibited extensively in the U.S. and internationally and was included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial. Solo exhibitions include *Metal Painting* at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia; *The Unloved* at the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, Belgium; *The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington DC* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC;

*The Nudist Museum* at the Bass Museum in Miami Beach; *Ruins are More Beautiful* at the Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, Poland; *Mirror* at the Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia; and, *A Whitney for the Whitney at Philip Morris* at the Whitney Museum at Altria in New York. She has completed numerous commissions, including *Arcadia* for the opening exhibition of the Turner Contemporary in Margate, UK and permanent public works for New York Percent for Art, New York Arts in Transit, the Chicago Transit Authority, the Philadelphia International Airport, the Federal Art in Architecture program and the Flemish National Architect. Her Belgian project *Repeat*, for which she demolished a church, won the Wivina Demeester Prize for Commissioned Public Art in 2016. She is currently working on *Network*, a commission for Boston's South Station; and *Atlantis*, a new permanent installation commissioned for the renovation of the Miami Beach Convention Center. Her work has been the subject of several books including *New York Beautification Project*, published by G. R. Miller & Co. in 2005; *Mirror*, published by the Pennsylvania Academy in 2006; *Ellen Harvey: The Unloved*, published by Hannibal in 2014; and, *Ellen Harvey: Museum of Failure*, published by G. R. Miller & Co. in 2015.

A fully illustrated catalogue is available. For further information please contact the gallery at 212-223-2227 or [contact@danese.com](mailto:contact@danese.com).

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