

THE KNOCKTURNAL

Art Review: Davina Semo, ALL THE WORLD, At Marlborough Contemporary

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"IT IS HARD," SHE SAID, "TO IMAGINE THE WORLD AS IT WAS", 2019. Photo: Pierre Le Hors.

"Quite frankly, it's ugly," a gallery hop guide says to a large group of observers.

At first glance, certain aspects of Davina Semo's third solo exhibit at Marlborough—ALL THE WORLD—is conceptually reminiscent of Duchamp's readymade urinal in its defiant and almost bellicose presentation as found art. Art or hoax? The early twentieth-century art world would debate furiously on what would become one of the most pivotal moments in the course of modern art.



Installation View. Photo: Pierre Le Hors.

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After witnessing a series of wildfires in her newly adopted home in California, Semo visited a recycling center and picked out a number of large sculptures of industrial waste to be shipped out for a second chance at a more shining life. Whatever amount Semo paid for was presumably less than the shipping cost. These freestanding sculptures are exactly as they had appeared at the recycling center, but now they exist in an esteemed gallery in Chelsea, observed by the keen eyes of New York gallery-goers. The inherent power and message in objects is what Semo recognizes, revels in, and nurtures.

ALL THE WORLD is politically-charged. Semo is enveloped with ecological anxiety, as the rest of the world should be. ALL THE WORLD is a presentation of that anxiety; the alarming recognition of the eminence of ecological doom, and perhaps a call to action. The bells, which visitors are free to touch and ring, point to the freedom we have granted ourselves—freedom to exploit our planet and freedom to deregulate, which in turn exponentially heightens carbon emissions that exacerbate wildfires.



RATHER THAN FIXING THE WORK AFTER THE BOYS' ROUGH HANDLING OF IT, SHE HAS SIMPLY RE-TITLED IT "BROKEN", 2019. Photo: Pierre Le Hors

Industrial materials have been a part of the artist's lexicon for a large portion of Semo's career. Most of her sculptures are heavy and unwieldy, so the contrast between her pristine and playful mirrors that coexist in the same space is even more stark. The mirrors, which are not found but made, are colored plexiglass with sealed bearings which are usually used for skateboard wheels; skateboarding, which continues to be a very popular activity in California.

"I see art and the rest of the world as being the same," Semo says in a conversation with Interview Magazine back in 2014. This philosophy remains visible in ALL THE WORLD. Continuing her insistence on titling her artworks from encountered words, she takes words out of context from texts, emails, and books—often replacing masculine pronouns with feminine.

"BECAUSE WE ARE FACING AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT AND THERE IS NO TIME TO CONTINUE DOWN THIS ROAD OF MADNESS," SHE SAID, 2019 is a found sculpture of hardware with a cast bronze bell, while *SHE BECAME VERY SENSITIVE TO THE TASTE OF WATER FROM THE TAP, 2019* is one of the vibrant acrylic mirrors.



SHE BECAME VERY SENSITIVE TO THE TASTE OF WATER FROM THE TAP, 2019. Photo: Pierre Le Hors.