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### The Fifth Leg: Pam Lins at Rachel Uffner Gallery

by David Brody

*Pam Lins: Problem Picture Sources New Sculptures at Rachel Uffner Gallery*

September 12 – October 24, 2010  
47 Orchard Street (between Grand and Hester)  
New York City, (212) 274 0064



Pam Lins, "The Fifth Leg", 2010. Archival inkjet print, 16 x 12 inches, edition of 5. Courtesy Rachel Uffner Gallery. Photo by Cliff Borress.

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Pam Lins has long been aggravating the multiple personality disorder of the pedestal, a pathology she traces back to Brancusi. With quirky elegance she questions whether the pedestal is furniture or scale model, support or the thing itself. In her current show at Rachel Uffner, she ramps up the quirkiness while holding on for dear life to the elegance, going so far as to re-build a version of the Romanian progenitor's studio fireplace as diorama-ized at the Pompidou Center. Brancusi had crammed a monochrome painting onto the wall as a photographic background, notching it around the masonry. (A few of his diaristic studio shots are currently on view at MoMA's *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today*, a superb show that crosses wires with Lins' project repeatedly.) Lins makes sure to cement this literal overlap between painting, photography, architecture and sculpture; homage and appropriation get bricked up in the process. Oh, and fabrication to boot, since Lins commissioned the painting (from Jessica Dickinson).

With this particular hearth as backdrop, the six standing, ornamented boxes that fill the gallery, each with a painting (by the artist) propped like an eccentric little billboard on top, beg to be seen as restive Brancusian plinths whose placement and status are up for grabs. By hovering their hollow bulk aggressively over recessed base elements, and by treating pairs of vertical faces as body-sized painting supports, Lins nearly overwhelms the amiable panels above. Two pedestal faces are always left plywood-raw, joining to a crisply mitered edge, along which tangent geometries have been notched out, patched smooth, and painted white. These refined truncations are sculpturally enthralling in themselves; decisive content also inheres in their voids, for several suggest negative castings of the diamond modules of the Endless Column, and the others function as fluted niches awaiting a saint or a god.



Pam Lins, *Lincoln bookend obstruction*, 2010. Acrylic on panel, acrylic paint, plaster, ACX plywood, approx. 60 x 23 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches. Courtesy Rachel Uffner Gallery

Exactly such missing figures haunt the small paintings. While four panels exhibit marginally competent, fashionably impulsive typologies of abstraction from the gestural to the minimal, two crucial ones derive legibly from photographs of famous marbles: Bernini's *Medusa* and French's *Lincoln Memorial* (with Brancusi's column crowding the martyr for good measure); à la carte panels in the back room suggest that other sculpture snapshots probably lie buried under seeming abstractions. In any event, Lins has been toying seriously with abstract painting for years, usually by way of infiltrating sculptural turf. In her 2009 Uffner show she wrapped her pedestals on two sides with vertical or diagonal stripes: Christmas present meets Anne Truitt. Pedestals in the current show are painted with a more open-ended version of hard-edge (tape bleed, asymmetry, coagulated drips), or else, antithetically, they are outsourced for a period-specific finish-fetish luster using vintage muscle car pigments.

To top off the show, Lins piles on elaborate frosting in the conceit of an ersatz textbook she calls *The Fifth Leg*:

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*A Psychological History of Sculpture*, existing only in the form of two unimpressive, commissioned photographs. In one, a nearly plausible mock-up stands on its softback edge, its cover sporting a monumental Assyrian winged bull caged by a jagged polyhedral abstraction. It would have been the best painting in the show, if it weren't a rephotographed digital collage. In the other photo, we can peruse the ostensible table of contents. These cryptic fragments are a clever vehicle for a sincere, undigested meditation on the sources of Lins' images and the metaphysics of sculpture. Printed versions of this text are available to visitors.

The "fifth leg" was the Assyrians' proto-cubist solution for negotiating blind corners in bas-relief; the same regal, quasi-solid conciliation prevails around the edge of a Truitt column or an Ann Pibal canvas. By comparison, Lins' pedestals are unruly, causing a dirty mind to wander to bawdier connotations of extra legs — and from there to overt phallic themes in Brancusi, and beyond. Given her preoccupations with the photography of sculpture and with a strain of sexual forwardness in its figurative lineage — double entendres aside, *The Fifth Leg* proposes topics such as "the wet T-shirt and mimetic cloth," "sticking out and sinking in," and "embarrassed pedestals" — perhaps we can next expect Lins to tilt at Rodin's priapic Balzac, currently looming over MoMA's ante-lobby. No contemporary sculptor is better positioned to blind-side that seminal muse of the modernist camera.

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