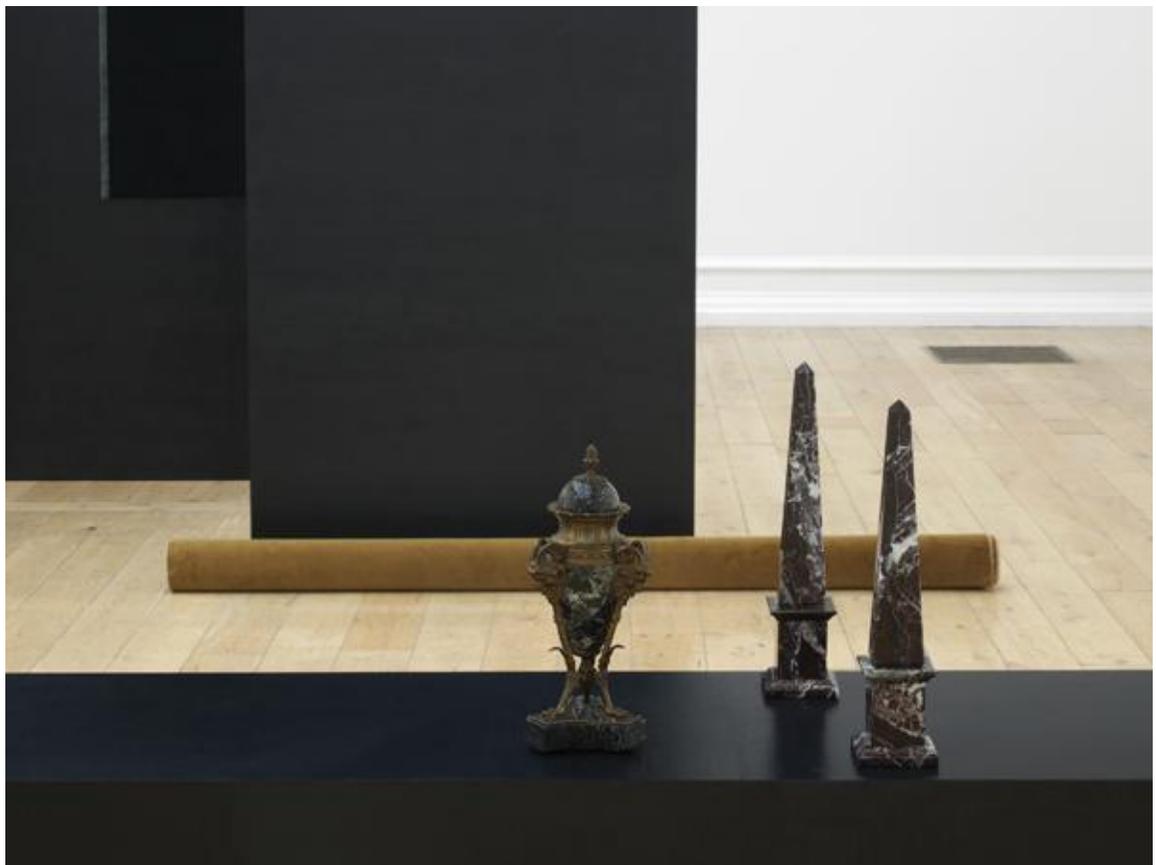


Art Review

Isabelle Cornaro, Paysage Avec Poussin, South London Gallery



Isabelle Cornaro, Paysage Avec Poussin At South London Gallery - Landscape Vs Nature

28-01-2015

French artist Isabelle Cornaro uses the language of art to explore and make visible the power and politics that shape our world. Her current exhibition at the South London Gallery is the sixth in a series of installations entitled *Paysage avec Poussin et témoins oculaires*, a series loosely based on landscape paintings by Nicolas Poussin, in this case his *Landscape with Hercules and Cacus* (c.1656). Cornaro structures the gallery space with matte black plinths built at varying heights, which she adorns with objects; an ornamental stone carving covered in lichen, a marble urn, a clay model cottage, rolls of green velvet. Considered together the colours, textures and feel of the objects evoke a *château garden: lush and elegant. But unlike a painting, Cornaro's 'landscape' exists in three dimensions, allowing the viewer to walk through it and admire it from multiple perspectives.*

It would be a mistake to assume that the installation is a purely art historical exercise. Cornaro uses the medium of classical landscape painting as a metaphor for the networks of power and politics that subtly shape our world. The ease and grace of a Poussin landscape may at first glance appear a vision of pastoral beauty, but closer inspection reveals the conventions and artifice that work to create this illusion of 'nature'. Perspective, which Cornaro takes pains to create using plinths taller plinths at the back of the gallery and variations in colour (lighter colours in the foreground, darker colours at the back) is the ideal metaphor for this because it is an artificial method for reproducing a 'natural' reality.

This exploration of the power structures embedded within our culture extends beyond this interrogation of landscape painting to the objects positioned within the 'landscape'. United in their connection to the theme, these objects are props, but they're also vessels filled with political, social and cultural baggage. The films upstairs expands on the theme of objects and their complex meanings. Cornaro's treatment is not archaeological, objects here are not merely reflections of the context of their production, they are networked, meaning is presented as fluid and subject to grouping. *Figures* (2011) groups objects through usage, for instance banknotes, coins and poker chips. The fetishisation of the object, both in terms of

commodity fetish and the object as a vessel for other meanings; the semiotics of objects, is the subject here. Premier rêve d'Oskar Fischinger (2008) presents a looser grouping of objects with colonial associations amongst others.

Through varied media and a cornucopia of objects Cornaro presents a precise analysis of the political and social threads imperceptibly woven into Western material culture. The result is as beautiful and alluring as it is challenging.

Isabelle Cornaro, Paysage avec Poussin - South London Gallery - 5 April 2015

Words: Laura Purseglove

Photo: Installation view of Isabelle Cornaro: Paysage avec poussin at the South London Gallery, 2015. Courtesy of the artists, photo by Andy Keate © Artlyst 2015 all rights reserved