Over the last decade, Amie Siegel (b. 1974, Chicago) has employed film, video, photography, performance, and installation to explore a breadth of themes, including history, psychoanalysis, economics, and the global trade in art and artefacts. Her works use the associative structure of poetry, the dispassionate perspective of sociology, and her own idiosyncratically paced, multi-layered approach to examine complex systems of power and value. With unhurried precision, often mirroring aspects of the systems she portrays, Siegel reveals society’s obsessions and their seductions and subversions.

In the exhibition Medium Cool, Blaffer Art Museum features three recent works by Siegel: Dynasty, 2017, an installation centered on a fragment of pink marble from Trump Tower; Fetish, 2016, a video exposing the annual cleaning of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s practice room and archaeological collection; and Quarry, a video following the production-to-consumption cycle of the marble facades bedecking multimillion dollar high-rise apartments. Additionally, for the Blaffer presentation, Siegel has made a new series of marble-dust paintings at the Vermont facility where much of Quarry was shot.

Conceived separately, these works together suggest a larger narrative of contemporary life and late-stage capitalism — a time of social stratification, unsustainable consumption, and the displacement of labor through mechanization. Freud used archaeology as a primary metaphor for his theories and collected over 2,500 ancient figurines, which we see being dusted in Fetish, along with lifting and vacuuming of the oriental rugs draping his analysis couch. Using an associatory, mining method similar to Freud’s, Quarry and Dynasty, too, peer behind surfaces to speculate on the drives propelling society. Without providing easy answers, they ask what glossy marble surfaces — the patterns of which often resemble the Rorschach inkblots used in psychoanalysis — say about contemporary society and how it constructs value.

The exhibition title, Medium Cool, while referencing the coldness of the stone materials appearing in each of its component parts, also suggests the detached, almost forensic perspective Siegel employs in her various media. Additionally, it reinforces an overarching reading of her component-based works. In the 1960s, philosopher Marshall McLuhan famously described “cool media” as forms of communication requiring the audience to piece together its larger significance.
underground cutting rooms. A two-part structure is revealed

begins deep underground in a quarry in Vermont. Accompanied

international symbol of wealth and sophistication. The video

transformation of marble from raw material to luxury product,

shown for the first time in the Unites States, Quarry looks at the

surfaces of book matched, or mirror-image, slabs of the same

Marble Dust Paintings, 2019

end on an open, windblown concrete high-rise construction
dock, Quarry showcases the ways we are beguiled by luxury

when the music repeats and the camera moves above ground
to multimillion dollar apartments high above New York. The

“real” and the “rendered” become indistinguishable, as Siegel
alternates between actual footage of artfully staged model
apartments and slick virtual renditions of life in the skyline.

Ending on an open, windblown concrete high-rise construction
dock, Quarry showcases the ways we are beguiled by luxury

and its slick and opulent facades.

Dynasty, 2017

Trump Tower marble fragment, two chromogenic prints, archival
pigment print, and vinyl wall text

Dynasty is an installation centered around a small piece of pink
Italian Breccia Perniche marble taken from the lobby of
Manhattan's Trump Tower, which Siegel purchased on eBay
during the November 2016 election. The stone was selected by
the president's first wife Ivana Trump, and he once bragged that
it cost more than the "middle rent" of his buildings in Brooklyn.

Spotlighted in a vitrine, this chunk of stone is paired with a
small, framed snapshot provided by the eBay seller to document
its original location. Also featured in the gallery are two large, 1:1
scale photographs made from high-resolution scans of the
surfaces of book matched, or mirror-image, slabs of the same
stone. A wall text lists the work's contents and provenance.

Partly polished, partly rough and craggly, this fragment conjures
up thoughts of future ruins, while its title calls to mind both
Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1818 poem "Ozymandias," which
describes a crumbling monument to a long-forgotten empire,
and the popular 1980's television drama of the same name
chronicling the lives of a wealthy, scandal-plagued family.

Fetish, 2016

HD video, color/sound. 34 min.

Fetish depicts the annual deep-cleaning of psychoanalyst
Sigmund Freud's practice rooms in his eponymous museum in
London. When Freud fled Austria to the United Kingdom in 1938,
he brought his entire office with him, including his extensive
collection of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian figurines. Siegel films
the slow, painstaking processes of dusting and vacuuming in
close-up detail, at once delicate and voyeuristic. Gloved hands
touch ancient fetish objects, and vacuum cleaner hoses reach
close-up detail, at once delicate and voyeuristic. Gloved hands
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Excavating layers of consciousness was central to Freud's
psychoanalytic work, and the ways Siegel mirrors his methods in
her study of the painstaking maintenance of his workspace in
Fetish make it a key to the other works in Medium Cool.

Quarry, 2015

HD video, color/sound. 34 min.

Shown for the first time in the United States, Quarry looks at the
transformation of marble from raw material to luxury product,
from cold stone to a cool minimalist aesthetic and an

international symbol of wealth and sophistication. The video
begins deep underground in a quarry in Vermont. Accompanied
by an otherworldly musical score, Siegel uses her trademark
gliding dolly shots to explore vast caverns, flooded grottoes, and
underground cutting rooms. A two-part structure is revealed