



Elaine Stocki

Caput Mortuum

November 21- December 20, 2019

Opening reception: Thursday, November 21, 6-8:30pm

Thomas Erben Gallery is excited to present *Caput Mortuum*, an exhibition of new paintings and photo-works by artist Elaine Stocki. By working within and across the two mediums, Stocki's practice critically explores the nuance of difference. A richly colorful term, *Caput Mortuum* draws color, alchemy, art and death into the exhibition's circle of interests. With literal translations of *worthless remains* and *death's head* in Latin, *Caput Mortuum* has broadly lent its name throughout history to various colors, the leftover remains of alchemist's experiments and mummy's head (an original source of pigment for artists). Here Stocki employs the term both for its linguistic multiplicity and posits it on the relationship between materiality and death; the act and making of painting and the irrevocable record of life/death captured by the photographic process.

Joining the general sense of unease that she developed with [Hoar Frost](#), Stocki's previous exhibition with the gallery, a conjoined urgency and formal peculiarity inhabit *Caput Mortuum*. Frustrating our sense of who and what is true, what is tangible, and most importantly that those things are not easily digestible, but complex and fluid, the exhibition is at home in this moment of difference.

The exhibit mounts Stocki's unusually round-edged, diamond- and pill-shaped paintings and photographs throughout the gallery's walls, lending their curving edges a subtle prominence. Across all the works there is an emphasis on materiality. Stained with watercolors, the paintings' raw canvases exhibit a palpable tactility, one mirrored by the silver gelatin printing and hand tinting of the photographs. Building gradations and intensity of color and, ultimately, form, Stocki articulates her

painterly concerns through a repetitive process, applying bands of watercolor in varying layers of widths and dilutions. Quiet, intimate portraits, the photographs' staged appearances nevertheless evoke a psychological atmosphere of pensive interiority. Viewed together, the two mutually charge one another. Stocki's paintings take on an otherworldly quality on top of their evocative use of abstraction. The photographs, by contrast, grow in their presence, entering more fully into the space.

Form is political, and *Caput Mortuum* situates roundedness as thus; nuance in thought and form, the curvature of the earth, the arc of time. This curved, sinuous motif echoes through the exhibited paintings and photos: their aqueous expanses of watercolor; the shimmering quality of silver gelatin prints; a continuous juxtaposition of positive and negative spaces—inviting reflection upon the object-hood of the works. At the same time these photographs and paintings engender a meditative mood beyond their materiality.

Stocki has long investigated the interdependency of painting and photography, but with *Caput Mortuum* the artist has now succeeded in uniting the two, mining their physical, mysterious, mystical, and political potentialities.

Elaine Stocki (b. 1979, Winnipeg, Canada) holds an MFA from Yale University (2009) and has been the recipient of many arts awards, including the **Tierney Fellowship**, the **Philadelphia Museum of Art Portfolio Competition**, and numerous grants and prizes from the Canada Arts Council. Her work has been nominated for the **Grange Prize** (2011) - now the **AIMIA Photography Prize** - and the **Sobey Award** (2012), and is held in the permanent collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Most recently her work was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, curated by Catherine Bedard. A monograph published by SKIRA accompanied the exhibition. Stocki's work has been published by LACMA, *The New Yorker*, *Semiotexte*, TBW Books, *Objektiv Journal*, *Centrefold Magazine*, *Border Crossings*, *Night Papers*, and *MATTE*. She has been a visiting artist and critic at Princeton, Yale, Bard College of the Arts, Parsons and Otis College of Art and Design. In April 2020, her work will appear in *Delusionarium 5 (Adaptation)*, a group exhibition at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, where Stocki currently lives and works.