

TWO COATS OF PAINT

Award-winning NYC blogazine, primarily about painting

On file: Leslie Brack at Cathouse Proper

By Sharon Butler

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Leslie Brack, Jurors, 2016, watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 12.5 inches

Contributed by Sharon Butler / Offices were once equipped with typewriters, copy machines, and paperclips, and, of course, contained the files that organized and stored “paperwork.” **Leslie Brack’s** new paintings of well-worn metal file cabinet drawers, on view at Cathouse Proper’s new space in Carroll Gardens, evoke this forgotten past, in which information, rather than existing online forever, could actually disappear. Remember when “searching for a document” involved poring through reams of paper rather than typing in a few search terms and pressing a key?

A gifted painter, Brack has created images that capture the file cabinets with meticulous specificity. Rendered in muscular watercolor, the intimate paintings record all the dents, rust, and peeling paint the cabinets have endured. Some of the drawers have labels, often handwritten, announcing what they store. Others are unmarked. Each image evokes memories of people who must have relied on these units to organize and archive their work.

Like the recent documentary film *California Typewriter*, Brack’s work conjures the pre-internet days when “cut-and-paste” was a time-consuming, physical activity, and multi-page memos were typed, stapled, and distributed through inter-office mail. Lately I have been

making notes for a new project using my **Royal Safari typewriter**. Only one copy of the notes exists. Rather than editing as I go (as I do on the computer), I move ahead without distraction. I can’t instantly copy-and-paste paragraphs or back up and share the document. I like the physicality of the keyboard: the harder I type, the darker the print becomes, and the more of an imprint it leaves on the page. The immediacy of the process of typing is also novel if a little daunting: copyediting and revising are separate and arduous activities that will have to wait. And although the typewriter was designed to be portable, it’s too heavy to carry around as you do laptops and tablets.

With the Trump FCC’s impending **repeal of sensible Obama-era net neutrality**, Brack’s wistful engagement with older modes of generating and storing information seems especially poignant. Net neutrality has helped small, independent projects like *Two Coats of Paint* to thrive alongside heavily bankrolled corporate initiatives. I wonder if its repeal could lead to a resurgence of ‘zines and other print publications that require the postal service rather than the internet for dissemination. Most likely, small operations will adjust to the new rules through digital innovation. But Brack’s constructively nostalgic exhibition reminds us of what we have left behind and, indeed, lost. The list includes not only



Leslie Brack, Rolled Latex, 2017, watercolor on paper, 18 x 13 inches

physical objects but also the privacy inherent in singular communications that we could lock away and effectively hide. In exchange for wider community and ease of transmission, we have enabled the growth of the surveillance state. Among the questions Brack's slyly probing work poses is whether it has been worth it.



Leslie Brack, DDR Drawers, 2017, watercolor on paper, 20 x 15.5 inches



Leslie Brack, Rusty, 2016, watercolor on paper, 20 x 14 inches



Leslie Brack, "Memorandum," installation view at Cathouse Proper



Leslie Brack, "Memorandum," installation view at Cathouse Proper

From the press release: *Leslie Brack is a painter living in Ithaca, NY. She holds an MFA in painting and drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is currently a Lecturer at Cornell University. "Memorandum" was most recently exhibited at Ithaca College (2017). Previous one-person exhibitions include the Herbert F Johnson Museum (2015), and Cathouse FUNeral (2015). She wishes to thank the Pollock-Krasner Foundation and the Hambidge Center for the Arts for their support of the work in this exhibition.*

