ARTFORUM

Fiona Connor, *On What Remains* (fountain), 2015, concrete, expanded polystyrene foam, antique brass hardware, plumbing supplies, steel, plywood, paint, coatings, car battery, pump, water, 36 × 24 × 36".

Fiona Connor

LISA COOLEY

The fountain has a storied and—given its outwardly prosaic nature—oddly auspicious history in modern and contemporary art: from Duchamp's foundational icon (actually a urinal, of course) to more recent examples including Bruce Nauman's gushing self portrait of 1966–67; Helen Chadwick's excremental chocolate-lover's dream/nightmare *Cacao*, 1994; and the spouting-nippled Christ that formed the centerpiece of Robert Gober's solo exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery in 2005. Something about this technically simple bit of plumbing—perhaps owing to its sometimes-awkward fusion of humble domesticity, grandiose public

ornament, and bodily function—always seems to stir things up. With the first installment of her New York solo debut, "On What Remains, Part One," Los Angeles–based artist Fiona Connor added her name to the list of those who've sprayed water in our eyes.

Connor's own particular fountain, which was installed in an otherwise empty rear gallery at Lisa Cooley, is of the drinking variety. Modeled closely—extremely closely—on a cast-concrete original located in Tompkins Square Park that was designed in 1939, and which reappears in public spaces throughout New York, it is a frankly unlovely affair. In a discussion with artist and writer Travis Diehl, Connor describes her initial misreading of the fountain's aesthetic roots: "First of all I thought it was Brutalist, but then I realized that it was Art Deco, veiled in Brutalism, because it's just, it had so many layers of paint and corrosion." Made in part from concrete and expanded polystyrene foam—as well as assorted coatings, paints, and plumbing supplies—Connor's hyperrealist homage, complete with meticulously reproduced peeling and chipping, could easily be mistaken for the real thing; indeed, it is more than a mere representation insofar as it does actually dispense water.

For Connor, this prosaic functionality transforms *On What Remains (fountain)*, 2015, from a relatively straightforward quasi-Minimalist and/or trompe l'oeil sculpture into a richer commentary on both the confusion of reality and simulation and the political and social dimensions of urban space. Cynically characterized by Diehl as a "rare instance of civic benevolence," the fountain is unarguably a freighted artifact. Distinguished by a history of protest dating back to 1857, when police attacked a crowd of immigrants demonstrating against unemployment and food shortages, Tompkins Square Park became, by the late 1980s, an emblem of New York City's chronic homeless problem. In more recent years, the park has come to reflect the increasing gentrification and sanitization of the surrounding East Village, a development that has coincided with the vogue for bottled water—something inconceivable when the original park fountain was designed. Connor also argues that *On What Remains (fountain)* transcends formal concerns in that it "connotes a particular type of behavior. Like, now that we're providing water it means you can spend longer here. You can be nourished and hydrated."

The grimy surface "corrosion" that Connor reproduces so faithfully in *On What Remains (fountain)* is a physical analogue to this fraught social and economic history. And while it cannot begin to contain that history's full complexity, it is effective in presenting the wear and tear suffered by public structures as a kind of psychic residue; it reminds us that our cities are much more than the simple accretions of property. A padlock attached to one side of the work's fortresslike form is branded COMMERCIAL MASTER—happenstance, perhaps, but it's hard not to read the name as another component of the piece's congealed juxtaposition of poverty and wealth, access and privacy. If galleries are themselves manifestations of, and magnets for, new money, what Connor presents is totemic of the culture clash that a shift from one demographic to another necessarily entails. The work is itself perpetually—and fascinatingly—out of place.

—*Michael Wilson*