

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Jina Valentine

“ LOTS WIFE ”

Project Space Proposal

23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. 26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.
Genesis 19:26

Lest we turn to stone (or salt) we musn't look back to the past. –So the ubiquitous, superficial lesson the story of Lot's Wife goes... The story itself is also referenced in the New Testament, in anti/gay movement literature, in feminist theory, and in the speeches of motivational speakers. Like pop-cultural stories/metaphors that have been reduced to concepts, or symbols of themselves, “the story of Lot's Wife” conjures up an infinity of associations for many people. In my previous work, I have addressed the issue of culturally heralded pop cultural icons for which we, personally, struggle to conjure up sentiment. Also, I have addressed the issues of audience agency—to what degree we are the makers of pop culture, the engines fueling the system, and the limitations of actively participating in the *American Idol* worship/democracy.

In a recent essay, I discussed the work of self-taught artist Bill Traylor, as it a visual representation of metaphors reduced to vernacular aphorisms. A particularly awesome example of the “illustrated aphorism” is his piece *He Clunked Her on the Head but She Wouldn't Drop the Chicken*. As in much of his work, it's the simplicity of the rendered form to which we identify, the aphorism (title) is the story we take along with it. Our associations with “Lot's Wife,” function in the reverse: the title, or aphorism is the simple form to which we freely associate.

(as an aside) This winter I revisited the Cy Twombly room at the Philadelphia Art Museum, wherein his *Iliad* series is housed. Of course the drawings are not literal illustrations of the *Iliad*, but offer up the premise as a point of origin for the viewers.

For the exhibition *Lots' Wife*, I am proposing a series of work addressing issues of material degradation and intellectual, physical, and emotional atrophy. The main series *5 Damned Cities* will directly reference the plains cities smote by “fire & brimstone.” Aside from the title, there will not be an actual, obvious Biblical reference. The *Salt & Paper Pillar*, is punny, and directly references the archeological/geological research devoted to proving the existence of Lot's Wife as a rock-salt formation. *Palimpsest I & II* speak to the degradation of sacred texts, in particular the ongoing feud over the cuneiform tablets at Ebla (sic). *Husks* deals with issues of obsolescence and the burnt-out embers of newly discarded stuff; also it indirectly relates to theories that the Wife lingered behind to collect her household wares.

Lastly, and of course, as always, the subtext of the exhibition is deeply personal. It is always my intention to present tragi-comic, ridiculously melo-romantic, semi-diaristic subtexts in my work, while concomitantly speaking to a larger, serious audience. Maybe I'm hoping to tug at the heart strings of the art intelligencia.