

# 燃点 Ran Dian

## Of Vessels and Value: Valerie Snobeck's Reservoirs in New York and Hong Kong

By Iona Whittaker

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### **"Valerie Snobeck: Reservoirs"**

Essex Street, New York

**October 29–December 13, 2015**

### **"Valerie Snobeck"**

Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong

**January 13–February 11, 2016**

The sculptures in Valerie Snobeck's Reservoirs series, shown recently at Essex Street in New York and Simon Lee Gallery in Hong Kong, were displayed less like fine art objects than artifacts or specimens for study. Organized into groups according to their subtitles within the series (Wedges and Jams, Large and Small Bends, and Shadows and Silhouettes, all 2015), the works were arranged on metal work tables. At Essex Street these were positioned lengthwise in the gallery—a decision by the New York-based artist that seemed intended to disrupt the flow of conventional interaction and provoke an attenuated pause.



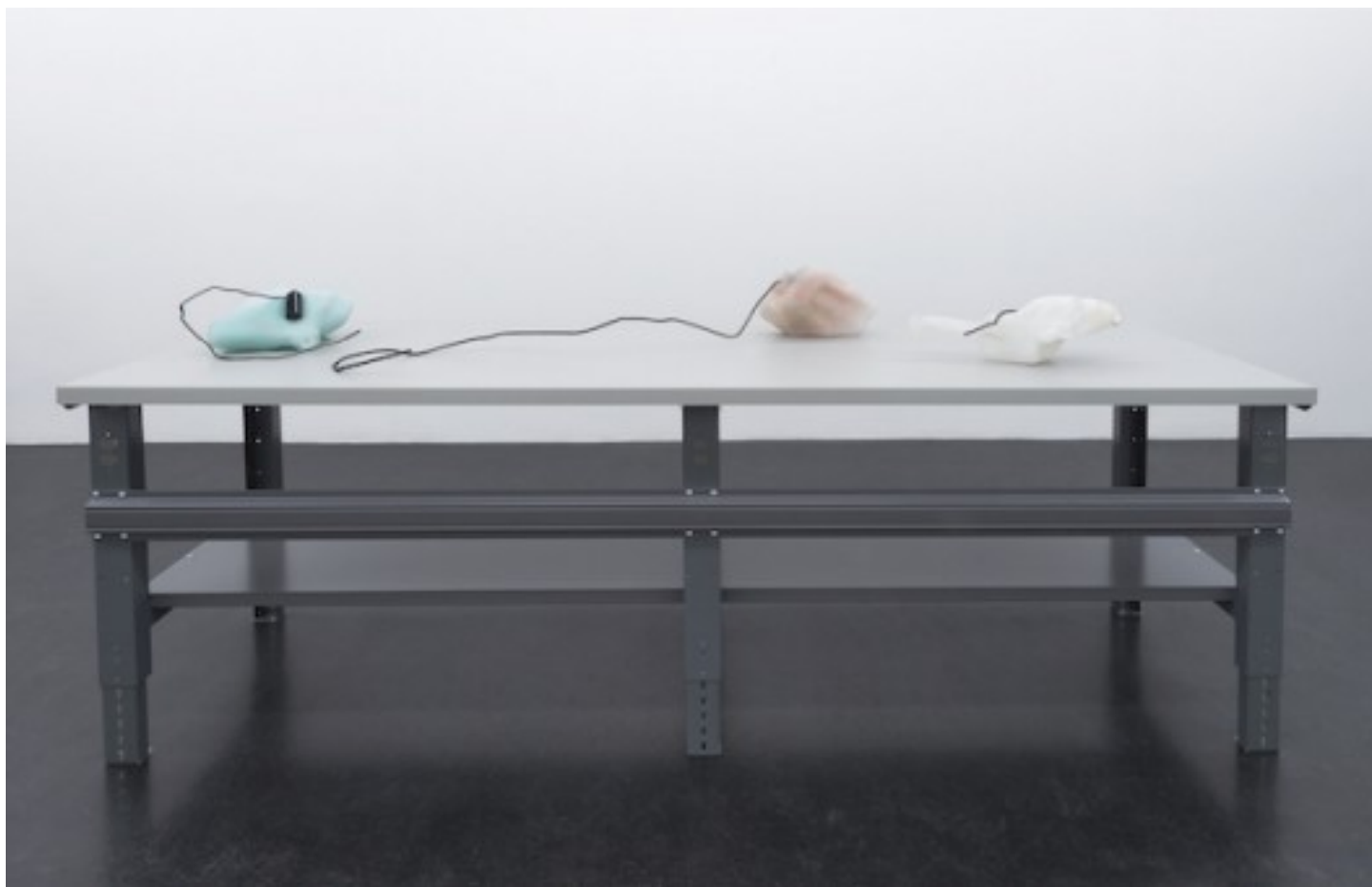
Valerie Snobeck, "Reservoirs" at Simon Lee HK, installation view

In a statement published for the Hong Kong show, Snobeck explained that her Reservoirs are faithful replicas of washer fluid tanks from engines. Made of blown and molded glass, their hollow forms are flattened or grooved in places, and bulbous, crumpled, elongated, or pinched in others—abject physical qualities that replicate damage to the original plastic tanks from heat and use. Each vessel has a round, even opening, and the matte glass surfaces

are in three milky shades: white, blue, and powdery pink, flecked in some areas with faint yellow and brown stains. Every one is accompanied by a shiny black length of glass that either extends from the circular opening or runs alongside it, mimicking the fluid-level sensors of the original objects. In one work in the Wedges and Jams group, Snobeck has gone so far as to include the smaller black pump that usually nestles in the side of the main reservoir as part of the sensor system. Like the vessels they are paired with, when extricated from their ordinary context, these black forms appear improvisatory in some sections and methodical in others, straddling instinct and intention.

Snobeck's previous exhibitions have revealed her interest in found objects, translucency, and archival materials. Her last solo show at Essex Street, Grand Beauty Salon (2012), took its title from the business opposite the gallery and featured real tar and bits of plastic partly sculpted by the sea. In a similar way, the Reservoirs recall salvaged glass and plastic trash, their shapes coerced by wear or time adrift. Replicated in a new material and presented as sculptural objects, they convey faith in transformation and attention to the poetic potential of commonplace forms. It would seem that Snobeck sees molded glass as a vessel in itself—a distillation of the natural and organic, in her own words: "Sculpted with exhalation. Breathed into the atmosphere, captured by oceans and plants, consumed and eventually pushed into the inner voids of the mold." The resilience of glass leads the artist to end her statement with the idea of it as a kind of vessel for time.

For the viewer, the abstraction of these forms from their usual context and function and the added dimension of metal surfaces that conflate pedestals with forensic examiners' tables might conjure other possible interpretations, for instance related to environmental politics, a timely topic given the historic climate agreement just reached in Paris, binding nations to lower their carbon emissions and recycle waste materials such as plastic and cardboard. Here one encounters the forms of already-consumed objects recuperated and remade as sculpture. Installed on industrial tables in a privileged gallery space, Snobeck's works muddy the distinction between cherished objets d'art and items salvaged from a recycling plant. Her Reservoirs are like the fragile cousins of common plastic tanks, buoyed by different currents and washed up on a rarefied shore, becoming vessels for contemplation. Through visually analogous forms and materials, this exhibition arguably "floats" an awareness of the fluid nature of value itself.



Valerie Snobeck, "Reservoirs with Stains, Dust, and Burns (Wedges and Jams)", mold blown and hot sculpted glass, 114 × 244 × 76 cm, 2015 (courtesy the artist and Essex Street Gallery)