

ARTFORUM

Amie Siegel

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Amie Siegel's latest works probe the pathos of preterit things. Shot in crystalline HD, *Fetish*, 2016, documents the annual cleaning of Freud's London home, preserved since the early 1980s as a museum. Bronze sibyls, ceramic sphinxes, and ivory Buddhas line bookshelves and Biedermeier cabinets like patients awaiting analysis. Two conservators, outfitted in Freud Museum fleeces (the only confirmation of context), methodically remove, dust, and return each figure to its site. Yet the true protagonists are the objects themselves, which Siegel images from their best angle, straight on and centered in the frame. Close-ups silhouette Freud's artifacts against shallow fields, while parallel tracking shots cultivate distance, enclosing each specimen in a solipsistic world. In these hermetic, eclipsed spaces, the viewer can only trespass.

Freud conceived the fetish as an undecided object: a substitute for the absent phallus, at once mnemonic of and protective against its loss. Siegel's artwork dilates the "both-and" quality of its namesake, treating the museum's miscellany as *sachlich* things and animate actors. Displaced from its perch, a metal porcupine seems less threatening than forlorn: a pocket-size Pierrot. Moments earlier, Siegel's camera scans an emptied shelf, recording its punctuated topology of sediment. The work closes with a long shot of Freud's infamous couch. Conservators successively strip and restore its carpet overlay in a choreography by turns tender and mundane. Disused and sagging, the settee makes a musty odalisque. Similar care is taken by the preservationists seen in *Double Negative*, 2015. Their headquarters in Canberra, Australia, occupy a black replica of Le Corbusier's modernist icon, the Villa Savoye. The doubled building tropes the doubled nature of object existence that Siegel's camera discloses. Her pieces tempt us to slip into the histories of things—to imagine the analysands supine on Freud's sofa or the faithful who fondled his sphinx—yet hold us indefinitely at the surface.



Amie Siegel, *Double Negative (detail)*, 2015, two black-and-white synchronized 16 mm films, silent, looped, 4 minutes.

— Courtney Fiske

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