

OCTAVIA

ART GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

William Monaghan: *Environmental Studies*

September 14 – October 5, 2019

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 19, 6 to 8 p.m.

High Line Nine, 507 West 27th Street, Gallery 5

(New York, August 2019)–For its inaugural exhibition in New York, Octavia Gallery presents *Environmental Studies*, an exhibition of recent works by New Orleans artist William Monaghan.

Instructed in the Bauhaus tradition at Yale University in the 1960s, Monaghan was trained in the studios of Buckminster Fuller and William Wainwright. After three decades in the Northeast, Monaghan returned to his native New Orleans in 2005, just days after the levees collapsed. Before him was a city laid to waste: once vibrant neighborhoods, now vast expanses of ruin. Over time, Monaghan’s practice began to engage on a material level with the issues faced by a city confronted with ecological disaster. His most recent works employ local detritus, industrial fabrication methods, and precise painting techniques, resulting in sculptural canvases that distort perceptions of space and examine our relationships with the histories, functions, and futures of everyday objects.

For *Environmental Studies*, Octavia presents 17 of Monaghan’s recent canvases, which range in size from 12”x12” to 96”x96.” Each work enlists heaps of discarded objects and industrial debris: air vents, wire fencing, cans, corrugated siding, coffee filters, and endless other forgotten forms collected across the New Orleans landscape. The materials are sandblasted and affixed to wooden frames in complex arrangements that appear at once haphazard and calculated. While retaining the symbolic narratives of industry, death of industry, consumption, post-Apocalypse, post-Katrina, etc., the scraps are also chosen for their formal potentials: circles and curves intersect rectangles, zig-zags, and straight lines in ways that create a sense of movement within each composition’s scrupulously square form.

The compositions are painted in monochromatic hues (green, magenta, silver, etc.). A second coat of paint in a different color is airbrushed across the canvas at a consistent angle, falling onto the materials in a way that imitates directional lighting. When this “painted light” conflicts with the actual lighting of the space, the effect is both ethereal and ominous—distorting perceptions of depth and, ultimately, how we engage with commonplace objects.

The larger works in the show are composed, in part, by steel forms fabricated by Monaghan that mimic at large scale the mangled shapes of the smaller discarded object. By meticulously recrafting these shapes, and bringing each fragment into sharp relief, Monaghan honors the integrity of the original object (intention, design, production, function), draws attention to its obsolescence, and alludes to object agency: the specific object being a vital element of the art making process, determining paint application; and, more conceptually, the object as an agent of environmental destruction—i.e. waste inundating the planet.

The work in *Environmental Studies*, and the evolution of Monaghan’s practice in general, is the result of an on-going pursuit of skills, crafts, and attentions that are useful inside and outside the art world. Enlisting materials simultaneously for their formal, conceptual, and political potentials, the works establish a call-and-response between the lifespan of materials and their repositioning as art objects, between labor and artistic production, and between our industrial past and the future of our planet.