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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

Carissa Rodriguez

By Martha Schwendener — March 7, 2018



Installation view of Carissa Rodriguez's "The Maid" (2018). Credit Kyle Knodell/ Karma International

Constantin Brancusi made an iconic, egg-shaped marble head, which he called "Le Nouveau Né" ("The Newborn"), in 1915. In 1993, Sherrie Levine made a mold of the piece for a show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which owns it, and subsequently cast versions in foggy white crystal and black sandblasted glass. **Carissa Rodriguez's new video, "The Maid," on view in the middle of SculptureCenter's main gallery,** visits several of these casts in the richly appointed collectors' homes and the sterile white warehouses on both coasts where they've ended up. No people are visible, except for the gloved hands of two preparators and a cleaning woman seen through a window, and the only sound is minimal electronic music. In New York, the weather is snowy and dark; in Los Angeles, staggeringly bright.

If Ms. Levine's appropriation was a one-to-one critique of the male artist-hero mythos that congealed around Brancusi, Ms. Rodriguez's reframing would seem to be a critique of the old-fashioned matrix of money and power in which even Ms. Levine's feminist reversal was still inextricably embedded. But what makes the video not merely effective but strangely moving is its air of scientific detachment. Taking in both Ms. Levine's casts themselves and the tokens of wealth and access with which they're surrounded — Warhols, sports cars, snapshots of the Clintons — with the same impartial attention, **Ms. Rodriguez makes the entire complex social phenomenon of art making and collecting seem as blindly mechanical as evolution. If there is a critique, it's in the suggestion that we could have dissolved our idols already just by looking at them more closely.**