

# MARC STRAUS NEW YORK

Exhibition Review

## BROOKLYN RAIL

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### Jeanne Silverthorne: *From Darkness*

by William Corwin, published February 8, 2019

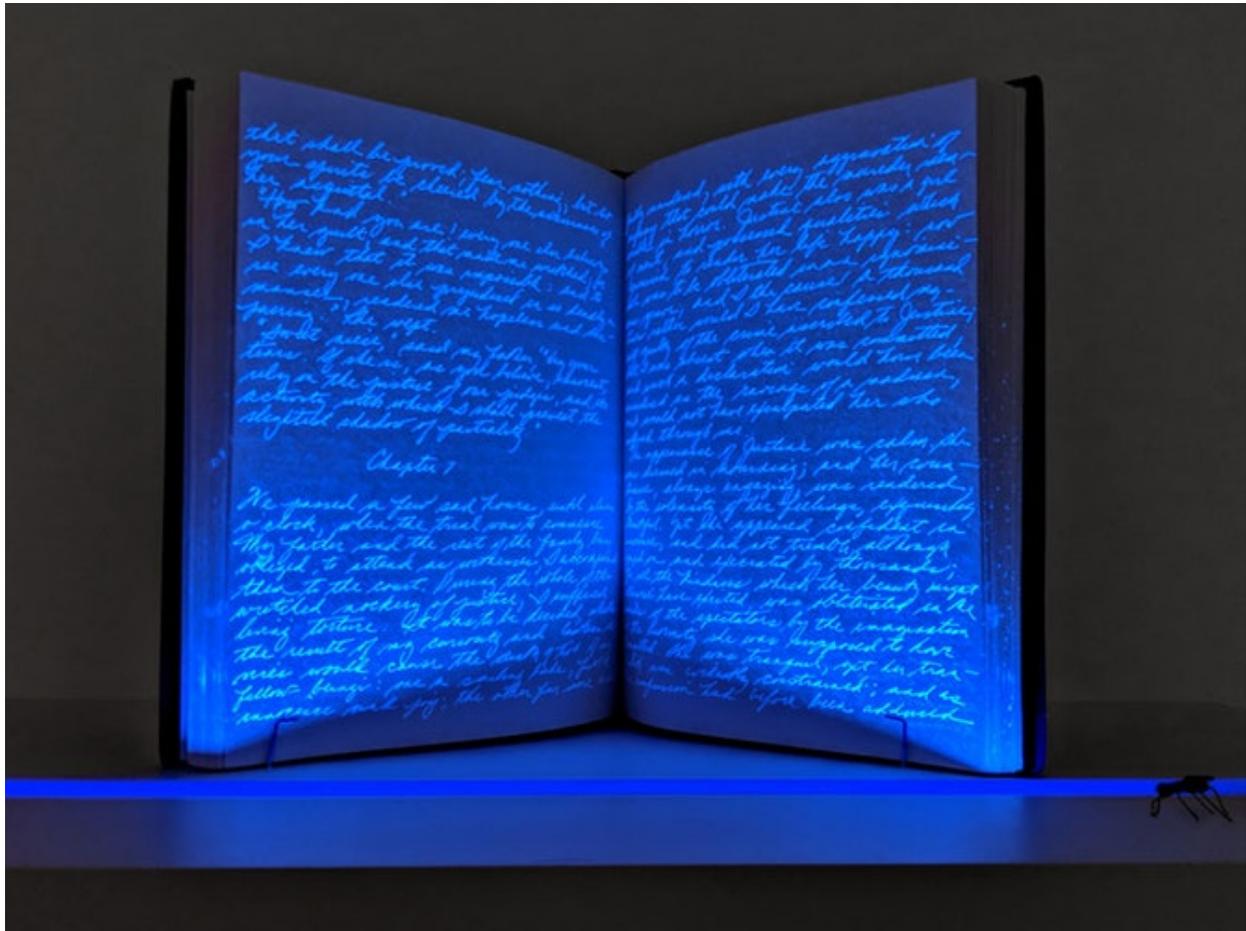
In the exhibition *Jeanne Silverthorne: From Darkness* the top floor of the Marc Straus gallery is dominated by a singular object: *Untitled (Chandelier)* (1994), cast in resin. It hangs unilluminated from the ceiling. As an object, the black chandelier activates many references: grandiose displays of wealth, the age of rococo from which it seems to date, and ultimately, implications of termination and finality. But Silverthorne has made her chandelier in a very particular material, and the black resin in which the piece is cast, and the black rubber that the attendant cords and outlets and electrical accoutrements are cast speak volumes—more than simply the symbolism of a snuffed candle or dead light bulb. On the other side of the gallery, a selection of much more modest objects, in cast black rubber, draw on the theme of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. These pieces—books, framed quotes from Shelley's text, and banal objects such as fire extinguishers and ventilation grilles—draw a connection between the goals of the sculptor and the ill-conceived dreams of Victor Frankenstein. Silverthorne's dull and supple rubber absorbs light and emanates a quiet soft presence which begs the viewer to investigate more closely: much like the fictional monster,



Installation view: *Jeanne Silverthorne*, Marc Straus, 2019.  
Courtesy Marc Straus Gallery

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these forms imitate perfectly the contours and textures of reality but are clearly completely divorced from the reality they mimic. In conjuring up these corporeal phantoms, lightbulbs that cannot shine and outlets with no juice, the artist caricatures, or at least questions, the Promethean role of the artist.



Jeanne Silverthorne, *Frankenstein*, 2018. Platinum silicone rubber, archival ink, archival paper, 11 1/2 x 9 3/4 x 1 3/4 inches.  
Courtesy Marc Straus Gallery.

Whether producing ugliness or beauty, it seems Pygmalion rather than Dr. Frankenstein is a surrogate persona for artists in general. Other artists who specialize in methods of exact replication—Duane Hanson, Rachel Whiteread, Ron Mueck, George Segal—seem less concerned than Silverthorne with questioning the underlying philosophy of making a thing. Like Dr. Frankenstein’s monster though, Silverthorne’s

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objects seem more broken and doomed than Hanson's overweight tourists or Whiteread's unwalkable staircases and inverted volumes. Silverthorne's rubber frame with accompanying quote "My Hopes Were Extinguished," are the plaintive cries of the monster; her jiggly rubber *Fire Extinguishers* (2018) can save no one, and her chandelier not only casts no light but like the fate of the monster, there is no attempt to rectify its unfortunate predicament. The huge looming chandelier hangs at the viewer's eye level absent of candles or bulbs. In a futile effort multiple cords, like tails, stream from the chandelier as if trying to find some source of electricity, or life, in the surrounding gallery. But the most they can accomplish is to hook into a dead emergency exit sign, also crafted in rubber. In a clever visual pun, curator Ken Tan has placed the lifeless Exit sign catty-corner and in close proximity to the bright red health-and-safety mandated EXIT sign. We can almost hear the rubber contraption cursing its maker under its breath.

In glowing contradistinction to the darkened chandelier is a glowing book propped open on a plinth; *Frankenstein* (2019). In this book, published a century before Silverthorne's sculpture, Silverthorne has meticulously copied the text in a neat and expressive script. Like bioluminescent organisms on a dark beach, the text, which is largely readable, represents much more than merely a reference to Shelley's book. Almost accusatory in its brightness, reflected in the black light emanating from the plinth, it attempts to be a beacon promoting the interpretation of the "pure" text, uncorrupted by succeeding, mostly filmic misrepresentations. Victor Frankenstein's conflict is a microcosm of the creator's conflict with human kind, and Silverthorne implies that the sculptor's relationship between their media and themselves is a fraught and frustrating one in the same vein. Shelley gives almost no detail concerning how Frankenstein manufactures his unnamed "monster." He works diligently for a time, using bits and pieces of rotting flesh. The fact that he constructs a living breathing creation (and unceremoniously rejects it immediately) is more important than the method which, aside from galvanism, is left largely to the reader's imagination. The various rubber and resin creations in Silverthorne's exhibition attempt to be perfect representations of the objects they imitate, but through no fault of their own, they can't ever be the objects they emulate. Does Silverthorne love them or hate them for their difference? While Pygmalion is looking for, and finds, love and perfection in his creation, Dr. Frankenstein seems to seek only the knowledge (of creation), an attribute

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to his ego which turns out disastrously because he can't stand what he has made. Silverthorne discovers the classic artist's dilemma in Frankenstein's predicament: what happens when what we make has a life of its own? Beyond the comfort and companionship of a Galatea, Silverthorne soberly acknowledges Frankenstein's revulsion of his creation but seems sympathetic and morbidly fascinated by the malformed progeny of her own creativity.

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**Article Link: <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/02/artseen/Jeanne-Silverthorne-From-Darkness>**

**Exhibition Link: <https://www.marcstraus.com/exhibitions/jeanne-silverthorne-from-darkness-january-2019/>**