

Press Release

## Steven Millar

### *Thereafter*

March 20 - May 13, 2015

Opening and Artist Reception:

Friday, March 20, 6 -8pm

Gallery Geranmayeh is pleased to present "*Thereafter*," the gallery's first solo exhibition of works by New York based artist Steven Millar. The exhibition features Millar's works from recent series produced in tandem, including sculptures, photographs, and an artist's book.

Millar has described his work as exploring themes of intersection: of the built world, society, and nature; home and community; memory and loss. In "*Thereafter*," Millar maintains a focus on the connection between memory and place, and the central ideas of time, longing, and displacement. The work investigates commemoration and references various forms of memorial markers—stones with metal plaques that honor a place, event, or vista.

Millar's sculptures give tangible form to the evanescent experience of memory. *Marker* seems to embody that which is past or lost. The sculpture's sheet metal skin, rough, weathered, and rusted, shows the traces of time and use. The form resembles a decaying monument or a signpost without a message. Similarly enigmatic, *Artifact's* sharply angular form suggests an upright column, like a monolith or stele. Unlike typical stone markers, the sculpture features no inscription or carved relief. Rather, inset inconspicuously into the base of the pillar, a small pointing hand bears the message "Don't Forget". The piece is a commemoration, though of what remains a mystery.

*Stump* similarly incorporates a small decorative object. A lone tiny owl hangs on a tree branch, merging with the dark textured surface of the polygonal form to which it is affixed. *Stump* suggests a minor commemorative marker like a gravestone, although the plaque-like shape on its front remains blank. Smaller yet and more intimate, *Crown* merges an antique trophy and a sharp- cornered rock-like form. Balanced atop the trophy, the rock seems less a tribute or sign of grandeur, and more a strange weight or burden.

*Inscription* takes Millar's typical angular shapes further toward the realm of fantasy. With a fluid loop sprouting from the base, the sculpture seems less rock-like. The curving line alternately suggests a cartoon word bubble, a child's doodle of a tree, or perhaps a wholly abstract wiggle. While the contrast between line and volume, open and closed, and angular and curved could not be clearer, the meaning of these juxtapositions remains just out of reach.

As a whole, the sculptures present an uncertain form of memento mori, memorialization in which the object of commemoration remains unknown. While the marker remains, it begins to lose its function as a record. In the end, one feels that these sculptures bear witness to a more universalized state of absence and loss.

*Temporary Monuments*, Millar's grid of twenty photographs, conveys a sense of mystery as well. Although out of focus and at times almost unrecognizable, the images show forms similar to those in Millar's sculptures. The images in fact document small sculptures that the artist carves while traveling. While the carvings themselves are discarded, the photographs serve as a record of the time of their creation. The images capture not the details of the forms, but rather the brevity of their lifespan.

Although directly referencing an individual, Millar's artist's book, *Reliquary*, is no less evocative. The book is dedicated to the artist's maternal grandfather, an amateur lepidopterist who died shortly before the artist was born. Lyrical and suffused with gentleness, the book acts as a memorial to a life that the artist knew only secondhand through stories, photographs, and objects left behind. The book is divided into twelve chapters whose titles suggest the passage of time. Within this chronological format, *Reliquary* presents thirty-three images of the thin papers in which butterflies were once pressed. The images themselves offer fleeting glimpses of beauty. While created naturally, the faint imprints seem like miraculous apparitions. As a whole, the book addresses questions of mortality and transcendence.

In addition, the exhibit will present several small photographs which serve as extensions of Millar's sculptural pieces. Depicting a pile of small stones, *Mound* sets the mood for the entire exhibition in its dark tone. The small photograph *English Monument* documents a distinctive wall in London that served as partial inspiration for Millar's *Inscription* sculpture. Finally, *Marriage Reliquary* originated with Millar's *Artifact*; the photograph depicts two small hands similar to the "Don't Forget" note holder of the sculpture. Like that piece, the photograph references shaped body-part reliquaries. Created as containers for holy remains, these reliquaries took the form of their relics and were believed to have healing and other powers. In Millar's photograph, the stark setting and simple arrangement impart an otherworldly power to these mass-produced ceramic figurines.

*Steven Millar received his MFA in painting from Washington University, St. Louis, MO and his BA in Art from Yale University, New Haven, CT. Millar has exhibited at many venues including Gallery Geranmayeh, Robert Henry Contemporary, IPCNY, Lehman College, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Dorsky Gallery, and Wave Hill. He has also participated in other national exhibition venues such as the Untitled art fair (FL), Silicon Valley Art Fair (CA), the Katonah Museum of Art (NY), Artspace (CT), Vox Populi (PA), and the Islip Art Museum (NY). His work can be seen at [www.sdmillar.com](http://www.sdmillar.com) and [www.gallerygeranmayeh.com](http://www.gallerygeranmayeh.com)*

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*From The Lower East Side Printshop's Editions '13 catalog:*

*Millar's works "evoke personal memories. . . . (They) are nostalgic and wistful, lovely, aching, and knowing. They invite us in with their intimacy."*

**Deborah Cullen** is Director and Chief Curator of the Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University, New York. Previously, she was Director of Curatorial Programs at El Museo del Barrio, New York.

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*From Burnaway's review of Inside Outside Upside Down at Robert Henry Contemporary :*

*Millar "is showing three, well-made, freestanding sculptures (although he also works two-dimensionally), mimicking the heavy metal of Minimalism but are instead made of plywood, overlaid with either plaster, laminate, or thin steel, all in shades of gray. That is one of his perceptual conundrums, to confuse our sense of materials. Another is that they are not really about sculptural mass or weight but emphasize volume and space. And still another is their toggling between abstraction and representation. "Marker" (2014) for instance, consists of a geometricized form that is also a boulder in which a pole, thrust through a sheet of metal like a flag, is embedded, in a streamlined version of a public monument, perhaps. Another faceted boulder, "for" (2013), made of plywood coated with powdery-looking, dark gray plaster, has a tunnel running through its center. It conjures the commemorative bronze plaques inset in stones frequently seen on New England commons, the names and events, more often than not, now forgotten, a commentary on forgetfulness and the transiency of history and memory."*

**Lilly Wei** is a New York-based critic and curator whose writing has appeared in such publications as *Art in America*, *Art & Auction*, and *Artnews*.

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