

# MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

ca CORRIENTE **alterna**

## On the exhibition “Things Felt” presented by Annette Lemieux at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NYC, NY, in 2022

por Mario Pérez | Publicada 13 febrero, 2023



Broken, 2019. Photo: Adam Reich.

### The scale of the invisible

The artist Annette Lemieux presented a solo exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in 2022. The title was formed by two words: “Things Felt,” being “thing” a word that refers, according to one of its meanings, to an object. In this exhibition this fact becomes especially important because some of the works included are made up of quotidian objects; the other sense of the word “thing,” is referred to as a situation.

Being “felt” as a verb, according to its meaning, refers to the act of sensing, be it with the senses or the emotions. That verb in the title of the exhibition is conjugated in its simple past form, which alludes to something that occurred before, that is a fact which is related to the memory.

Having mentioned the last ideas, the combination of the words “Things Felt,” could be interpreted in one sense: as objects perceived before, and in the other sense, situations that were experienced before. This ambiguity contributes to enriching the meaning behind the title of the exhibition.

The first interpretation of the title of the show which refers to the objects, is reinforced when it is thought that some of the works are made up of quotidian things or goods. They are not represented or reproduced, by the contrary, they were transformed into works of art extracting them from the ordinary life and their traditional uses. The scale of the shown objects is not monumental, not too small, just the human scale size.

During Ancient Greece, Protagoras searched the human scale as a measure of the whole world and during the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci created the Vitruvian Man inspired by the ideas of the Roman architect Vitruvius. It consisted of an idealized drawing of a man inscribed inside a circle and a square, the main figures in the cosmic order.

In the 20th Century Marshall McLuhan said that every human invention is an extension of bodily human capacities. Le Corbusier designed a kind of architecture that utilized the human scale as its main reference. Carlos Raúl Villanueva created an architecture that integrated art as a part of quotidian life developed inside the buildings surrounded by the landscape.

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But contrary to the works of the artists from the Renaissance or modernity, the works included in the exhibition by Lemieux show no intention to study the human anatomy. Instead, they are evidence of a study of the artist's inner self, specifically her memories, the space, things, and events within her mind: "Things Felt," which give way to present feelings turned into artistic objects, the works included in the exhibition are also a way to represent space, not the surrounding space with the use of linear perspective as it was represented during the Renaissance but showing a deepness over imposing layers of memories.

If the Vitruvian Man shows a human figure inscribed inside a circle and a square, the triptych by Lemieux entitled "Broken," includes a photograph of a man serially repeated three times. The one placed on the left is surrounded by a pattern full of circles. The panel located on the right side has a pattern full of squares, and the picture in the panel at the center is interrupted by an image of an organic pattern which represents straw. The panel at the left is the only one that completely shows the portrayed man. It is possible to see his facial expression, implying there are emotions expressed in opposition to the classic figures of the Classical tradition. In the second and third panel it is not possible to see his face.

There is an analogy with the Vitruvian Man, the human figure is confronted with a representation of cosmos. The middle panel of "Broken" is interrupted by a pattern that shows straw, a detail that could be thought as insignificant in the Universe. "Broken Sky" shows an image of the same man, the photograph was cut the same way that the aforementioned picture but this one is interrupted by an image of galaxies and stars. If both works are confronted, it becomes clear that the artist presented a vision of a micro and a macro cosmos.

If "Broken Sky" and "Broken 2" are viewed and compared, it can be observed that the first image is interrupted by a photograph of the cosmos, while in the second the character is surrounded by a pattern with stars schematically represented confronting a more naturalistic and idealized representation of the cosmos. Another curious fact can be extracted. Sometimes Lemieux showed the portrayed, the character with patterns inside his silhouette, in other occasions he is surrounded by other patterns, bringing the ideas of "being inside" and "being outside," or "being present" and "being absent." If those ideas are associated with the views of space included in the exhibition "Things Felt," the concept of traveling is brought to mind too.

As another reference to the cosmos and the stars, as it was done in "Broken Sky" and "Broken 2," the work "Cinematic Rescue," shows a case with the figure of a star on its surface, this time making a direct reference to the artistic world, specifically movies. In addition, the star is an element commonly used as a symbol of the artistic success or refers to a successful artist.

The scale of the objects included in "Things Felt" is not monumental, not too small, just the human scale size. It becomes evident when observing "Boots on the ground," or the jacket hanging from the frame of "Midnight Sun," or the hat in "Performative Object," that scale works as a way of transition between the quotidian world and the world of images presented by Lemieux.

In general, the works shown in "Things Felt" contain different references to the COVID epidemic. For example, in "Midnight Sun" it is possible to see a thermometer, a coat and in the middle a portrayed woman who puts her hand on the head, a gesture that is often associated with the fever. These three elements indicate sensations of heat, as an additional fact, the woman in the picture holds a paintbrush which could be interpreted as if Lemieux made a kind of self-portrait.

The word "felt" in the title of the exhibition can be understood in a direct relation to the memory. That is the case of "Woe," which refers to an emotional state. There can also be an indirect relation with some other objects in the exhibition such as "Queue." In this case it refers to something that is carried behind. The fact that this work is made up of funerary sashes, an object that brings to memory that recalls a life that came to an end. According to the artist's own words, this work refers to the lives lost during the COVID epidemic as well as the lives lost during the war in Ukraine.

The word "Rescue" could be related to the act of bringing something back. The title "Cinematic Rescue" obviously indicates a situation in which a thing that originated in a cinematographic past is brought to the present, be it true or fictional. That idea is reinforced by the fact that the case is stained and could contain a vintage film reel indicating that it has stills from old films on its surface, referring to the old cinema. The work "Queue" introduced the idea of something that is carried behind. "Cinematic Rescue" includes again a reference to the act of carrying, but also the act of traveling and transporting objects. Lemieux has said that the star on the case refers to the Hollywood Walk of Fame as well as a military condecoracion.

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The title “Performative Object,” indicates that the viewer is observing a hat that was worn during a performance. It also appears in the photograph entitled “Woe,” both works referring to each other. In the exhibition Lemieux included a work which name is “Lockdown” that contains a double portrait of Buster Keaton who is wearing a hat too and is like that that can be seen in the aforementioned works. Although it is not the same object, the viewer could infer they are.

“Lockdown” has a right panel with an area of black velvet with white stripes on the surface of the fabric. The process of making them can also be related to the title of the exhibition “Things Felt” because those stripes were made by decolorating the material with bleach. The whole fabric was entirely black in the past. Although the described work does not have the same number of stripes compared to the flag of the United States, but the general structure of the image reminds the aforementioned flag which permits imagining a reference to a specific territory.

Some of the subject matters presented in the show “Things Felt” are related to the body: (hat, boots, jacket), and some others refer to the space. For example, the bricks represented in the diptych entitled “Double Back,” is a work made up using gray tones which, confronted with the other photographs included in the exhibition that were extracted from old movies, seem to be implying that the wall represented is connected somehow to the past. That idea is reinforced by the presence of the word “back” in the title.

The idea of space was developed by Lemieux at different scales through the exhibition “Things Felt.” The images that conform the series “Broken” show references to outer space, the case in “Cinematic Rescue” imply the idea of traveling, “Double Back” shows walls of bricks which refer to architecture, thus, the inhabitable space. There is a photograph entitled “Houston” which is a specific city of the United States; the mentioned diptych is related to Lemieux’s work titled “Double Obstacle” (1995), which represents a wall of bricks on each panel.

“Double Obstacle” (1995) is a color painting, “Double Back” is a black and white version of the mentioned diptych, they are the same size, each panel is 72 x 93 in. 182.9 x 236.2 cm., and the installed dimensions are 72 by 203 1/2 in. 182.9 by 516.9 cm. which leads to thinking that they represent the same object but with different intentions. In the case of the exhibition “Things Felt,” “Double Back” refers to the impossibility of moving due to the COVID lockdown.

The idea of travel was newly treated by Lemieux when she presented an image of a donkey with a dog on its back and a suitcase in its snout. One of those images is titled “Travel Tips, North” and was printed with the donkey walking to the right with transparent colors of the American flag. The other image is titled “Travel Tips, South” and was printed with the donkey walking to the left with transparent colors of the Mexican flag. These images refer to the border between both countries. The directions right and left in the pictures (which can also be understood as east and west) and with north and south in the titles contain the four cardinal points referring to an expanded sense to Planet Earth. It is also worth mentioning the presence of the work entitled “Houston,” because that city is in the state of Texas which is also located at the border between the United States and Mexico.

If “Travel Tips, North” and “Travel Tips, South” refer to specific countries, “Boots on the Ground” show a pair of objects useful to walk on the soil, so those works contain references to the concept of territoriality. But in the last case the viewer can find a work of art made up of boots with feathers attached to them, which is clearly a reference to the Roman god Mercury who is traditionally associated to financial gain and commerce, which can be associated to the art market. The classic Western culture also attributes to that god the ideas of eloquence, messages, communication, divination, characteristics that are often associated to the arts too. Mercury is also associated with travels and boundaries, two ideas directly and indirectly expressed in most of the works included in “Things Felt,” revealing in all the cases a relation between the exhibition and some aspects of the classic culture, the Western cultural tradition, and Lemieux’s personal way of seeing the past as well as the present, according to the artist herself. The boots are also a reference to the military conflict in Ukraine. Lemieux herself has said they could be seen as a fallen soldier and due to the attached wings, the work can be seen as a way of representing an angel.

It is also possible to observe in the exhibition “Things Felt,” that the use of a black and white palette, grayscale, and a few colors, with some of the works in the show having a black frame, and the objects like “Queue” and “Boots to the Ground” being black, while “Cinematic Rescue” and “Performative Objects” are placed on black backgrounds, gives the exhibition an atmosphere of severity.

## **All images:**

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