

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

BETH CAMPBELL

HOW DO YOU KNOW I AM NOT A LIAR...

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PRESS RELEASE

Beth Campbell's second solo exhibition at Kate Werble Gallery, *How do you know I am not a liar...*, introduces a new, large-scale mobile installation that collapses spatial and temporal distances.¹ The work uses the history of the chemical element radium as a vehicle to draw lines through seemingly disparate things. This story stands in for many larger histories of corruption and obscured information. Her mobile spirals outward with circular portals that offer glimpses of various times and places: a factory's brick façade, a 19th century laboratory, and a 1970s boudoir. These cutouts create a larger picture, pulling the past into the present and underscoring the uncanny nature of the world.

Last summer, Campbell stayed in a house carved from a rock by an older uranium miner in Utah. After investigating the mining history, she learned how close it came to her own hometown, uncovering many details that led her to question her knowledge of the area she was raised in and its government. Once touted as a miracle substance with restorative powers, radium was used in the 20th century as the primary ingredient in luminous paints applied to the faces of glow-in-the-dark clocks and dials. In 1922, businessman Joseph A. Kelly, Sr. opened a watch face painting facility, the Radium Dial Company, in a former high school building in Ottawa, Illinois. The young women in his employ were instructed to lick their brushes to a fine point when applying Luna, the company's trademark paint. These "Radium Girls" became gravely ill, a consequence of the human body mistaking radium for calcium.

Campbell produces a personal narrative, saturated with warm data. Circling around her own specificities, history becomes a repetitious and entangled thing dissolving the distinction between signal and noise. She highlights our entwined fates and our smaller-than-expected degrees of separation.

After losing a significant court case against the female workers, Radium Dial was forced to close in 1934 and Kelly opened Luminous Processes Inc. five blocks away. The plant operated until 1978 when the Nuclear Regulatory Committee measured radiation levels 1,666 times higher than permitted. The factory was abandoned, though the ordered cleanup was never started. In the intervening years, the former Radium Dial site had become a meatpacking plant and then a farmers' co-op. After its demolition in 1968, rubble from the building was used as landfill and scattered throughout Ottawa resulting in 16 Superfund sites.

Viewed from the vantage point of the future, Campbell's layered temporalities captured within this exhibition make time itself begin to circle back. The pivotal question is: how do we locate the edges of something when pierced through by everything at once? This conundrum posed by Campbell's work enacts philosopher Timothy Morton's assertion that ecological awareness—an acknowledgement of our inextricable and constellating relations—is an explosion of contexts. A thing, as Morton argues, is a junction between past, present, and future. When that thing has a half-life of 1,600 years, whose context is the greater one?

Beth Campbell, (USA, b. 1971 in Illinois), received her BFA from Truman State University in 1993, (Kirksville, MO), and her MFA from Ohio University in 1997, (Athens, OH). She has held solo exhibitions at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2017); Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH (2010); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2007); the Public Art Fund, New York, NY (2007); and White Columns, New York, NY (2000). She received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011 and a Tiffany Memorial Fellowship in 2009. Her work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Campbell currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

¹ As of October 25, 2019, the search "How do you know I am not a liar" finds no results on Google.