

# KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

## HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

**Beth Campbell: Wrestling with Reality**  
**Sarah Murkett**  
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*Same As Me*, 2002, three channel video, Duration: 15 minutes, 20 seconds, Edition of 5. Courtesy of the artist.

With the recent closing of Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, Beth Campbell is currently without a home-base, but she is taking New York by storm with three recent shows around the city. In the group show *Collider* curated by Rachel Owens at ZieherSmith in Chelsea, two pieces from a new body of work inspired by ideas surrounding virtual reality create disorienting combinations of objects, in a kind of sculptural collage. In a show organized by curator and art historian, Saul Ostrow, at Dorsky Gallery in Long Island City titled *Gravity of Sculpture: Part II*, about the historical turn when sculpture became about “events” rather than just static objects, she has included one of her large scale mobiles. These elegant hanging works serve both as a physical map of our decision making processes and literally warp our perception of the world when we looking through their vibrating tines. And finally, at a new space in Soho called *Hotel Particulier*, Campbell has a solo show titled *Not at Home*, which features works that play with mundane functional objects like lamps, sinks and towels. Curator Sarah Murkett sat down with Beth Campbell to discuss the evolution of her work.

**Your work seems to consistently deal with issues surrounding perception, both visual and conceptual, verging on the psychological. How did you arrive at this line of inquiry?**

I had already been addressing, through psychological, personal, social, and even philosophical ways, what it is to be a person, or the experience of a self. The work literally started to behave in that way, as a way of trying to understand. It wasn't until 2004 that the work began to question visual perception. Earlier pieces, like the three channel video *Same as Me* hinged on the process of the viewing in between the video channels so that there was an action of viewing and comparing, but it wasn't about challenging your perception. So early on that wasn't there, but it came about because when you're trying to understand what is it to be a person one's visual perception is going to be part of it. It's not only what is happening psychologically in your head or your knowledge or intellect, but how do you come to know your world. The very first piece that played on this was the *Never Ending Continuity Error*, which was a bathroom scenario with a sink and a mirror above it, yet in actuality there was no mirror, it was a frame with a cut out space. Four of these bathroom scenarios were repeated in a row which when viewed behaved like an infinity mirror, but also unlike an infinity mirror because there was an actual depth. This all came about because I was playing with repetition and trying to layer multiple spaces but I was originally going to do it through video and it just didn't seem like it was going to have the right kind of effect. And it's funny because I've now seen that video made a few times by different artists and I wish that I had done that too, but I ended up making the sculpture. It's funny how your works evolve.

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**There is a strong sense of craftsmanship in your work and when it makes sense I understand that you make a lot of it yourself. Do you enjoy fabrication and getting your hands dirty in the studio?**

It depends, actually, but mostly no. I enjoy it when I am trying to figure out something that hasn't been figured out. And if it's something that is just trying to make something happen in a normal fashion, I just don't like it at all. Because I never had sculptural training, I will come to making my work in certain way. When I did the two rooms piece House (A Standardized Affectation for Telepresence), I really talked about the work in terms of craft. And some artists who were more traditional makers questioned, "What are you talking about craft? That's not craft." But it totally was craft because the objects in the rooms needed to be in the same place. It was doing something well. But it wasn't a traditional craft. Putting a lipstick on one dresser and then putting it on the other dresser, that's not a traditional craft. And this was before digital cameras and all, so it really was based on my memory. And as much as the work would play with the viewer, it would play on me when I was making it. Sometimes I thought I had only put one lipstick in one room and would find the second already in place. I would lose my place in the piece as well.

**It seems to me that to make the work that you do, you would need to have a good sense of industrial design, architectural planning, design and math. Is this something that came naturally to you or something that had to develop because that was the kind of work that you wanted to make?**

I guess I would say both, certain impulses come naturally, but I have had to learn how to do quite a lot. It's funny you say math, though, because with Stereotable there was a lot of math there. That piece is very much like a puzzle, and it was a challenge, and that's the kind of making I really enjoy – to figure that out. I know when I was working on the sinks at Kohler, they have the industrial designers and those sinks are totally engineered. So when I went to mess with them, it was kind of a disaster because the clay body was not suited for being moved or manipulated in a plastic kind of way. I did not have an understanding of industrial design as far as that goes. I just wanted to make it do something and it, in all of its purpose, did not want to do that. So I made it do it. It was like wrestling with it. I had basically destroyed it. It was filled with rips. It was like a Frankenstein in a way; not multiple body parts from various locations but just like ripped open. I ended up using what the factory had engineered to repair minor flaws in their merchandise so that they could have less waste, but I really used it like surgery – massive surgery. They had three different kinds of slip to the point that their last slip they likened to superglue, but it wasn't. It was like a clay body, but it was just engineered to really fix cracks. That work would not have been possible in the same way without what they had created industrially. I feel like in a regular ceramic studio if you had pushed the work that far and had those huge cracks you probably would have tossed it and started over. But it wasn't going to get any better because it wasn't designed to be moved. I think it is a will too, just wrestling with reality.