

# GAY OUTLAW

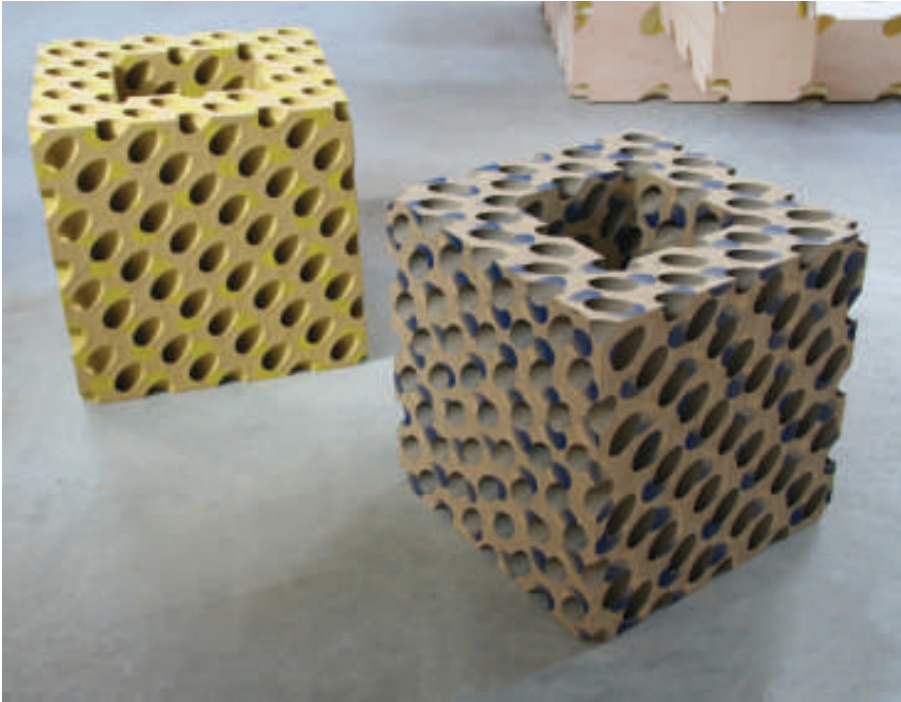
THE VELOCITY OF IDEAS

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Catalogue Essay by Chris Daubert

## The Surface of a Photograph



*Camo Cubes* 2006

In rendering three-dimensional shapes onto a two-dimensional surface, there is a fairly short list of visual references that create the illusion of volume. Not having the advantage of binocular vision that our two eyes use to create "3-D" vision, a flat image is limited to using overlapping shapes, clues related to perspective, and most importantly, light and shadows.

European realism is based on a static, monocular view of the world, similar to that constructed by photographic images. Viewers of photographs often understand them as recordings of facts, when, in fact, they are flattened abstractions of the merely visible with only a tangential relationship to actuality.

Outlaw studied at International Center of Photography in New York and began exhibiting her photographs twenty years ago. She identified early on the strange duality of the photographic image, the flattening of space onto the printed surface and the clues that guide us into reading and then believing the optical illusion of depth and volume existing even when they are presented as flat prints.

It is instructive to look at the sculptures *Camo Cubes*, which at once appear to be three-dimensional objects and at the same time are doing everything they can to subvert this definition. Like the semi-mirrored cubes of Larry Bell, they dematerialize upon viewing. They cannot be considered to be solid, because not only are they constructed around a hollow void at their centers, they are perforated throughout by evenly spaced cylindrical openings that allow the viewer to see entirely through them when viewed at the proper angle. Added to this, the cubes are covered with a photographically printed pattern of the same holes that pierce the surface. When these printed "holes" are juxtaposed with the real voids that they are representing the tension between what is seen and what is known becomes the real definition of the piece.

This tension between the observed and the understood lies at the heart of many of Outlaw's works. Not merely trompe l'oeil trickery, these pieces call for us to examine how we have been conditioned to see images and the relationship between objects and their representations. In a recent series of small studio still-life paintings with photo-collage, she presents humorously realistic paintings of details of her studio with projects completed and underway. Into these images she has collaged photographs of small sculptures and other objects that populate the studio. There is a slight shift, a dissonance, when these two styles of realistic representation collide and then connect. The painted images, being more complete, first assume the position of reality, while the intruding photographic fragments are incongruous. At the same time, though, the photos are placed in such a way that they compliment and enhance the painted interiors, and in turn become the "realistic foreground" against which the painted imagery is subsumed.