

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Jessica Halonen: Remnants, Relics, and Incidentals*

July 22, 2017 – September 9, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, July 22, 6–8 pm

Artist's talk: 7 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Remnants, Relics, and Incidentals*, an exhibition of new work by Jessica Halonen—the artist's first presentation at the gallery.

Jessica Halonen's newest body of work began with a residency in Berlin spent researching the color blue. Paintings, cyanotypes, sculptures, and found objects have all come out of this project. In addition to examining blue from a scientific and historical perspective, Halonen is interested in the color's wide-ranging associative potential—particularly with its capacity to suggest ephemerality and melancholy.

Lapis lazuli is a deep blue semi-precious stone that artists have ground up and used as a pigment for painting since the 6th century. The paint color derived from lapis came to be known as *ultramarine*, and during the Renaissance, it was remarkably expensive (and even costlier than gold). But in the early 1700s, a dye producer in Berlin accidentally discovered a way to make an alternative for ultramarine—and Prussian blue, the first synthetic pigment, was born. Blue paint quickly became affordable and widely available for the first time, setting art history on a new course.

These days, studies have shown blue is the most common favorite color among Americans and Europeans; anything so broadly appealing is bound to be richly associative. The deep blue sea and the wild blue yonder (i.e., the sky) connote depth, distance, infinity, and spirituality. First-place ribbons represent excellence and high performance. But sometimes the color points in contradictory directions. Blue blood is aristocratic, while blue-collar jobs are held by the working class. And although blue can be soothing and peaceful, *the blues* represent loneliness and depression. It is the color of elusiveness and transience: *the blue hour* is that fleeting, magical time between day and night.

Thinking about blue as a marker of impermanence, transition, and fragility led Halonen to the last paintings of Édouard Manet. Bedridden and terminal, he made a score of small canvases—flowers in vases brought to him by friends saying their goodbyes. Halonen has made her own paintings and cyanotypes of Manet's flowers, repeatedly, as if in an effort to extend their short lives, to prevent their petals from inevitably wilting. Her interest in these bouquets has also moved her to make images of hourglass vases—rudimentary, archetypal forms—vessels reminiscent of bodies, but stable and permanent. Vases—urns—unlike flowers and bodies, do not age.

Knowing Halonen's academic investigations have always also been deeply personal, one might be able to intuit that the loss on her mind is not merely abstract. A relative, too soon, in recent years. Her father, also before his time, when Halonen was young. She celebrates her family in coded ways with her work. The joys of making—woodworking, cross-stitching, drawing, stone polishing—filled her childhood home. Her grandfather's obsession with picture frames and her grandmother's with thread, fabric, and patterns have all influenced Halonen's paintings and sculptures. Recent installations have even included assortments of small curios—gifts between her grandparents—and a plaster mold of the artist's teeth, made many years ago on a wide-eyed visit to the dentist.

Halonen's close look at color is part of a well-established tradition. Goethe said he wrote *Theory of Colours* at a time in his life when "a quiet, collected state of mind was out of the question." An ailing Wittgenstein wrote about color and pain in the last 18 months of his life. Joan Didion's *Blue Nights* and Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*, too, are struggles to cope with loss. Perhaps the relationship between color and

despair has been so inexhaustibly captivating to artists and thinkers across the ages because both are so ineffable. Neither the analytical nor the emotional parts of our brains are quite able to locate why *that* blue is so enchanting (and do you see the same blue I do?) or if our hearts (even at the peak of health) will ever mend.

Jessica Halonen, born in Michigan, lives and works in Austin and San Antonio. She has shown her work at Artpace (San Antonio), Blue Star Contemporary (San Antonio), Dallas Contemporary, Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Maine College of Art, McNay Art Museum (San Antonio), Park Projects (Los Angeles), Torrance Art Museum (California), and Weatherspoon Art Museum (North Carolina). Her work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts (Houston) and Art Museum of Southeast Texas (Beaumont).