Sara Cwynar, still from *Baby Blue Benzo*, 2024. © Sara Cywnar. Courtesy of the artist and 52 Walker

Sara Cwynar
Baby Blue Benzo
October 4–December 21, 2024
52 Walker Street, New York

52 Walker is pleased to announce its thirteenth exhibition, *Baby Blue Benzo*, which features work by Canadian-born, New York-based artist Sara Cwynar. This presentation focuses on a new film—for which the show is titled—shot on both digital video and 16mm and projected at monumental scale. To complement *Baby Blue Benzo*, a series of related photographs will be installed throughout the gallery space.

Engaging with vernacular photography and the moving image, as well as their attendant technologies, Cwynar's practice—which also includes collage, installation, and performance—explores how pictorial constructs and their related systems of power feed back into real life. Such projects as *Rose Gold* (2017) and *Baby Blue Benzo* consider color—namely, how its use and value are constantly renegotiated by the shifting conditions of consumerism, technology, and desire. Drawing from her background in graphic design and a lineage of postwar conceptual photography, Cwynar tampers with visual signifiers to deconstruct notions of power and recontextualize image culture in late capitalism.

In her new film, Cwynar combines newly produced video and photographs with found images amassed in her archive. The principal scenes for *Baby Blue Benzo* were filmed at a studio in Los Angeles, where Cwynar staged a surrealistic shoot—featuring two sets of circular camera tracks—with massive props and elaborate historical costumes that became a kind of stand-in for the artifice and arbitrariness of composing images. The artwork's central visual pillar is a replica of the titular 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR, which is to date the most expensive car to be sold at auction. Throughout the film, the Benz along with the colors baby blue and Ferrari red are leitmotifs that surface again and again—the car, for one, variously appears as a custom-built replica, as a cutout, in photographed reproductions, and as a life-sized copy at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, Germany. Inserting her authorial presence, Cwynar incorporates filmed representations of herself in the Benz, of hired models and crew, and of friends and collaborators like Tracy Ma, a graphic designer she has depicted in previous projects. This amalgamation of images, all shown at varying scales, is unveiled in a continuous horizontal scroll across an extra-wide screen, a new animation style that Cwynar developed with a video editor. The movement structurally suggests the forward progress of certain techno-utopian ideals, though the occasional shift backward hints of its false promises as well. This scroll is interrupted by visible "seams" such as pieces of tape or cinematic glitches, which question the sovereignty of the images presented.

Cwynar uses the make of this luxury vehicle and the color baby blue as starting points for both the film and the exhibition, and she further links the eponymous Benz to benzodiazepines—medications commonly prescribed for conditions such as anxiety and insomnia, a sleep disorder with which the artist herself struggles. Connecting her intense states of wakefulness to the uninterrupted 24/7 thrum of twenty-first-century life, Cwynar conceptually pairs the advent of photography to the development of the Fordist assembly line, which altered how modern subjects were viewed and how they viewed their own productivity. In *Baby Blue Benzo*, the artist relates these ideas to our shared contemporary reality: the omnipresence of social media and the push toward automation and artificial intelligence. Cwynar collected, over a period of two years, relevant video clips and imagery from archival sources and stock databases, and pieced them together along with AI-generated text and visuals.

52W

Cwynar includes recently shot footage of the Manhattan Bridge and the New York City skyline, the continuous construction near her studio, an auto workers' strike in Detroit, "superblooms" in Los Angeles that have resulted from ever-warming temperatures, dolls, and sequences of ice skaters, which recall the artist's own teenage experience taking part in a sport that puts young women on constant display. She also cites the violent histories of car manufacturing, scenes of car chases pulled from the internet, "booth babes," and other such pin-up models as Pamela Anderson, whose bodies drum up scopophilic desires to consume and be consumed. The authoritative voice of Paul Cooper, an actor with whom Cwynar has worked on previous projects, provides the main narration for the film; it is paired with the artist's own voice, which emphasizes or corrects points that Cooper has made. These scripts are layered and interspersed with jarring moments from car commercials or sound bites of an engine revving, as well as excerpts from classical and popular music tracks that register different emotional cues.

In this deeply researched and personal project, Cwynar presents her insomnia as a kind of dispossessed dream state—one in which the artist, audience, the beauty and potency of images, and the past, present, and future of photography are all implicated.

Sara Cwynar: Baby Blue Benzo is curated by Ebony L. Haynes and presented by 52 Walker.

Sara Cwynar was born in 1985 in Vancouver. She received her BA from York University, Toronto, in 2010, and her MFA from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, in 2016.

Cwynar has exhibited across North America and internationally since 2012, when her first solo shows were presented at Printed Matter, New York, and Cooper Cole, Toronto. The artist has since presented solo exhibitions including *Everything in the Studio (Destroyed)*, Foam, Amsterdam (2013); *Flat Death*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia (2014); *Soft Film*, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2017); *Image Model Muse*, Minneapolis Institute of Art (2018; traveled to Milwaukee Art Museum); *Tracy*, Oakville Galleries, Canada (2018); *Gilded Age*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (2019); *Gilded Age II*, Polygon Gallery, Vancouver (2019); *Down at the Arcade*, commissioned by Performa, New York (2021); *Source*, Remai Modern, Saskatoon, Canada (2021); *Apple Red/Grass Green/Sky Blue*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2022); and *S/S 23*, Foam, Amsterdam (2023), among others.

The artist has been featured in a number of significant group exhibitions presented by The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2011); Dallas Museum of Art (2014); Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (2016); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2017); Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo (2017); Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2017); Centre régional d'art contemporain (CRAC) Occitanie, Sète, France (2018); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2019); Arts Club of Chicago (2019); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2021); and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2022), among many others.

Cwynar has been included in international recurring exhibitions such as *Greater New York*, MoMA PS1, New York (2015); Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie, Mannheim, Germany (2017); Bienal de São Paulo (2018); Capture Photography Festival, Vancouver (2022); and Triennial of Photography Hamburg (2022).

Her work is held in institutional collections including the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Bâloise Art Collection, Basel; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Dallas Art Museum; Foam, Amsterdam; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco and Paris; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Milwaukee Art Museum; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, Kansas; Polygon Gallery, Vancouver; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

The artist is represented by Cooper Cole, Toronto, and The Approach, London. She lives and works in New York.