SARA CWYNAR
Elephant

November 6 – December 19, 2026
Esther Schipper, Berlin



Detail: Sara Cwynar, *The Disturbed Slumber II*, 2026

Elephant is a project by Sara Cwynar, on the occasion of the artist's fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin. On view will be new videos, photographs and a drawing.

Cwynar's films and photographs employ a mix of analogue collage, digital modifications and cinematic techniques to create works with a distinct aesthetic, a dense mix of historical references, found images, and traces of contemporary image worlds. Her process includes photographs that are themselves photographed, arranged in real life with everyday objects, re-photographed and filmed or put into motion. The effect closely resembles a kind of visual free association floating in your head — what thought can feel like.

For her presentation at the gallery, she draws on a project concerning automatons. A small elephant from the late 19th century recurs as symbolic presence. In the anachronistic wound-up toy, a wide web of references coalesces: the object speaks of colonialism and the culture of extraction, its mechanism to industrialization, outsourced labor and automatization, which has brought us to the current developments of AI. With halting steps, the tiny toy becomes a melancholic symbol of the enormous scale of cultural currents that began to form the present a long time ago.

Cwynar's new film is loosely inspired by the famous 1968/1977 film *Powers of Ten* by designers Charles and Ray Eames. She reworks its educational approach into an associative sequence of found images, collage, animation, and live-action footage, moving across scales, genres, shapes, colors, and formats. From a mosquito, we travel to Mount Everest and the deepest part of the ocean, from cobalt mines to someone holding an iPhone. Cwynar's film moves rapidly from the micro to the macro, destabilizing any sense of scale, intentionally confusing the spectator. The insistent slippages of scale in Cwynar's new works draw on philosopher Timothy Morton's concept of the hyperobject. The term describes entities or phenomena, such as global warming, that are so widely distributed across time and space that we cannot perceive them in their entirety. We encounter them instead through their effects on our daily lives.

The film's monitor is installed on a wooded wall which leaves its back exposed. It is here that we encounter an iPad screening the short video of the Elephant automaton. This promise of revelation by opening the back of the wall finds an analogy in the four photographs on view. Cwynar took images of automata she found in the archive of the New York Public Library Picture Collection—still a largely analogue affair—and uses them as foundation for her collages, layering found and AI-generated images and placing objects on them to create an effect similar to the distortion of a lens. What it is we are looking at, is at first confusing: Re-photographed sections of existing photographs, mixed with other images, the back of a frame superimposed. The frisson of having access to an otherwise hidden view is an illusion.

Cwynar's works on paper are akin to conceptual notes, with images, drawing, and collage. The drawing on view expands the research and connects the threads that run throughout the exhibited film. The enlarged image of a small figurine of a woman disturbed in her sleep becomes the holder for this information, inscribed with handwritten notes, as objects and images are superimposed. All objects, images or logos are chosen for their connection to the artist's research about environmental decay, philosophy & human understanding of scale, the long trajectory of industrialization into an AI economy.

Sara Cwynar was born in 1985 in Vancouver, Canada. She currently lives and works in New York.

She received an MFA from Yale University, New Haven, in 2016, and a Bachelor of Design from York University, Toronto, in 2010. She also completed a program in English Literature at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in 2006.

Cwynar received the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2025, the Sobey Art Award and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award in 2020, and the Kodak Film Prize at the IV Moscow International Experimental Film Festival in 2019. In 2018 she received the MAST Foundation for Photography Grant on Industry and Work and the Ammodo Tiger Short Prize at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the Prix Baloise from Art Basel in 2016.

The artist's work has been exhibited at numerous international institutions. Selected solo exhibitions and commissions include: *Baby Blue Benzo Beta*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2026); *Alphabet*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2025); *S/S 23*, Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam (2023); *Apple Red/Grass Green/Sky Blue*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2022); *Source*, Remai Modern, Saskatoon (2021); *Down at the Arcade*, Performa Biennial, New York (2021); *Gilded Age*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (2019); *Modern Art in Your Life*, commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019); *Gilded Age II*, The Polygon Gallery, North Vancouver (2019); *Image Model Muse*, Milwaukee Art Museum (2019); *Image Model Muse*, Minneapolis Institute of Art (2018); *Tracy*, Oakville Galleries, Oakville (2018); *Soft Film*, MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2017).

The artist's work is represented in the collections of Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Bâloise Art Collection, Basel; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Dallas Art Museum Collection; Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco/Paris; Museum of Modern Art Library Collection, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art Library Collection, New York; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Milwaukee Art Museum; MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City; Polygon Gallery, Vancouver; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Soho House, Toronto; TD Bank Collection, Toronto; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and Zabludowicz Collection, London.