

GEARY



William Corwin at Geary Contemporary (Millerton, New York)



Installation view, William Corwin: *Lethe-Wards* at Geary Contemporary. Courtesy of Geary Contemporary.

William Corwin: *Lethe-Wards*

Geary Contemporary

October 16 through December 18, 2022

By JONATHAN GOODMAN, November 2022

Will Corwin is active in a number of artworld activities. He writes regularly for *The Brooklyn Rail* and curates contemporary art for New York City galleries. But it is most accurate to see him as a sculptor. His current exhibition of boats with ladders and his studies of female goddesses, put up in Geary Contemporary (now located upstate), shows us that the artist is fascinated with an archeological reading of the past. In his case, the past is meant to impart not only formal possibilities, but also a sense of mythic, even devotional concern with metaphysics. Boats are often metaphorical vehicles for travel of a spiritual sort, while ladders are used to support the act of ascension, appearing in the Bible and as a generally recognized symbol of rising skyward. We could read Corwin's work as symbolic in nature, but that would diminish its evocative power. His boats, holding thin ladders, are usually made of cast black iron and are roughly twelve to eighteen inches long. Set on a large platform of thin wood in the center of the gallery, they start to feel like a fleet meant to take us to places beyond our knowledge. And the goddesses, tabletop forms in size, are contemporary interpretations of ancient maternal forms. In both sets of work, Corwin is committed to a visionary treatment of very old things.



William Corwin, *Lethe-wards Had Sunk*, 2022. Iron, 2 1/2 x 1/4 x in. Courtesy of Geary Contemporary.

In *Lethe-wards Had Sunk* (2022), Corwin has cast in iron an open vessel, with a rough exterior and edges. Inside the boat, the artist has printed the title in capital letters. The roughness and gray-black of the vessel gives it the feeling of a primitive artifact, and the title, referring to the classical river Lethe, from which the dead drink to forget their former lives, shows Corwin's antiquarian bent. He is unusual for his interest in antiquity; his art shows the tension between ancient forms and the need to make them successfully contemporary. *Little Curragh* (2022)—the Irish word “curragh” refers to a woven wicker boat covered with a water-tight material—is a vessel boat than the first. Its edges are rough, while the sides themselves are quite uneven. Inside the boat is a ladder twisting this way and that; its pliability enhances its sculptural effect. *Little Curragh* is both an inspired version of a boat used long ago and a contemporary vision of its sculptural beauty.



William Corwin, *The People All Said Sit Down, Sit Down You're Rockin the Boat*, 2022. 2 x 1 x 1 ½ in. Courtesy of Geary Contemporary.

In the front of the gallery, we find a large cast iron boat with quite a tall ladder extending upward from its center. The sculpture is called *The People All Said Sit Down, Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat*. The work's size emphasizes the archaic gravitas of the boat and its ladder. Its title comes from the American musical *Guys and Dolls*; here Corwin's humor is attached to a major vehicle of transport. Then, the cast aluminum work, *Artemisia Ephesia* (2022), silver in color, presents the goddess standing in a single column, with truncated arms. It is a difficult to see her features, although she has a thick head of hair. On either side are small heads supported, like Artemisia herself, by a silver platform. Artemisia, a goddess of the hunt and wild animals, was celebrated in a temple in Ephesus in ancient times. The sculpture's breast-like extensions, running from neck to ankle, are also found in other archaic sculptures of Artemisia. Here Corwin conveys his love of ancient culture, something he does throughout the show. It is rare to see historical narrative and symbols so well used in contemporary art.