

*Elaine Cameron-Weir*  
STAR CLUB  
REDEMPTION  
BOOTH

APR 3 – SEP 12, 2021







Cameron-Weir encountered illustrated in a book, the title appeals to base human desire. Beyond the veneer of language and spectacle, however, the promise of the proposition gives way, revealing an elaborate ruse.

At the center of the installation are two sculptures, each comprised of a human-sized, metal case—U.S. military equipment for transporting bodily remains—that serves as a counterweight to a factory conveyor belt that rises up from the ground like a suspended bodily stand-in, soaring over twenty feet into the double height, cathedral-like volume of the gallery. A coffin literally enables the ascending verticality of the conveyor belt, evoking the tension in capitalist logic that weighs the value of human life against the health of the economy.<sup>1</sup> Death anchors transcendence, creating a counter-image to the myth of the American Dream embodied in the concept of individual, upward mobility through hard work. Cameron-Weir’s counterweight construction evokes

the stage trick in which a winch and pulley hoist the body to appear as if levitating, but instead of keeping the apparatus hidden backstage, she pulls the curtain on the truth of the mechanism. “The hoax is almost always a trick disguised as a wish. ...The real revelation may be just whose wish it is,” writes Kevin Young in his book on the topic of hoaxes and their pernicious ramifications across American culture.<sup>2</sup> Cameron-Weir’s sculptures inspire related questions about the operations at play that produce the stories we believe and the lives, and deaths, these stories manufacture.

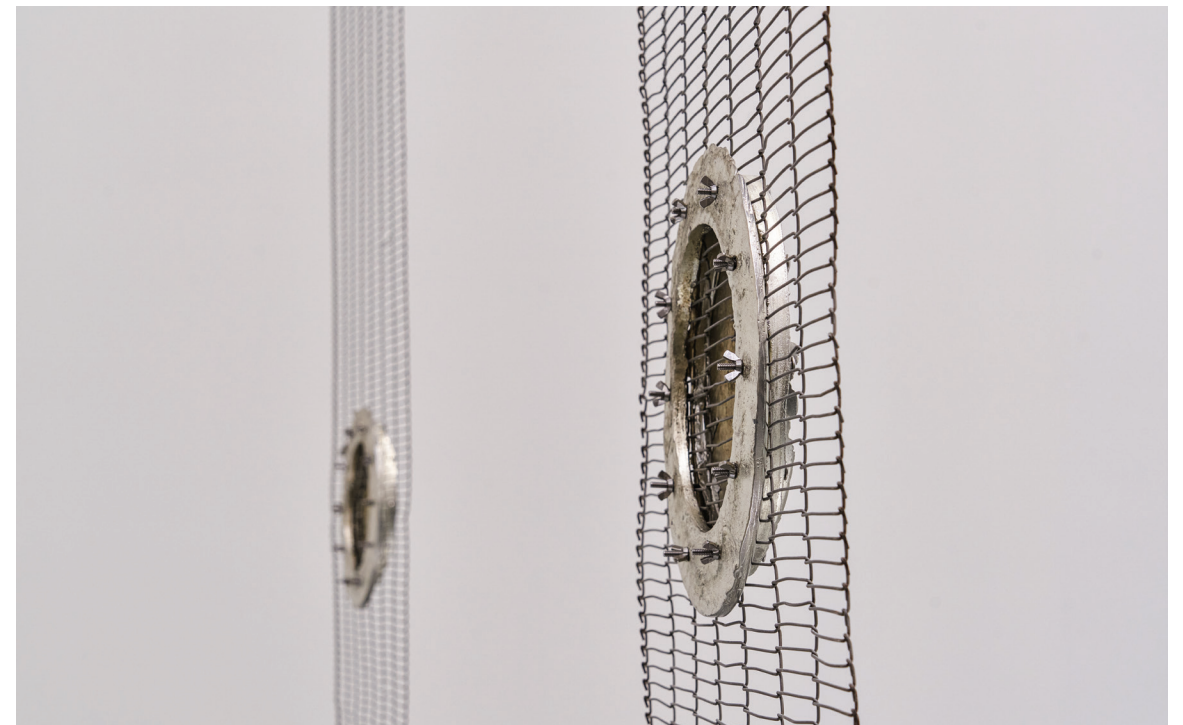
Illuminated by electric flicker lights, each casket has a performative funerary presence. The caskets signify a life to mourn; yet the artifice of the lights conjures a more menacing affect as well. There is a pretense here akin to the hollow expression of “hopes and prayers” offered by authority figures in the wake of tragedy, words that acknowledge loss but that deflect action to address conditions that

## STAR CLUB REDEMPTION BOOTH

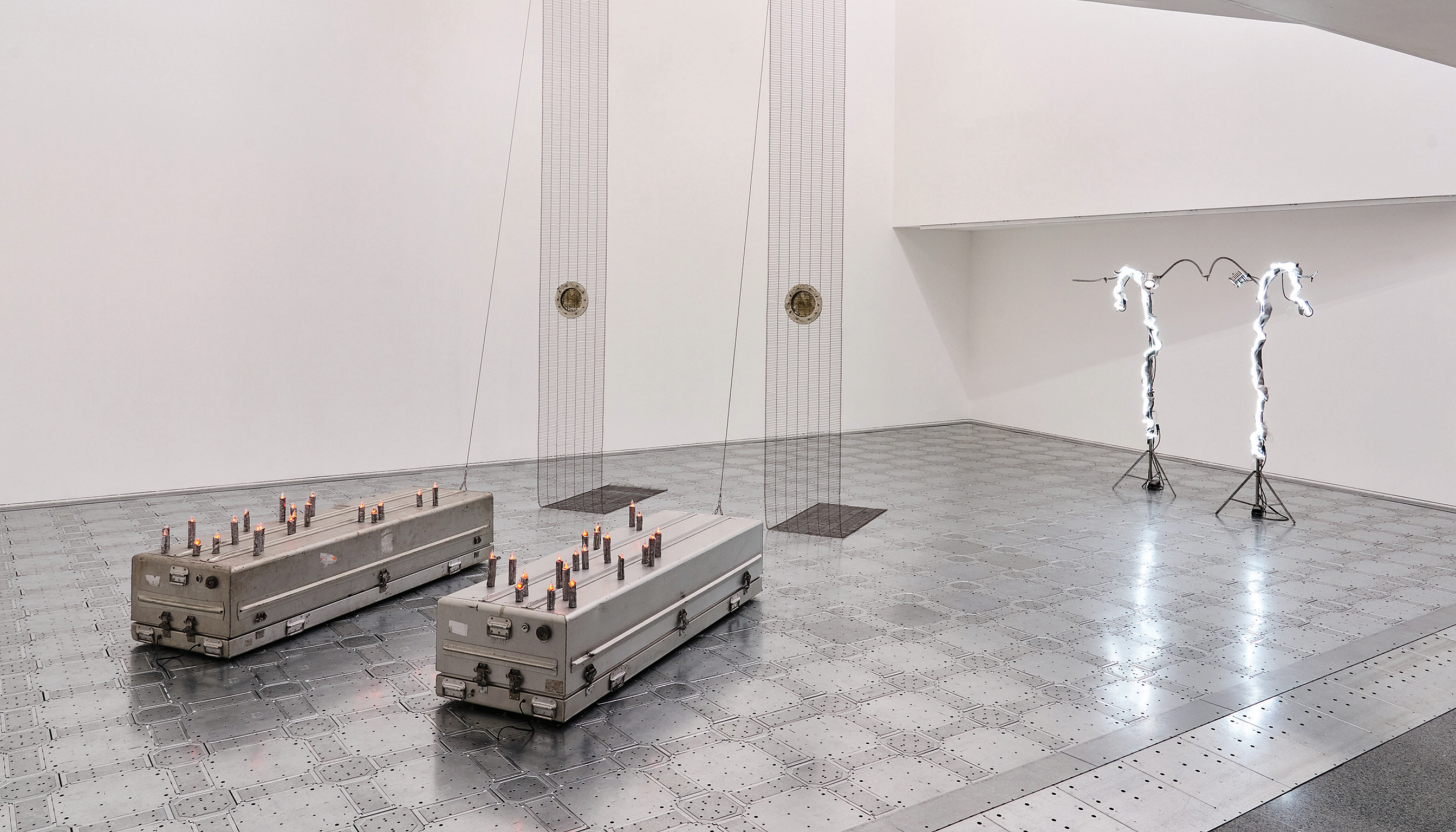
Throughout her work in sculpture and writing, Elaine Cameron-Weir grapples with questions of individual and collective human survival, while also considering the potential for transformation in states of being and forms of knowledge. Her work is informed by belief systems that structure how people make sense of and find meaning in the world—from science and religion to the nation-state. She often repurposes objects and materials previously used in industry, the military, or medicine to create exquisitely assembled forms that generate new, speculative functions. The resulting, reimagined objects are viscerally evocative expressions of the human condition and the porous, interdependent character of our bodily and social lives.

*STAR CLUB REDEMPTION BOOTH* is an exhibition of new sculpture by the artist that sharpens persistent themes in her work while reflecting on the context of crisis laid bare during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. A critique of societal machinations that render individual lives expendable, as well as a sincere locus of mourning, the exhibition is a mise-en-scène of quasi-ritual objects that considers the void left in the wake of loss—of life, but also trust in social systems and the narratives that sustain them.

Styled in all-caps, the title—*STAR CLUB REDEMPTION BOOTH*—evokes the glitz and allure of flashing lights, peddling a potent cocktail of renown and deliverance. Drawn from a neon sign









produced the tragedy in the first place. Military coffins, these caskets illuminate the facade of state-sponsored death in particular. Entitled *Low Relief Icon (Figure 1)* and *Low Relief Icon (Figure 2)*—a reference to the cast pewter disk emblazoned with a repeating image of the crucifix that adorns each conveyor belt—these sculptures invoke how the hero narrative, associated with individual sacrifice and moral exceptionalism, sustains and obscures operations of the state that render life expendable. Made from a spin mold typically used in the mass manufacture of cheap metal trinkets, the cast-disks reinforce the perpetual motion of the conveyor belts, compounding uncomfortable connections between bodies, commodities, and disposability. The parenthetical ‘Figure 1’ and ‘Figure 2’ in the titles adds to the effect, and signifies the dissociative process in which bodies become numbers and persons are abstracted into statistics to measure and track.

Enter here *Left Hand Right Hand, Grinds a Fantasizer’s Dust*, a companion sculpture to the coffin/conveyor belt works. Who lives and who dies in the context of large policy decisions is often reduced to a cost-benefit analysis, a value proposition with origins in war and game theory that makes the title of the work, with its allusions to card dealing and mortality, particularly resonant.<sup>3</sup> Made from a repurposed portable funerary backdrop, and aglow with white neon and theater spotlights, a tool of mourning becomes a prop with allusions to commerce and artifice that suggest the exploitation of human vulnerability. Read as a portal with sinister, angel wing-like supports, or a perverse rendition of the gates to heaven, this object reveals a false promise of salvation. The moribund ‘back’ of the concrete textile that wraps around the metal armature belies the seductive flash of the illuminated ‘front’, revealing a duplicitous nature. Large bolts and wingnuts that hold the object together make visible its construction and suggest a temporary quality, as if the contrivance this object discloses is designed to be repeated and reproduced elsewhere. Such transferability

warns that the scene here is not unique, but part of a recurring pattern; what offers protection or solace, may actually be the threat.

A modular, metal floor—conventionally used to hide electrical cabling—serves as a stage for the installation, implicating viewers as both vulnerable and knowing actors in a shared context, objects among other objects: the coffins, the conveyor belts, the portal. Light streams into the space, reflecting off the floor and reinforcing the conditions of illusion echoed throughout the installation. Reflection here is also a form of illumination recalling these poignant words by scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor written last year: “American life has been suddenly and dramatically upended, and, when things are turned upside down, the bottom is brought to the surface and exposed to the light.”<sup>4</sup> When facades crumble and familiar frameworks lose meaning, how do we revise in recognition not just of failure and disappointment but of existential threat? Cameron-Weir’s installation, with its dual references to death and the potential of regeneration, hopeful desire as well as foreboding, invites the question: what expires and what survives when things fall apart—does the corruption of old models adapt, or could alternative ways of being prevail in these future worlds?

– Nina Bozicnik, Curator

<sup>1</sup> Adam Rogers, “How Much Is a Human Life Actually Worth?” *Wired*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/how-much-is-human-life-worth-in-dollars/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Lethem, “Kevin Young’s Enthralling Essential History of the Hoax,” *The New York Times*, November 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/14/books/review/bunk-kevin-young.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers.

<sup>4</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Reality Has Endorsed Bernie Sanders,” *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/reality-has-endorsed-bernie-sanders>.





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Elaine Cameron-Weir earned a BFA from the Alberta College of Art and Design and a MFA from the New York University Steinhardt School. Select solo exhibitions include *exhibit from a dripping personal collection*, Dortmund Kunstverein (2018); *Outlooks: Elaine Cameron-Weir*, Storm King Art Center, New York (2018); and *Elaine Cameron-Weir: viscera has questions about itself*, New Museum, New York (2017). She has shown nationally and internationally in group exhibitions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Remai Modern, Saskatoon; the Fellbach Triennial, and the Montréal Biennale, among others. Her work is held in numerous collections, including those of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

*Low Relief Icon (Figure 1)* and *Low Relief Icon (Figure 2)*, 2021. U.S. military body transfer case, aluminum, flicker bulbs, electrical wiring, conveyor belt, pewter, chain, pulleys, aircraft cable, hardware. Each work overall: 281 x 202 x 28 1/2 in. (713.7 x 513.1 x 72.4 cm); Case with candles: 26.5 x 89 x 28.5 in. (67.3 x 226.1 x 72.4 cm).

*Right Hand Left Hand, Grinds a Fantasizer's Dust*, 2021. Concrete textile, funerary backdrop stand, neon tubing, transformers, spot lights, silk gauze. Overall: 85 1/2 x 112 x 24 in. (217.2 x 284.5 x 70 cm).

All work courtesy of the artist, JTT, New York, and Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles.

*Elaine Cameron-Weir: STAR CLUB REDEMPTION BOOTH* is organized by Nina Bozicnik, Curator. Artist support provided by the Canada Council for the Arts.



Photography: Installation view of *Elaine Cameron-Weir: STAR CLUB REDEMPTION BOOTH*, 2021, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle. Photo: Jonathan Vanderweilt.

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