



Alix Pearlstein

White Room 1988

A graduating student in the MFA program at SUNY Purchase in 1988, Alix Pearlstein was responsible for securing a venue for her thesis show, so her well-timed White Room exhibition served a double purpose. At the time she was a sculptor, making minimal pieces that combined ready-made objects with manipulated materials. The show was reviewed, and Pearlstein began a relationship with a now defunct Soho gallery that would last several years and result in both group and solo exhibitions. Feeling reassured by future opportunities secured, and wanting a fresh start in a new studio, she destroyed the sculptures after the close of the show.

Over the next several years, Pearlstein continued her exploration of sculpture influenced by Minimalism and Pop. She increasingly reduced the forms in her work until a show in 1991 in which she exhibited pieces of a remarkably ephemeral nature, such as cotton fuzz carefully installed in the thin cracks between the gallery's wooden floorboards. Immediately after that work Pearlstein felt the need to steer away from the precious nature of Minimalism. She sought to continue making pieces that relied on formal tensions yet were infused with cultural and figurative references. In 1992 she created a series of sculptures constructed with simple juxtapositions of readymade objects, mostly toys and novelty items.

Finger is one of these works: a latex fingertip pinning down a single string that runs from ceiling to floor. In a humorous and slightly macabre manner, this piece plays on the oppositions between figure and object, form and line, gesture and immobility, haphazard and deliberate.

Also in 1992, Pearlstein made her first video, which would eventually become the primary medium of her work. In the earliest videos, objects appeared along with performers as catalysts for actions, and later in the form of cutout figures that served as both characters and props. The formal play in her earlier sculpture eventually transformed into engagement between human subjects. Although they do not contain linear narratives or much spoken dialogue, the videos are focused on relationships; affection, sexual attraction, power struggles, and betrayal all play out. Their soundtracks, notably distinct from the visual action, help convey emotional states and reinforce a sense of displacement and distance.

Pearlstein's newest video, *Forsaken*, presents a group of people whose complex relationships seem to hinge on a central male character. Their interactions and postures divulge fickle emotions and loyalties; love and respect are expressed openly, yet suddenly and unexpectedly turn into rejection and abandonment.