



Travis Diehl, "Critics' Picks: Sean Townley," *Artforum*, December 5, 2015.

# ARTFORUM

## Sean Townley

### Night Gallery

By Travis Diehl | December 5, 2015



View of "Sean Townley: The Third Measure," 2015.

From left: *One of Three Shades (Aluminum)*, 2015; *One of Three Shades (Black)*, 2015; *One of Three Shades (Terracotta)*, 2015.

Classical Greek artists, having never seen actual lions, based their funerary lion sculptures on a combo of house cats, dogs, and other sculptures of the real thing. Sean Townley has possibly never seen a lion sculpture. For his series "One of Three Shades," 2015, Townley modeled a clay and carbon-fiber lion after a digital scan of an unspecified Greek example, carved by anonymous artisans and catalogued by an unnamed institution, and then made three aluminum casts. Originality becomes as abstracted as authorship. If the source is marble, the hollowness, jagged truncation at the waist, and empty eyes of Townley's versions appear as affectations of the scanning process. The ravages of time we imagine in the lichen, cracked, and acid-pocked stone here succumb to the limits of the scan's resolution and of Townley's skill, which round off more than divots, mane, and ribs.

Working from a downgraded original, Townley seems forced, or has forced himself, into a series of interpolations. His sculptures rest with only their front paws on the pedestals, monumentalizing incompleteness. The trio's bodies point from their diagonal row, as if due north, against the gallery's irregular layout. The pieces' finishes, too—bare aluminum or black and terra-cotta-colored powder coats—project a confused classicism. The last, titled *One of Three Shades (Terracotta)*, manifests a sickly, peanut-buttery surface evocative less of art history than of a loose, queasy grip on Western tradition. Apprenticeship becomes repetition and grand gestures become awkward ones. Clay in one hand, computer in the other, Townley helps accelerate the ancient into the modern. To what funerary end?