

TWO COATS OF PAINT

March 20, 2020

Jude Tallichet's sense of the ineffable



Jude Tallichet, *Fire Escape*, installation view at Smack Mellon. Images by Adam Simon.

Contributed by Adam Simon / [Jude Tallichet](#)'s *Fire Escape*, one of several sculptures in her exhibition "Heat Map" at Smack Mellon in Dumbo, doesn't look like something that would help if your building were burning down. It hangs there in all its ineffectuality, abject yet amiable, enormous and out of place (except that nothing is out of place in an art gallery). The piece

appears to be made of aluminum foil – the flimsiest and most domestic of metals but also the lightest common-use metal and a great reflector of light. *Fire Escape* catches and reflects the light from the large windows opposite onto (and off of) a multiplicity of surfaces. Each facet of each twisted section establishes a different relation to the light, so that what we see encompasses a range of colors: white, silver, gold, and different grays. So *Fire Escape* is defined by light and by its lightness. It cascades, seemingly liquid, like a waterfall. There are no straight lines.



Jude Tallichet, installation view

What can one make of a fire escape with no straight lines? If it were a fraction of its actual size it would be whimsical, but this fire escape is two stories high. The normally straight ladder

between floors has been twisted into a helix. What happened? Did the heat of a fire contort the fire escape, or did it just get old and suffer the weight of too many bodies over time? The extension ladder is down. Did people escape? Apparently their safety was always in question because of corrosion as well as human repurposing that obstructed the way down. [A 1968 change](#) in the New York building code banned the construction of external fire escapes on almost all new buildings. But they do have a rich cultural history (*West Side Story*, *Rent*) and a warm place in a lot of New Yorkers' memories of hot summer nights.

Fire Escape's insistent inutility suggests we can see it as a metaphor, and certainly a useless fire escape seems an apt metaphor for our times. Still, it would be wrong to experience this uncanny object primarily as metaphor. The specificity of metaphor constrains our awareness and diminishes our sense of something not so readily identifiable. Our senses don't experience objects or sculptures metaphorically. Metaphors have to be thought. *Fire Escape* hangs over the gallery space like an awkward intruder, an uncomfortable presence, perhaps the object of nervous glances. Will it fall? How much does it weigh? How did it get here without being destroyed in transit?

What Tallichet does uncannily well is to present objects that embody emotions more than thought, and tones of feeling more than specific emotions. Her sculptures resist interpretation. They have presence, and by extension suggest that all objects that inhabit our spaces and help us navigate the world have it, too. This suggests a way of being that does not take things, behaviors, enjoyments, necessities and conveniences for granted, does not assume that everything will always be here, impervious to catastrophic events or just the passing of time. We don't really need metaphors right now. Perhaps what we need is a heightened sense of the ineffable. *Fire Escape* provides exactly that.



Jude Tallichet, installation view.

"Jude Tallichet, Heat Map," Smack Mellon, 92 Plymouth Street, Brooklyn, NY. Through April 12. Also on view at the gallery is a beautiful and thought-provoking video installation by **Summer McCorkle**. (Note: The shows have been closed due to COVID-19)

About the author: Artist **Adam Simon** is affiliated with Studio 10 in Bushwick. His most recent solo show, "From this Position," took place earlier this year.