

Frieze

Reviews

For Artist Diamond Stingily, No One is a Winner



BY TRAVIS DIEHL

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In her solo show at CCA Wattis, San Francisco, the artist invokes sports awards to critique our obsession with victory



The main gallery at CCA Wattis is a big space, and Diamond Stingily fills it the way one uses Photoshop to texture a defined area. In 'Doing the Best I Can,' these areas are broad and the textures granular: copies of the SF Chronicle from last September on every window and skylight, cornflower blue acrylic carpet under lengths of tacky plastic carpet protectors, and – the main event – an L-shaped row of brown particleboard shelving lined with hundreds of small trophies. These are, for the most part, the standardized statuettes given out for participation in youth sports; several seem large or impressive enough for the winners' podium. But they are compounded by the suburban home-office aesthetics of their setting. The gold-foiled plastic statuettes represent various sports, but the trophies'

small plaques have been replaced with ones bearing more realpolitik slogans, like 'I DID THE BEST I COULD WITH WHAT I HAD,' and 'AND THAT'S IT.' This sense of joyless making-do reverberates along the backs of the shelves, where they form a sort of corridor against the wall, dappled with trophy shadows. Winning, losing and simply being: on the opposite wall, harshly defined by the light of one of Stingily's signature racks of klieg lights, stand the *Hergott Shadows* (2019), a series of cloth dolls on an Amish pattern. At Wattis the 13 dolls appear arranged roughly by size – or, read left to right, by shrinkage, from over a foot to a few statuette-esque inches. Each has a dark brown head but no face, and so no front—just a top and a bottom. Each rests on an identical pair of big nails, one under each of its armpits – up against the wall, crucified or on crutches.



Diamond Stingily, *Flournoy and Kedzie*, 2019. Courtesy: the artist, Queer Thoughts, New York, and Ramiken, New York; photograph: Johnna Arnold

The texts on the trophies repeat, at random, across the randomly repeating styles of trophies; the handful of phrases repeat again in an audio piece, *Slogans* (2019), that booms from two speakers on the wall above the shelves. Here, a voice that sounds compressed by a cell phone or tape recorder intones these same slogans ad nauseam. 'I don't know why, but sometimes it just be like that.' 'It was for the glory.' The installation babbles and loops, like the newspapers filling every pane of glass that offer a senseless rundown of conflicts and aspirations. Meanwhile, two speakers on the opposite wall offer a sort of competing, more personal and more naturally voiced monologue, *Big Brother*, Byron,

Talking (2019), on the same subject of success. In a text on the title wall, Stingily points out that her two brothers both played professional football, and that like them, she is doing the best she can. Left unsaid is whether her brothers are stars, or even starters. 'Doing the Best I Can' mixes up the vicissitudes of defeat and victory to the point that there is only struggle, endless and even unfair. It's not clear what winning looks like, or would look like; Stingily doesn't show us. Or maybe the cleanly parsed zones (carpet, shelves, dolls) of this exhibition are a model of equilibrium: these forms and textures don't touch and they don't fight. The trophies in their numbing numbers seem to invoke the legions of mediocre players in the game of life.

Diamond Stingily, 'Doing the Best I Can' <<https://wattis.org/view?id=647>> runs at CCA Wattis, San Francisco, until 6 April 2019.

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Main image: Diamond Stingily, Middle but in the Corner of 176th Place (detail), 2019. Courtesy: the artist, Queer Thoughts, New York, and Ramiken, New York; photograph: Johnna Arnold

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