



Virginia Lee Montgomery:  
*Cut Copy Sphinx*,  
2018, video,  
3 minutes,  
30 seconds.

# Virginia Lee Montgomery

by Wendy Vogel

SORCERY AND CORPORATE creativity don't make for the most intuitive pairing, but Virginia Lee Montgomery unites them in her persona of Business Witch. This presence haunts the artist's surreal videos, where, for instance, her Dewalt drill opens a portal to another dimension, and a three-foot-long ponytail from a blond wig (resembling Montgomery's own long tresses) bounces through a business hotel room.

Montgomery, who has an MFA in sculpture from Yale, lives in her home state of Texas. But she travels up to three weeks a month for her job as a graphic facilitator, diagramming the flow of ideas at focus groups and tech conferences. So it seems fitting that her art highlights disruptions in the smooth machinery of capitalism. This summer at Arsenal Contemporary in New York, Montgomery showed *Lincoln Looks at the Moon* (2017), a work from her "Glitch Coins" series comprising six misprinted pennies. On each coin, a sliver of the president's head appears beneath a bare copper planchette.

Montgomery's videos and readymades complement her sculptural practice, which is grounded in a feminist exploration of materials. Her recent work has focused on the witchy

aspects of myths and pseudoscience, reclaiming esoteric practices that once led to the persecution of women. In *Split Sword* (2017), a Y-shaped steel blade, evocative of medieval divining rods, leans against a black disk. (Such rods are still used to find oil in Texas.) A related video, *Water Witching* (2018), suggests causal connections between Y-rods, meteorological phenomena, and feminist protest. For this fall's annual exhibition of emerging artists at Socrates Sculpture Park in New York, Montgomery has created *Sword in the Sphinx*. The sculpture embeds an immovable steel sword in a garden sphinx featuring the bust of Madame de Pompadour, a brilliant intellectual and patron of the arts best known as the mistress of Louis XV. A video for the park's website dramatizes how an eighteenth-century sculpture of Madame de Pompadour as a sphinx, the authorship of which is disputed, has been copied for centuries in decor and knickknacks. A response to the #MeToo movement, Montgomery's work upends the masculine bravado of the tales of King Arthur and Oedipus. "In the myth, Oedipus kills the sphinx," Montgomery says, "but in my version she just keeps replicating." ○

COMING SOON  
Work by Virginia Lee Montgomery in the Socrates Annual, Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, Oct. 7, 2018–Mar. 10, 2019.

WENDY VOGEL is a critic, writer, and curator based in New York. See Contributors page.