

Criss Cross
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My work has been informed by Pfaff, Saret, Michaux, Turner, Twombly, and Goya, but beyond these are the films profoundly embedded in my psyche, with their poetic and evocative titles: *Scarlet Street*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Detour*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *The Big Heat*, *The Naked Kiss*. Endless childhood hours in front of the TV watching these movies molded me as surely as the works in my personal art-historical canon. The psychological undertow of my work was nurtured by the nightly vigils I spent viewing Barbara Stanwyck, Edward G. Robinson, Robert Ryan and their ilk in the shadowy, tortuous, sweetly toxic byways of film noir. Auteurs like Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock, Edgar Ulmer, and Samuel Fuller plumbed the horror of World War II and transformed it into scenarios of a deeply anxious and alienated America.

Film noir is a genre steeped in and born of ambiguity. As film historian Martin Rubin notes, film noir is "...perhaps most of all a general mood, evoked by such elements as sultry city nights, cool torch songs, walls striped by venetian-blind shadows, and streets splashed with rain and neon, evoking such feelings as hard-boiled cynicism, alienation, unfocused discontent, melancholy, and romantic yearning. The film-noir atmosphere is bluesy, shadowy, and predominantly urban."* These films have informed my work in a subtle but significant way, fueling an interest in things in flux, the syncopation of time, and psychic ambivalence. In noir, all is rarely what it seems. Although there is no direct one-to-one relationship between my installations and the films they're named after, their titles underscore the preoccupations and allusions simmering beneath the surface of my work.

It isn't the narrative that attracts me to these films, but rather the psychological complexity of the characters, the visual expression of dis-ease, the pungent dialogue, and the jazzy and visceral musical scores, escorting the stories to their often bleak conclusions. Shadows are all-important, creating the crucial subtext; lyrical black and white and, less frequently, jarring color expose the frailty or brutality of the characters and their plights and an ever-present confusion between what's real and what's not.

I'm still awed by the female stars in these movies, many of them playing smart, malicious perpetrators and sirens, like Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* or Jane Greer in *Out of the Past*. Even when they're victims, like the burned and scarred Gloria Grahame in *The Big Heat*, they're still feisty and complex, irreverent and caustic.

In this genre, things are always in shadowy flux; in my own work, I try to construct expanses of veiled tension, forces in opposition, jittery rhythms. Improvisation is an important part of my process and recalls the uncertainty and risk of fateful incidents in noir, in which a single action may completely change a character's life. Likewise, one decision can influence the trajectory of an entire installation. Layering translucent and reflective materials like mosquito netting and monofilament—materials that are there and

not there—that insinuate themselves into existing architecture, in some way parallels the drift of noir images into one’s consciousness: exceedingly present, yet ephemeral.

*Rubin, Martin. *Thrillers*. (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 96.