

Rachel Youens, "In Review – Sculpture at Flipside," Arts, Volume 1, Number 4, wburg.com home, Summer 2001

In Review – Sculpture at Flipside

SCULPTURE offers a chance to get a birds eye view of Williamsburg as a geo/aesthetic entity, at Flipside's gallery space where modestly sized works reflect seven artists thinking processes. Some sculptors who have flown the coop to show in Manhattan are returning to home ground, while others are expanding into vital territory. So this show offers a dialogue between margin and center in the politic sense, but more immediately brings together current avenues these artists have taken: a preoccupation with the dematerialization of sculpture along with a specificity of materials brought to the foreground as terms of stylistic signature.

An encounter with many objects here is like a minimalist surprise; they share a sense of discretion in terms of their relationship to the surrounding space. Long gone is the concept of sculpture as a force field that penetrates and dominates space reaching out to the viewer. Replacing it is the familiar concept of an anti/being inhabiting space, each one personal and to some extent eccentric. This moment may be the first time that sculpture has had to compete with on onslaught not only of proliferating objects, but the widespread precedence of the 'virtual'.

The effectiveness of Mary Carlson's work lies in part in its whispering insistence like a gadfly of art. She accomplishes this through the three-quarter or miniature scale of her coiled clay worms and snakes titled 'Smooosh' 'Stomp', and 'entanglement 1 and 2'. While each piece makes a simple understatement, they are all part of a thematic grouping; and even as they look distant and tossed off, the presence of each occupies an uncomfortable biting edge in one's mind. This introversion of epic attains a preciousness that even so threatens a balance, and is also her hallmark of expression.

A section from Elana Herzog's piece 'Untitled Elements e and f' reflects her increased preoccupation with the incorporeal. Stapled and frayed into the wall, its vestiges of deep red pattern are haunting. In moving away from her humorously absurd feminist narratives, Herzog's work has lost some of its energizing invention; yet this readymade, albeit one that is in the process being dismantled continues a dialogue about work, labor, and use and offers an ironic if melancholic sense of process.

Inserting your head inside Matt Freedman's 'Panorama', a crudely fashioned high gloss cylinder attached to the wall at eye level reveals a dioramic photomontage of the gallery space itself. In a maquette of a much larger piece currently at five Miles Gallery, Freedman returns to the very beginning of photography and comments on the appearance and disappearance of the individual in an objectified virtual world.

Drew Shiflett's pieces are assembled out of serial but handmade elements that resemble gears or the keys of a piano. Her source material is tramp and obsessional art, and they are built with compelling involvement as objects about the beauty of mechanical and transitory experiences, and are allegories that pay tribute to ingeniousness of an industrial past.

Julia Kunin's cast glass octopi apply the most technologically advanced technique in the show. Transparently pure and impeccably detailed. Each one is like nature – self sufficiently complete, yet they remind one of crystal balls. Organized in a floating mandala on the wall, they seem to need a more dialectic ground. Ana Linnemann's 'Dressed Spaces' are quite formal in their treatment of ingenious screened enclosures that zip up and lie playfully on the floor.

At once magical Janet Pihlblad's 'Windows' offer the most direct encounter with the idea of concealment yet the physicality of these works, moss or grass covered windows renders a weighted mass into which one can enter a dream state. Her card which quotes Henry David Thoreau alludes to the convergence of mind and eye as the road to seeing.

Collectively, the work here utilizes whimsy to make its points. It is as if humor combined with the love of making is the artists last stand in defense of our cultural island of art. Sculptors have a difficult task of making objects for reflection. To quote Baudrillard in his book titled 'The System of Objects': "the organized attempt to swamp our society with an endless stream of obligatory and infantile objects... where the death of the group is celebrated through the euphoric devouring of objects and gestures". He hopes he won't have the last word.

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