

Jill Conner, "CustomFit," Contemporary, Issue no. 52, 2003 NEW YORK: SMACK MELLON STUDIOS

Custom Fit

While boundaries can be transgressed to create new meanings, they cannot be transformed away entirely. The economic wonder of the last decade created the illusion that physical, social and intellectual limits can be moved and stretched to the point of non-existence. Architecture, for example, sought transparency through the combined use of large sections of glass and the construction of information systems which built surfaces. Smack Mellon's exhibition CustomFit features work by Gretchen Bennett, Ellen Driscoll, Rebecca Graves, Lisa Hein, Elana Herzog, **Drew Shiflett**, and Jean Shin and Brian Ripel, who each successfully articulate an original vision within the limits of a large circumscribed space, addressing the differences that exist within either cultural, structural or material parameters.

Elana Herzog's Civilization and its discontent consists of five commodified oriental carpets that were compulsively secured to the gallery wall with a staple-gun before being ripped into shreds. The remnants left for view address the oppression and destruction that Western civilization has wrought upon helpless countries within the Middle East. An oil painting by Rebecca Graves, titled Les Reves de Guerre, shows a similar use of the arabesque rug pattern in combination with Western army camouflage. The centre of this piece also portrays a blue wave cradling an empty boat as the faint portrait of a mosque emerges from the light orange background on the far right.

Moving from visual to structural metaphor, Ellen Driscoll's site-specific sculpture, titled Ghost, features a fabricated white truss that rests precariously upon a large wheel construction. Twelve white ribbons secure the artist's truss around two real ones above, transforming physical balance into a need that all built forms share. Sun Gutter by Lisa Hein toys with the verticality both within and outside the gallery space. A yellow funnel attached to a skylight poses as a filter for external light, while a white pipe extends horizontally across the interior space before ending in a low corner of the room. A tiny light shines brightly from the small opening, lending illusion and humour to Hein's work. Jean Shin and Brian Ripel address a similar theme in Glass Block. More straightforward and less complex, this artist duo stashed various yellow, green and blue glass bottles with a seven-foot-square opening, creating a vibrant stained-glass abstraction.

Gretchen Bennett's blvd explores the physicality of line. Assembled with stickers collected from city kiosks and buildings, this wall drawing stretches sporadically over a 28-foot-high wall and appears similar to a long plant vine. Although these graphic images are fragmented, small details like 'Iraq=Vietnam' appear and attribute a historical context to this temporary installation. **As a complement, Drew Shiflett presents three works that utilize materials such as paper, cheesecloth, polyester, and glue to highlight the tangible porous nature of the empty, blank surface. Sheet with Ribbing and Trough, for example, presents a thick layer of polyester stuffing roiled back to reveal a linear swath of small paper scraps.**

Spacious and largely uncluttered, CustomFit signifies a physical limitation while separating art from architecture to show how each, as a framework, can complement the other. The visual and physical tensions that arise throughout this show re-emphasize the dynamic nature of meaning. Although opposing boundaries can be pushed into the spaces that divide, the unique characteristics of each are essential for the other to succeed.

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