

frieze

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Eva Rothschild

303 GALLERY, NEW YORK, USA

An alchemist of sorts, Eva Rothschild has created many lushly mysterious two-dimensional pieces by weaving together found posters, photographs and computer-generated patterns. Her first New York solo show offered one of these barely decipherable images, an eerily futuristic rondo in black and fluorescent green titled *The Back of Your Head* (all works 2007), but it was dominated by a series of objects that radiated a tense, unsettling energy. Every bit as hybrid as the woven-paper works, these morphologically shape-shifting sculptures incorporated organic and inorganic materials, including leather, Perspex, wood, tiles and aluminium; some of them combined angular with sinuous forms. Flexible or hanging elements recalled post-Minimalism, while sleek quasi-geometric structures hinted at Minimalist DNA. Several evoked the trappings of various ideologies, countercultures and religions, including New Age and the occult.

Some emitted a disturbing emotionalism, including two dramatic, black-lacquered works: *Ordinary Me* and *Magical You*, a horizontal, diamond-shaped wall piece with bars extending from its sides and tangling in the centre, and *Blackout*, an arrangement of three triangles pointing upwards: one open and two solid with hexagonal cut-outs, and a pair of hexagons, like crystals spilling from a pyramid. Other objects were humorous in a way that recalled some of Eva Hesse's work, although they radically depart from Hesse's anxious Modernism with their glossy

elegance, whiff of Gothic mystification and placing of spiritual and emotional angst in quotation marks. Hesse, of course, strove for her sculptures to offer no more than what was materially present, whereas Rothschild is preoccupied with precisely the opposite: her work explores how objects acquire meanings that are extraneous to the objects' material reality. In an interview with Andrea Tarsia of the Whitechapel Art Gallery she remarked, 'I'm interested in the ways of looking that go with concepts of faith and in how things are invested with a power above and beyond their materiality, the transference of spirituality onto objects'.

A spectral need to believe seems literally to hold aloft *White Wedding*, whose title perhaps alludes to the eponymous Billy Idol song, with its sepulchral tones and lyrics dripping with sarcasm and disillusionment. A hula-hoop-like ring wrapped in braided black and white leather from which long fringes spill onto the floor, it appears to be suspended in mid-air. It may evoke the ancient concept of a 'cosmic marriage' between the earthly and the terrestrial, but its title hints that such a union would be essentially hollow; here, if opposites come together, it is in a vaguely ominous shotgun wedding. This work suggests symbolism ascribed to circles in various religious and art-historical traditions, including Native American art, circles as emblems of totality, unity, heaven, perfection – or, sometimes, nothingness. Formally, this enigmatic show-stopper echoes a pivotal Hesse work, *Untitled* (1965), in which she dangled a length of painted and cord-covered hose from a ring wrapped with cord and painted with enamel. But *White Wedding* embraces the polish, neatness and beauty that Hesse eschewed in pursuit of the awkward, comical and absurd.

Elegance, narrative, decorativeness, anthropomorphism – these bugaboos of much 1960s and '70s art all come into play in Rothschild's objects. At times her work calls to mind Michael Fried's musings on the latter in his 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood'. He wrote that 'the apparent hollowness of most literalist work – the quality of having an inside – is almost blatantly anthropomorphic. It is, as numerous commentators

have remarked approvingly, as though the work in question has an inner, even secret life.' This once-hidden anthropomorphism, real or imagined, seems to burst out of the sleek surfaces of many of Rothschild's pieces – here most notably in *All for You*, which includes a giant shape, lumpy as a rotten apple, covered in slick-black, shard-like tiles. Suggesting a bulbous, sagging head, it connects to an arc of black, green-and-brown striped tubing ending in a fork that rests delicately on the floor like two pathetic legs. The misshapen form telegraphs abjection – as does the title – though the extreme listlessness seems somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Other titles suggest self-abnegation, such as *Ordinary Me* and *Magical You or Kindness*, seeming to allude to self-effacement as an ingredient of belief (whether for good or ill doesn't seem to be the issue).

Twins comprises an open pedestal supporting – or being invaded by – tangled tubing. In *Kindness* a more orderly looping form rests on a pedestal. These, along with other works – such as the black-lacquered pieces, which conjure up a Kenneth Anger-style magick – hinted at a privileging of the imagination and emphasis on metamorphosis, as though the Romantic tradition were yet another belief system to be mined.

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