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Rachel Harrison, *Perth Amboy*, 2001.
photo : Chris Kendall, courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

reviews

Rachel Harrison, *Consider the Lobster*

CCS Bard Hessel Museum, New York, June 27–December 20, 2009

The point is that making a point is futile. Rachel Harrison's work deliberately and stubbornly resists interpretation.

Harrison's exhibition at Bard is both a survey of her practice to date, including remakes of previous large-scale installations, and a collaboration with six other artists to curate works from the Hessel Collection. Highly idiosyncratic and ironic, Harrison's work lends itself more to description than conclusion—uncanny, staged, improvisational, comic, inconclusive—and does not assume any singular adjective long enough to become definitively characteristic. Harrison's unruly sculptural forms, coated in a signature pearlescent paint, often become platforms for a miscellany of photographs, video monitors, or found objects planted seemingly casually on its surface, challenging viewers to connect disparate, if not irresolvable, clues.

The exhibition starts before you enter the gallery doors. An oversized flag bearing an image of a bald eagle flies majestically at the end of the laneway, *Eagle* (2009), its ambiguous message simultaneously comic and patriotic. Opposite, a lumpy Franz West sculpture sits on the front lawn, its two protrusions jutting upright from the main body. Harrison adorns them with enormous wigs, *Wigs for West* (2009), one a brunette mullet, the other a jaunty, braided blonde, in a simple, irreverent gesture that renders the original West comic. Anything can be a pedestal; anything can be transformed through a deft sleight-of-hand.

Harrison's West-in-drag resonates with her tactics of display and juxtaposition throughout the exhibition. She moves between sculpture, photography, video and installation with relative ease, precision and naughty wit.

Harrison resigns the problematic of the modern museum to the function of a stage set. The walls become part of the ready-made material in the works, the sculptural forms are highly choreographed and theatrical, and the work is both calculated and unresolved. *Take Perth Amboy* (2001) for example. A labyrinth of upright corrugated cardboard dividers hides an array of incongruous forms and sculptural tableaux: a bust of Marilyn Monroe in a filing box on a dolly with metal castors, a wheelchair-bound Barbie doll faces a photograph of a cinematic green screen, a large pile of drinking straws. In *Car Stereo Parkway* (2005), multicoloured foil streamers that adorn used car lots are suspended diagonally through the space, connecting sculptural assemblages of various found objects, all placed before projected vintage video footage of 80s glam rock band KISS in concert, whose surreal, trashy theatrics operate on a similar register to the surrounding installation.

Harrison's work operates as a form of resistance; resistance to a culture that generally privileges the singular, the complete, the product, etc., over its opposite. This defiance of easy interpretation in Harrison's work, its incongruity, along with the clash of signifiers, are simultaneously challenging and pleasurable, disconcerting and heterotopic.