

Marcelle Alix

galerie

**4 rue Jouye-Rouve
75020 Paris
France**

**t +33 (0)9 50 04 16 80
f +33 (0)9 55 04 16 80
demain@marcellealix.com
www.marcellealix.com**



**Liz Magor
Press**

Marcelle Alix
SARL au capital de 10000€
SIRET 518 370 192 00016
NAF 4778C

R.C.S. Paris 518 370 192
TVA FR89518370192



Liz Magor
Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto
Oct. 29 — Dec. 5, 2015
by Lena Suksi

Liz Magor recently showed five new sculptures (all produced in 2015) at Susan Hobbs Gallery. In *Speckled Veil*, a stuffed blue bird sleeps in a glove. The posed fingers appear tenderly possessive, closing gently around the bird's throat and chest, while the bird's head remains animated as its live self would. It angles into the world through the spotted cellophane that gives the work its name. This evocative glove, though, is as eerily unoccupied as the bird's body, its fingertips collapsing into the softness of shed clothes. Upstairs, the glove in *Pink Shimmer* makes this still more clear, with fingers limp along their length, and the bird that it supports in a death pose, breast to the sky.

Magor's work gets talked about in terms of entropy and detritus, but the sculptures on display here mark the moment between disposal and its opposite: offering. Casts of cardboard boxes acting like plinths have come up from the basement and been altered by her in a way not unlike what the weather does when we leave things on the street. So, the boxes look salted and wet, ready for the garbage collector. However, the levitation of their potential contents – *on* them, rather than *in* them – takes us again to that delightful act of display in order to give away. Giving is the best outcome of shedding. We hope that others will take what we no longer need. The glove in *Speckled Veil* could be catching what it's catching to release it.

Indeed, the central objects of these sculptures are still things that we expect to see as trash. Ornamental taxidermy is, like pressed flowers, a typically clumsy Victorian way of commemorating nature. The way that the stuffed dog topping *Glow Pet* has been unevenly painted is intriguing, like the teen impulse to spray-paint our stuff out of boredom with its stubborn persistence as our bodies change. However, these works suggest that the decision to transform something comes as much out of hope for an object's future as the desire to dismissively sabotage it.

The sculptures refer still more strongly to giving and sharing through the wrapping materials used in each one: bubble wrap resting gracefully under the toy dog of *Glow Pet*, yellow cellophane generating reflected light around *Gold Box*. More specifically, these materials lend the works movement. Formally, in the lovely way that they offer light and potential sound to the other, calcified components. Otherwise, in that gift wrap and packing material is suggested the passage of our things between destinations and hands. They also present the event of covering and uncovering. Without their rustling skins, the stacked birds, gloves, toys and their boxes might feel consigned to the dump, the curb, or the specimen cabinet. With them, they circulate through those and other places.

The cellophane that, again, gives the bird works their names – *Speckled Veil*, *Pink Shimmer*, *Gold Box* – does another sensitive thing. In her artist talk upon reception of the Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the Art Gallery of Ontario this past October, Magor spoke tenderly about wanting intimacy with the world in an impossible way. She described wanting to feel her pillow closer to her head than it could be, and wanting to absorb all the rain that fell in Prince Rupert, BC, and how her practice copes with these impossible desires. Sensitive cellophane is radiant and seductive, but it is also a slippery obstacle. The bubble wrap perched beneath *Glow Pet*'s little bum cuts it off entirely from its grounding support. Sensible knowledge is realized through the same material as protective distance, like how our skin holds our organs in while it sends them nervous signals. The lovely transparencies invite the inspection of the boundaries of our senses at the same time as they enforce them. The satisfaction of pinching bubble wrap still gives way to two seamed plastic surfaces. Feeling, rather than dissolving, limits us. At the same time, it is a condition of survival.

This thwarted investigation of the stuff of our world looms in Magor's long body of work: casts of tree trunks stuffed with unlikely secrets, blankets repaired and folded. For her, nothing can be altogether handled, much as we might inspect it. What is unknown is an inevitable frustration. That she achieves experience of resistance in an expertly crafted way



is poetic. That she works through our mundane surroundings reminds me of more of the close afternoon light of an enigmatic short story. Alice Munro writes experience through minor details, describing, for instance, in “Deep-Holes” (2008), a landscape of champagne bottles, picnic blankets and cellars that nervously supports the untethering of a family. Ultimately, these objects are not catalysts but settings for our experience, advancing and receding in the way of weather and dust. Munro and Magor might agree that our efforts to solve our lives with signs or objects are futile, but that we cannot entirely neglect their delicate impacts. In 2011, Magor produced works called *Marks* for the City Centre Library in Surrey, BC: big clay ottomans with barely legible evidence of relaxing bodies impressed into their surfaces. This treatment of trace persists in her new sculptures, allowing the effects of the world and ourselves on one another while acknowledging that we get up, that we move on.

This observation is not sentimental. The *Pets*' noses are inches from the wall they are mounted on, diverting us from nostalgia. The birds do not invite us into the wilderness. Everything here has flown its obvious coop and past uses get confused by the closeness of the inspection Magor's work demands. We want to angle our heads, like the bird in *Speckled Veil*, near to the wall to measure the barely present distance between it and *Glow Pet*'s nose. Between disposal and offering, taking stock and imagining new purpose, there is fleeting space in this work for our solitude and innocence.

Lena Suksi attended OCADU. She writes poetry in Toronto.



Liz Magor, *Glow Pet*, 2015
PHOTO: TONI HAFKENSCHIED;
IMAGE COURTESY OF SUSAN
HOBBS GALLERY

cmagazine 129

Liz Magor, *Speckled Veil*,
2015 (detail)
PHOTO: TONI HAFKENSCHIED;
IMAGE COURTESY OF SUSAN
HOBBS GALLERY





LIZ Magor

Out here, on the northwestern coast of North America it wasn't easy to be influenced by art during the second half of the 20th century. With an emphasis on practicality and resource exploitation, the incumbent, pioneer culture was resistant to "imported" ideas and did a good job of blocking and ridiculing "poetic" tendencies. As a result we had to be nimble to pick up the "new."

We had to travel, go to talks, convene conferences and generally do a lot of hanging out, gleaning intelligence from friends and putting things together in bits and pieces. Context made the difference in determining what was worthwhile: where were you when you heard or saw something? What was the occasion? Who else was there? What did they say? What were you working on? The flow was unregulated. You didn't turn it on in the privacy of your own space and you could never summon exactly what you wanted when you wanted it. Instead, you worked with whatever fell into your path.

The inefficiency of this form of growth was part of its power. Often it was hard to follow up on stimulating new information. No library had the books we wanted to read and few galleries brought in the things we wanted to see, so when the stars aligned and you were able to apprehend a sculpture or a book or a film that you had only heard about until that moment, the event was stoked by such intense longing for experience that perforce, it would inevitably become an "influence." As a result, my influences are better described as random moments, rather than particular artists, having no obvious connection to one another but each occurring as a fortuitous encounter, arriving, as I needed them and providing guidance as to how I might proceed. These moments are thicker in number at the beginning when I had lots of questions. But they still happen.

A partial list of influences:

- The image of the ocean on a picture postcard pinned to the far wall in an unidentified space, present in the last frames of Micheal Snow's film *Wavelength*, 1968.
- The exhibition "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" curated by Pontus Hulten for the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1968.
- Betty Goodwin's "Tarpaulin" works (1972-1974).
- Advice for one's personal life delivered by Agnes Martin at the Vancouver Art Gallery in the early 1970's. She instructed that a serious artist should have no companions, not even pets!
- The Complete Stories of Franz Kafka, published in 1971.
- A huge lump of tallow (Joseph Beuys) in the foyer of Museum Monchengladbach, mid-'70s, presented with no attribution or explanation.
- A small photograph of a white dress, with a pattern painted on it, hanging from a tree; collaboration between Robert Gober and Christopher Wool, 1988.
- Rosemarie Trockel's cots for visitors at the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, 1999.
- Pina Bausch's piece, *Kontakthof*, as seen in Wim Wender's 3D film *Pina*, 2011.

to be continued...

Liz Magor is an artist who lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. Her work was recently shown at Triangle France and Peephole, Milan. Upcoming exhibitions include an extended survey exhibition at Musée d'Art Contemporain Montréal; an exhibition of recent work at Credac d'Ivry, France; and a two-person show, with Alisa Baremboym, at Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Scotland. A recent publication regarding her work is *The Blue One Comes in Black* co-published by Triangle France and Mousse Publishing, 2015, editor Celine Kopp.

In questo luogo sulla costa nord-occidentale del Nord America, non è stato facile coltivare il mio interesse per l'arte durante la seconda metà del Ventesimo secolo. Ponendo l'enfasi sulla praticità e sullo sfruttamento delle risorse, la cultura pionieristica dominante ha opposto una forte resistenza alle idee d'esportazione, rifiutando e ridicolizzando ogni tendenza "romantica". Di conseguenza, siamo stati costretti a diventare agili nel cogliere tutte le novità. Abbiamo dovuto viaggiare, partecipare a incontri, organizzare conferenze e, in generale, conoscere tantissime persone, cercando di carpire le idee dagli amici e mettendole insieme a spizzichi e bocconi. Il contesto faceva la differenza nel determinare ciò che era importante: dove eravate quando avete sentito o visto questa cosa? In che occasione l'avete sentita? Chi altro c'era? Cosa han detto? A cosa stavate lavorando? Il flusso non era regolare, non potevi raccogliere le informazioni che volevi quando volevi. Al contrario, finivi per lavorare con qualsiasi cosa ti capitasse a tiro.

L'inefficienza di questo modello di crescita era parte della sua forza. Spesso era difficile proseguire. Nessuna libreria aveva i libri che volevamo e solo qualche galleria presentava le cose che ci piacevano, quindi quando per un caso fortuito eri in grado di vedere una scultura o un libro o un film di cui, fino a quel momento, avevi solo sentito parlare, quell'evento era alimentato da un desiderio talmente intenso che, per forza di cose, sarebbe diventato un'"influenza". Di conseguenza, le mie influenze si possono riassumere in momenti casuali, senza nessuna connessione ovvia tra loro. Sono incontri fortuiti che avvenivano quando ne avevo bisogno e mi fornivano indicazioni su come procedere. Questi momenti erano più frequenti all'inizio, quando avevo tante domande, ma accadono ancora.

Una lista parziale d'influenze...

- Una fotografia dell'oceano su una cartolina illustrata affissa alla parete di fondo in uno spazio sconosciuto, presente negli ultimi fotogrammi del film di Micheal Snow *Wavelength* del 1968.
- La mostra "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" curata da Pontus Hulten per il Museum of Modern Art di New York nel 1968.
- La serie "Tarpaulin" di Betty Goodwin (1970 circa).
- Un consiglio per la vita privata dell'artista impartito da Agnes Martin nei primi anni '70 alla Vancouver Art Gallery. Ci ha insegnato che un artista serio non dovrebbe avere compagni, neanche animali domestici!
- *Tutti i racconti* di Franz Kafka, pubblicato nel 1971.
- Un enorme blocco di sego (Joseph Beuys) nel foyer del Museo Mönchengladbach, a metà degli anni '70, presentato senza attribuzione né spiegazione.
- Una piccola fotografia di un abito bianco, con un pattern dipinto a mano, appeso a un albero; una collaborazione tra Robert Gober e Christopher Wool (1988).
- Le brande di Rosemarie Trockel per i visitatori del padiglione tedesco della Biennale di Venezia del 1999.
- *Kontakthof*, una performance di Pina Bausch inclusa nel film 3D *Pina* di Wim Wenders (2011).

continua...



115

Betty Goodwin, *Tarpaulin n° 2*, 1974-1975.
Courtesy: Collection Lavalin du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Photo: Richard-Max Tremblay



Rosemarie Trockel, installation view at La Biennale di Venezia, German Pavillion, 1999 (film still). © Rosemarie Trockel by SIAE, Rome, 2016. Courtesy: Sprüth Magers, Berlin / London / Los Angeles



Robert Gober and Christopher Wool, *Untitled*, 1988.
© Robert Gober and Christopher Wool. Courtesy: the artists; Luhring Augustine, New York / Bushwick; Matthew Marks Gallery, New York / Los Angeles



Michael Snow, *Wavelength* (still) 1966.
Courtesy: the artist and LUX, London



Liz Magor, *Pearl Pet*, 2015. Courtesy: Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid



Liz Magor, *Gold Box*, 2015. Courtesy: Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid



Liz Magor, *Companion*, 2015.
Courtesy: Marcelle Alix, Paris

<http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=1374>



SOFT YELLOW

Polymerized gypsu, plastic,
stuffed bird
23 x 30 x 12 cm
2015



LIZ MAGOR

SOFT YELLOW

At first glance it looks like nothing more than a little gray cardboard box, a butter yellow glove, a sleeping sparrow, and a thin clear case. But in actuality, the box and glove are perfect replicas sculpted by the artist, the bird is stuffed, and the case is a sheet of plastic wrap. In defiance of appearances, Liz Magor (Canadian artist born in 1948), through her unique associations and elegant production, manages to imbue inert elements with a quiver of life that escapes any

absolute certainty or comforting sense of possession. As in her previous works, which use found dresses and stoles folded and presented as though fresh from the dry cleaner, nothing is what it seems in Liz Magor's work: the pleated and pressed materials are not offered to the viewer as apparel ready to be tailored to their personal tastes. Enveloping each object is a form of thought, whose folds necessarily resist any excessively superficial approach to understanding. Moving from the

human to the object, and from the object to ideas and vice versa, Magor's elegantly simple works stir up a subtle feeling of the uncanny, which marks all of her career in Canada and bears a signal relevance to Europe today.

CÉDRIC AURELLE



THESE ARE NOT IDEAS; THESE ARE THINGS: A CONVERSATION WITH LIZ MAGOR

BY SKY GOODEN • FEATURES • NOVEMBER 13, 2015



Liz Magor, "Being This (Argence)," 2012. Image courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery.



Liz Magor, "Siberian Husky," 1990. Image courtesy of Ydessa Hendeles.

Liz Magor claims her “space between the mould and the cast.” It’s a pronouncement reified by thirty years of installation and sculpture that reads tentatively, delicately, inscrutably, and sometimes misleadingly. In person, though, Magor is totally resolved. She communicates an uncanny clarity and determinacy, a dedicated idea of her practice, revealing nothing of the obfuscation or ambivalence that her work sometimes conveys. When she speaks, she imparts fully-realized meditations, as though threaded from a safe in her chest where she keeps them coolly spooled. Magor is slow and assured and wholly articulate. She insists on saying things simply. Indeed, on the occasion of her 2014 Iskovitz Prize exhibition at the AGO, *Surrender*, we walk through her spare show, peopled by the appearance of a sleeping Husky (*Siberian Husky*, 1990) and crowded with her famed *One Bedroom Apartment* (1996), and during this tour she establishes her markers of import by a list of exclusions. Among these are nostalgia (she has no use for it), home (it’s not a painful notion, just “work”), and conceptualism (“I’m totally against ideas. Ideas are a dime a dozen”). Magor is one of the most articulate and poetic thinkers I’ve had the pleasure of interviewing, though I’m not sure her cogency goes reflected in the words below, as so much of it flowed from inflection. I felt, let it be said, completely convinced that the indeterminacy of her work stems from me (from us?) than anything else.

Looking at *One Bedroom Apartment*, with its collection of boxes and wrapped furniture, I’m made to wonder about your relationship to the process of moving. For a lot of people it’s considered a traumatic event ...

I’m with you on that. [Laughs] So that’s the nerve I’m interested in [touching]: why would moving be so bad? Often you’re moving to a better place. Often the move is voluntary (it’s a tragedy if it’s not voluntary, let’s put it that way). Often you’re moving to another city, moving in with your boyfriend. However, in the process of going towards that goal, whatever we’ve chosen, we have to throw all our stuff in the air, and it’s painful. Because that stuff is supposed to be our pacifiers. So when they’re disrupted, it’s not that pleasant. Then the recognition that all that stuff you



bought for pleasure – even the buying is pleasurable – it’s all just a great big lead boot. You get to the truth of it when you move. I don’t like getting to the truth of it. [Laughs]

I think about your work, especially this one, in its relationship to home, and the realization that you can’t get home again. James Agee articulates this in *A Death in the Family*, that you can try to get home again, that it’s good to try, but you’ll never get all the way home again. Unless you have a little child of your own ... he gets into a familial aspect of trying to turn the corner on your own pain by creating a home for someone else. What is home for you? Is it a painful idea? No, just that it’s work all the time. You have to maintain the center, even though the center is moving. By the center I mean, you might call it home. [Agee’s] probably referring to the idea you form as a child. And then you’re kind of cast out of paradise — you have to pay your own rent, and it’s never the same again. But I don’t lament that; I’m used to that. It’s part of my human job to feel familiar in the world outside of my parents’ house. And for me, that’s a long time ago. I remember ... the thing I called normal? – I was never at a normal place again. Normal doesn’t really exist, except for children. So it’s not painful; it’s normal to be abnormal, normal to be disrupted all the time. This isn’t trauma.

I’m sort of interested in the below-the-radar traumas, which are more like irritants, small anxieties. Things are always breaking. You drop things on your clothes. There’s a general entropy and destruction going on in your life. It’s not like your roof is caving in, but there’s a lot of stuff that you are responsible for, and it fails. A constant humiliation. The failure of it.

Let’s talk a bit about media. There’s a moment in a [frieze review](#) of your work where the author picked up on how a lot of artists would, if they were trying to articulate similar fallibilities and insecurities, do it through performance or the body or, anyway, less tangible media than what you’re electing to use. How do you perceive this comment? How do you account for your choice of such solid media in communicating such instability?

I think my choice is consistent with the subject, in the sense that if my subject is the relationship I have, including my body and my mind, with the inanimate or the material, it is this soft, amorphous thing called *me* bumping up against this hard, intransigent, uncooperative thing called *hard material*. It’s not me bumping into the movies, or TV, because they’re mutable and manageable. These things are not. They don’t listen, they don’t cooperate. They were created to sit still, and be at my service. That sofa [*gestures across the room to One Bedroom Apartment*] is my servant. It’s not my fantasy. So when I think of media that is more mobile, it’s equivalent to the imagination; whereas that’s equivalent to my body. Because my body is also not that responsive to my desires. I can’t make it the shape I want. If it’s sick I can’t heal it, exactly. I like the intransigence of this.

So my processes are difficult. I’m not conceptual. I don’t say, “oh I have this great idea.” I say, “oh, I have this material with this characteristic. I’m going to explore the characteristic and see what’s unseen so far in its behavior.” I use the casting material a lot because it flows; it’s liquid at one point. And it will flow into any shape I provide, and it will mime that shape. These are not ideas; these are things. I’m totally against ideas. Ideas are a dime a dozen. [Laughs]

You said in a talk at FIAC that you wanted to empower the idea of zero. There’s a nice elusiveness to that. What did you mean?

If I create a longing for a state or a life I would like to have, or things I would like to touch or be with ... if I am engaged in that longing incessantly or thoroughly, I turn them into idols, idols for things I don’t even have. And while I’m doing that I’m probably sitting in a chair that I do have. My bum is on it. [Laughs] So I think, “what if I flip it and idolize the things that I do have, and I look at them so hard that they become important?” Because I give them my full attention? So the



extreme version of that would be to say nothing is everything; zero, dust is important. I can do that for a few moments [at a time]. I can't do it forever, I'm not a Buddhist. But for a moment. And as an artist I want to go for those things that have fallen down, and been discarded, and find in them the allure they had when they were first picked up.

The relevant term for your projected or perceived allocation of meaning in a used, even historic object, might be aura. Is that a term you think about?

Aura is – it comes directly from us. There is some phenomenology in the idea of aura, so there is some material reality in aura. So aura's pretty good. [Laughs] Yeah, I'm interested. But I also would go into the auratic space and –

Muck around? –

Yeah, muck around. I would go in and drill a hole in it and say, “what are you made of?” [Laughs] So I don't stay in that dream space. I want both. I want that dream to be about what is around me now, in every moment. That's why I don't really deal with pop culture. I'm not doing rifts on TV shows or music because it's already quite famous.

It doesn't need you.

Yeah, it doesn't need me. It's redundant, my efforts are wasted there.

You have some objects here that make me think of my mother, and her mother, though. They're already becoming signifiers.

Yeah, they're becoming signifiers. It's like when you're driving on the highway and those lights are coming toward you: they're like signifiers. And then it passes you and you see what kind of car it is and who's in there. Those things, I don't know if they're receding or advancing. They might be receding for someone your age because they're coming out of your grandmother's view and into yours. But to her, they might be going back. She probably doesn't want to see them again, while they're exotic for you.

That's an interesting way to invert the common narrative of nostalgia.

Yeah, everyone's in a different place when it comes to the trajectory of their intersection with the things in this room. So I don't have a meaning for them, exactly. I just want them to be here with some degree of charm that I know is latent in them. So I pull up the charm with a bit of sparkle. And then often people say [my work is like] I've cleaned up after a party. I didn't mean to do it that way, like the scene after a party. I don't have moral or narrative or fixed [meaning].

Right. The artist I associate with you, however adjacently, is Iris Häussler. And yet she's stringing a narrative through, or certainly laying the narrative crumbs for us, in a way you're really not.

Yeah, I just truncate it. I just say, “it's an excerpt, one frame out of a film.” Maybe I can imagine a beginning and an end, but it would be different for everybody.

Do you have an instinct around that? A water's edge that you bring things to, narratively, but know not to go beyond?

I'll try. Like sometimes I let it go quite far along – like probably the dog there [*Siberian Husky*, 1990] is quite far along, narratively, because it's quite articulated. I call him a Siberian Husky, for instance. There's a lot of things where I play with sentiment and mortality. I get as close as I can to the brink of “suck,” and then sometimes I fall in. But I'm not cynical, I'm not ironic; I don't want



to be detached. I don't want to be afraid of attachment even though it's full of hazard and ... it's expensive. To get stuff to –

Oh you mean it's expensive literally! Not just in the sense of emotionally taxing ...

No! I mean literally. I mean you have to have a lot of privilege to be attached to things. Look at the migrants, they can't even carry a bag. If they want to keep going they have to drop, and drop, and drop.

***Being This* (2012) feels different – it's more directional, more citational.**

I was trying something. It came after the blankets. With the blankets I was trying to identify them through their affiliation, their label, and their material. So if they say, "all wool," you think to yourself, "okay, that's pretty good." And if they say, "made in Scotland," you go, "oh hey, *that's* pretty good!" So in the hugeness of the things that come floating towards us we have to do some quick sorting. And so even though we don't want to look at labels, we do; we do that probably for each other, too [label and sort each other]. So I started looking at labels. I go to Value Village, it's like my archive for the world. I started finding things that had labels of stores that were in Vancouver when I was fourteen – that was when I started my retail experience. I would start finding these and then keep the garment and the label; and I knew that all those stores had disappeared in Vancouver.

There's this constant change, something you don't realize until you find a record or a photograph that reminds me how momentous and constant the change is. I started making these as though they accepted that change. Each one of them is incoherent and has no center. Even though it's wanting to say, [as the work points to its own label with a gloved finger], "I'm something. I hope I'm something." [Laughs] So with all that turmoil – not just human but material turmoil, the churning of stuff is enormous.

I'm noticing the title of the exhibition, *Surrender*, on one of these labels. What's the significance of this show's title?

Titles are hard; you can see they're fairly literal. I do them mostly just to identify things [for myself]. I don't want the titles to tell you how to view, though. But it does seem that all the works have some relationship to the inevitable, inexorable deal that you have to make with the material world, and that you can't boss it around. And that at some point it might be that our things give the narrative to our life, as opposed to us giving the narrative to theirs. The relationship might not be as unequal as we think it is. I surrender to that.

<http://momus.ca/these-are-not-ideas-these-are-things-a-conversation-with-liz-magor/>



VOIR + CLAIR

Sept artistes à découvrir à la FIAC 2015

Magali Lesauvage • 22 octobre 2015

Partager

Twitter

Partager

Cent soixante-quinze exposants, 1733 artistes, plusieurs milliers d'œuvres : autant dire qu'opérer un choix à la FIAC relève de la plus grande subjectivité. On avait donc choisi de concentrer notre regard de prédateur esthétique autour de critères précis : des artistes dont le nom commence à émerger ça et là (mais pas forcément très très jeunes), et plutôt représentés par des galeries françaises (histoire d'avoir plus de chance de les revoir par la suite). On n'avait pas mentalement coché la case « sexe féminin », et pourtant sur les sept artistes dont on a griffonné le nom sur notre dépliant, cinq sont des femmes... et c'est peut-être tant mieux.

EXPOSITIONS À LA UNE



1 WARHOL

02/10/2015 > 07/02/2016
Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM) - PARIS

2 PICASSO MANIA

07/10/2015 > 29/02/2016
Galeries nationales du Grand Palais - PARIS

3 FANTASTIQUE ! L'ESTAMPE VISIONNAIRE

01/10/2015 > 17/01/2016
Petit Palais - PARIS

LIZ MAGOR (galerie [Marcelle Alix](#), Paris)

Elle est, de loin, l'artiste la plus âgée de notre sélection. À soixante-sept, la Canadienne de Winnipeg Liz Magor n'en impose pas moins un vent de fraîcheur par sa pratique, dont elle dit qu'elle est destinée à « réhabiliter le zéro ». Ses sculptures et assemblages, encore peu montrés en France, prélèvent et empaquettent les objets du quotidien avec amour. Une pratique sensible qui touche.



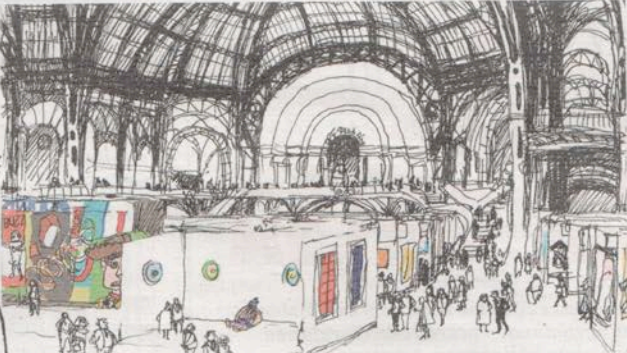
Liz Magor, *Companion*, 2015, courtesy galerie Marcelle Alix, Paris.

LA FIAC POUR LES NULS

VISITE GUIDÉE AVEC
JEAN-MICHEL, ART
ADVISOR, DE LA
FOIRE INTERNA-
TIONALE D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN,
QUI S'EST TENUE
AU GRAND PALAIS
À PARIS, DU 21
AU 25 OCTOBRE.

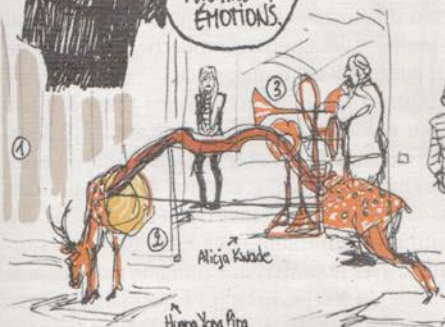


ACHETER UNE
OEUVRE D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN
C'EST SE PAYER
UNE ÉMOTION,
POSSEDER UNE
MACHINE À
ÉMOTIONS.



JM, 50 ANS, PANTALON À PINCES ET
MOCASSINS, EST DEVENU CONSEILLER
EN ACHAT D'OEUVRES D'ART CONTEM.

POURIN APRÈS AVOIR FAIT FORTUNE
DANS LA FINANCE.



Alicja Kande



Anish Kapoor

« LE PARFAIT STAND FIAC.
CELUI DE LA GALERIE KAMEL
MENKOUR. ① BUREN, DAR-
TISTE HISTORIQUE ② LE DAHM
COUPE EN 2, SPECIAL PHOTO DE
PRESSE, UN ARTISTE CHINOIS
POUR MONTRER QU'ON EST
"GLOBAL" ③ UNE OEUVRE
PLUS COMPLEXE, LES
TROMBOINES, ET ④ UN KAPOOR
HUIRIST POUR TON SELFIE-
À-LA-FIAC. »



ÇA *
FONCTIONNE

« CHI HARU SHIOTA.
DES FILS POUR CARAC-
TÉRISER LA VIE AUTOUR
DES OBJETS, COMME ICI
DES CLÉS. TRÈS POÉTIQUE. »

« LA REPRO D'UN
ROTHKO AGRANDIE,
ULTRA PIXELLISÉE,
PLUS AUCUNE ÉMO-
TION. UNE TOILE
MONOCHROMIQUE
FAUSSEMENT CON-
CEPTUELLE POUR
APPART AIRBNB! »



Mark Flood



Liz Magor

« C'EST INTRIGANT, AMUSANT.
TU PEUX Y VOIR CE QUE
TU VEUX. J'AIME
L'UTILISATION
D'OBJET DU QVO.
TIDEN. UNE TROU
VAILLE DANS
UN GRE-
NIER DE
SOUVENIRS. »



« GEORG BASELITZ. À LA FOIS UNE
IMPRESSION DE LÉGÈRETÉ DANS LA
FORME ET DE PUISSANCE DANS
LA MATIÈRE COMME DU BOIS
MASSIF. J'AIME AUSSI BEAU-
COUP SES PEINTURES. »



ÇA MANQUAIT
DE BITES, NON ?

CHRISTEL



Surrender: Liz Magor AGO exhibit a sincere art of juxtapositions

JAMES ADAMS

The Globe and Mail

Published Monday, Aug. 31, 2015 3:14PM EDT

Last updated Monday, Aug. 31, 2015 3:15PM EDT

Comments



AA

“Stuffy” is what you could call Surrender, the Liz Magor exhibition that opened on the weekend at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Stuffy not in the sense of being straitlaced, but in the sense of being full of stuff – boxes, blankets, garments, coverings, containers, materials “real” and “synthetic.”

Winnipeg-born, Vancouver-based Magor, at 67, is getting the solo showcase as part of her winning the \$50,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize last year for outstanding lifetime contributions to Canadian art.

Surrender’s artful juxtapositions – the exhibition is devoted mostly to sculpture and installation work – are distinguished by a sincerity and rigour rooted more in the nitty-gritty of art-making than any act of intellection (although Magor gives you plenty to think about regarding identity, history and memory). Through Nov. 29 in Toronto.

James Adams

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/surrender-liz-magor-ago-exhibit-a-sincere-art-of-juxtapositions/article26166090/>



frieze

No Fear, No Shame, No Confusion

Triangle France, Marseille, France

In a recent talk at FIAC, Canadian artist Liz Magor pointed out that her practice is about empowering the zero. The exhibition 'No Fear, No Shame, No Confusion', her first solo show in Europe, which opened at Triangle France in Marseille in October, can be read in this key, as an infinite labour of love where making art is making space for the ordinary, shaky and uncertain. This exhibition, curated by Céline Kopp, features a selection of the artist's works from the 1970s to today, and engages Magor's practice in a compelling conversation with works by three younger artists: Jean-Marie Appriou, Andrea Büttner and Laure Prouvost.

Since the early '70s, Magor has produced photographic works and sculptures that question the unstable character of objects, ideas and human beings. Instead of opting for a representation of the frantic rhythm of precarious life through the performance of the object or the body, Magor's works confront the viewer with uncanny factuality and eerie stillness. Tables, chairs, cupboards – the contents of a one-bedroom apartment in *One Bedroom Apartment* (1996) – with their presence and volumes invite the viewer to consider the weighty sensation of living an unsettled life. Uncertainty is also a presence: a white dog rests under one of the tables. Is the dog real or a model? It seems to be at ease, though the rest of the scene provokes anxiety. Who hasn't experienced the stress of moving from one place to another, after all?

If material possessions might produce a sense of certainty and comfort, in Magor's works, materials often embody and show their fragile status. In the work *Tweed (neck)* (2008), a cast tweed jacket folded together with brown gloves has its neck stuffed with a bottle of whisky. The stiffness of this glass neck is concealed by the apparent softness of the piece of cloth. Things are never one-sided in Magor's work. In *Double Cabinet (blue)* (2001), what from one side looks like a pile of blue towels laying on the floor, if looked at from a different angle reveals a hollow interior filled with real beer

About this review

Published on 19/11/13

By Federica Bueti



Liz Magor, *Tweed (neck)*, 2008, gypse polymerisé, 41 x 42 x 14 cm. Courtesy" Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

[Back to the main site](#)



cans. Though on closer observation, the towels are a cast. In fact, many of her works are casts made of plaster, resin, silicone, Platinum-Cure silicone or rubber. So a piece of wood and construction material leaning against the wall and sheltering potatoes, onions and carrots in *Stores* (2000) is not necessarily a piece of wood – just as a tweed is not necessarily as soft as it appears to be.

Magor's artistic practice is about inhabiting – to quote her – 'a space between the mould and the cast', between the potential and the already exhausted, the imagined and the factual, where the object becomes a mobile threshold between different realities. The uncertain status of matter in the works expresses the resistance of the material world to meaning or forms of representation. But matter here never merely equals the physical. As the nuns in conversation with artist Andrea Büttner in her video *Little Sisters: Lunapark Ostia* (2012) suggest, spirituality is an ordinary, material practice of living and sharing with others. And being with others can also mean being confronted by a heavy inheritance. So, in her video *Wantee* (2013) Laure Prouvost pushes the inheritance of art history over the edge and engages in a spooky conversation about art with her fictitious grandfather, an artist and close friend of Kurt Schwitters.

More than particular motifs, the works by all of the artists in the exhibition share an attitude and an understanding of art as a practice that values the domestic and unspectacular – where things and materials whisper their secrets to us: that they have no secret at all. They offer themselves in their sensuality, as bodies, as things, as human beings, without fear or shame.

Federica Bueti

Frieze

3-4 Hardwick Street, London EC1R 4RB, 020 7833 7270



REVIEWS

VANCOUVER
CATRIONA JEFFRIES

LIZ MAGOR

by Lisa Marshall

In reference to earlier work, Liz Magor has spoken of an “aggressive offer.” The description fits with what she showed in “I is being This” at Catriona Jeffries, where the visitor was confronted by an army of gift boxes. Each box presents its own unique arrangement: a neatly folded shirt, blouse or jacket embellished with fabrics, sequins, price tags, garment labels, slogans and other found objects sits nestled in crinkly tissue paper like a freshly opened present. One box catches the eye with a swirl of hot-orange tulle that wraps around a

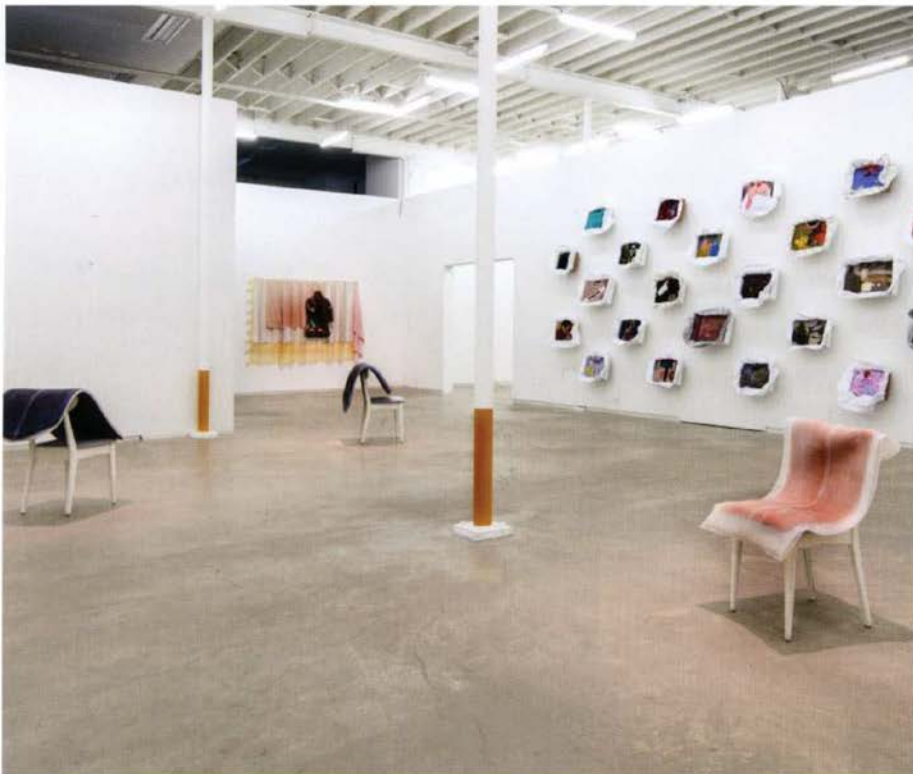
neatly trimmed hole. An elegant vintage label reading “Made in England” is featured in the centre. The archaic label—a rare find these days—immediately brings to mind today’s intensely globalized industry. Adding to the contrast, hand-sewn stitches attach a delicate net to a substrate of coarse machine-made fabric. The richly textured assemblage culminates in a crumpled candy-bar wrapper trapped beneath the sheer surface, suggesting compulsions that diverge from fashion but will eventually feed right back into it—I imagine the clichéd paranoia of dressing: “Does this make me look fat?” In fashion, sheer is sexy. In the best of this exhibition, sheer fabric becomes a morbid membrane mingling attraction, repulsion and compulsion: the desirable becomes abject, cool is corny and luxury is indistinguishable from trash.

Another piece features a haughty glove pointing to a regal insignia and a scattering of cigarette butts. The cigarette butts allude to the two enormous cigarettes supporting the gallery ceiling: cylindrical beams painted to resemble cigarettes evoke the smoking crowd clustered outside any opening. More “cigarettes” appear in *The Rules* (2012), a collection of painted driftwood ranging in size from a few inches to one and a half metres in height. Standing on their characteristic ochre tips, they make an oddly delightful crowd.

Magor is known for her polymerized gypsum sculptures, so her turn to found objects such as garments and driftwood seems a departure. Continuity is to be found in the murky side of the psyche that runs through the secret stashes, the hideaways, the peculiar simulations and the garment-based assemblages. “I is being This” worked by flaunting that which would be covered over while presenting the peculiarities of display. An “aggressive offer” can’t be refused—it arrives in those things that seduce us into identifying with them too deeply to resist. “I is being This” disrupted the syntax of those desires a little bit, with a cacophonous play of offers and counter-offers.

LIZ MAGOR *Being This* [detail]
2012 36 boxes, paper, textiles
and found materials 30.5 x 48.2
x 6.3 cm each (approx.);
overall dimensions variable
PHOTOS SCOTT MASSEY

ABOVE: INSTALLATION VIEW OF LIZ
MAGOR'S “I is being This” 2012





LIZ MAGOR
Double Cabinet (blue)
2001, Gypse polymérisé,
canettes de bière, 23.5 x 68.5 x 43 cm
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

NO FEAR, NO SHAME, NO CONFUSION

Liz Magor accompagnée
de Jean-Marie Appriou,
Andrea Büttner et Laure Prouvost.

Exposition du 11 octobre 2013 au 2 février 2014

Dans le cadre de la programmation artistique New Orders, Triangle France poursuit ses engagements féministes et internationaux en invitant une artiste majeure : la canadienne Liz Magor (née en 1948, vit et travaille à Vancouver). Visible pour la première fois en Europe depuis sa participation à Documenta VIII en 1987, elle présente une sélection conséquente de sculptures datant de ces vingt dernières années. Elle est accompagnée de trois artistes européens parmi les plus reconnus à l'heure actuelle et dont l'univers esthétique et les recherches proposent une mise en perspective complexe des questions posées par son travail.

Jean-Marie Appriou (né en 1986 vit et travaille à Paris), Laure Prouvost (née en 1978, vit et travaille à Londres) et Andrea Büttner (née en 1972, vit et travaille à Francfort), dont la gravure sur bois datée de 2006 *No Fear, No Shame, No Confusion* donne son titre à l'exposition, réalisent un projet spécifique pour cette exposition.

Depuis le début des années 1970, le travail sculptural et photographique de Liz Magor questionne avec poésie et retenue les questions liées à ce qui est apparent. Elle examine la façon dont les objets et les personnes se dévoilent, se revendiquent et prétendent être. À travers de nombreuses références faites à la nature sauvage et aux refuges de pionniers, elle pose la question du désir d'abri physique et émotionnel et celle de la fragilité identitaire et matérielle des objets et des corps. Depuis ses machines des années 1970 transformant des matériaux

ordinaires en formes sculpturales, en passant par ses séries photographiques des années 1990 documentant des 'reenactments' historiques, Liz Magor n'a eu de cesse de dévoiler les strates d'informations qui cachent le sens des choses tout en le fabriquant. Les œuvres de l'exposition, dont certaines ont été réalisées spécialement pour l'occasion, constituent une sélection précise de sculptures présentées ensemble pour la toute première fois. On y retrouve sa célèbre installation *One Bedroom Apartment* (1996), ses objets ambigus réalisés par moulage et ses dernières œuvres textiles.

En réutilisant, dupliquant et transformant des objets souvent issus d'un quotidien qui a fini de les consommer, Liz Magor questionne leur statut social et émotionnel, leur



inconsistance, et révèle leur anxiété. Si l'anxiété et la confusion sont des éléments récurrents du travail de Liz Magor, les sentiments de gêne et de honte constituent la structure et le moteur même du travail plastique et conceptuel développé depuis une dizaine d'années par Andrea Büttner.

L'artiste dégage la valeur positive, politique et productrice de ces émotions en leur attribuant un caractère heuristique. Dans la lignée de *Little Sisters: Lunapark Ostia* (2012), où elle documentait le travail d'une communauté de sœurs qui animent un stand de fête foraine près de Rome, Andrea Büttner présente ici une installation composée de travaux qui reflètent son intérêt pour les questions sociales et éthiques liées à la dignité, à l'émancipation, à la pauvreté et aux systèmes de croyances.

La présence du folklore et l'utilisation de techniques traditionnelles se retrouvent également chez Jean-Marie Appriou. Ce jeune artiste français réalise une toute nouvelle série de sculptures en bronze dont la préciosité est révélée par un caractère brut et étrange. Il conçoit la sculpture comme la forge : une cuisson, une transformation et un amalgame d'où émergent parfois des personnages.

Ce caractère expérimental, où tout semble possible jusqu'à la perte de repères, se présente sans doute de la façon la plus forte dans la nouvelle installation vidéo que Laure Prouvost réalise pour cette exposition. Il s'agit d'un nouvel épisode de la série d'œuvres narrant la vie de son « Grand père conceptuel, mort lors de la réalisation de sa dernière grande œuvre qui visait à creuser un tunnel vers le Maroc depuis son salon ». Après avoir reproduit le salon de ce grand père fictif pour la Tate Britain (*Wantee*, 2013) lui valant une nomination au prestigieux Turner Prize à l'automne prochain, Laure Prouvost propose pour Marseille de se concentrer sur la chambre à coucher de cette grand mère éperdue de chagrin. Il s'agira d'objets, de rêves, de fantasmes... Laure Prouvost introduit avec humour une cacophonie à la Kafka où les objets quotidiens, le film, le son, auto-génèrent une narration qui semble à la fois logique et produite par erreurs de traductions successives.

Production Triangle France
Projet lauréat Mécènes du Sud 2013

LIZ MAGOR
Casual
2012, Silicone durci au platine,
caoutchouc, chaise, 80 x 61 x 63.5 cm
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

SEVEN PRINTS!

Du 30 août au 7 septembre 2013

Le Dernier Cri, éditeur et atelier sérigraphique, produit plusieurs estampes d'Atelier Van Lieshout, ainsi que de quelques-uns de ses auteurs. Le Dernier Cri s'interroge sur l'émancipation et le statut de l'artiste face au marché de l'art. Il tend à un fonctionnement similaire à une coopérative « d'art total ». Artistes : Fredox, Henriette Valium, Andy Bolus, Yann Taillefer, Sam Rictus, Sekitani, Pakito Bolino. Les estampes seront présentées pendant ART-O-RAMA.

Production Le Dernier Cri



THE ART OF LIZ MAGOR

Facing page: Liz Magor, *Stack (Raccoon)*, 2009, polymerized gypsum, ash, wood, 58 x 68 x 68 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Photograph: Tami Hafkenschield. Courtesy Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.

1. *Corner Mouse (left hand)*, 2009, polymerized gypsum, wood, caulking, 79 x 28 x 23.5 cm. Photograph: Tami Hafkenschield. Courtesy Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.

2. *Corner Mouse (left hand) (detail)*, 2009, polymerized gypsum, wood, caulking, 79 x 28 x 23.5 cm. Photograph: Tami Hafkenschield. Courtesy Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.

by E C Woodley

To use language at all is to use an instrument that was forged by others. The purely personal cannot be uttered in language at all.

— Gabriel Josipovichi, *Writing and the Body*, Princeton University Press, 1982.

Objectivity is left when something is finished.

— Siri Hustvedt, "Ghosts at the Table," *Yonder*, Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

There is a line written by Northrope Frye about Flaubert, how he turns "all simple life into an enormously intricate still life, like the golden touch of Midas." Liz Magor also freezes and transmutes "simple" life, and her tableau can be just as intricately precise or as abjectly complex as an image in Flaubert. Her accumulations of foodstuffs, clothing, deceased animals and other objects are uncannily odourless and irrevocably silent. They are capable of stopping your breath, if only for a moment, in mortal dread or fascination. The airlessness and the motionlessness of time in the gallery rooms these things inhabit must be negotiated without much recourse to language. Fluidity of speech is held like Midas's water and wine.



Unlike the occasionally lavish, gold-tasselled banquets Flaubert transcribed (when *Sentimental Education* was published in 1869, the critic Edmond Scherer dismissed the novel as “a collection of photographs”), Magor has a fondness in her still life for the quotidian amalgam of pewter (which is primarily tin) or silver-plated lotus-shaped or round trays. In their modesty and intimations of worldly dignity, these domestic objects transmit a certain pathos, especially when they are tarnished. The effects of the daily atmosphere seem to have adversely affected these decorative plates, as gravity affects mortal skin and bones.

Magor's objects may be “real”—a mickey of scotch or a stick of gum (the labels removed but identifiable as Johnnie Walker and Wrigley's), a box of Toblerone chocolate—or, like many of the plates and cigarette butts, and the animal corpses and leather or tweed jackets, they may be remade as polarized gypsum casts that hold every surface detail of the originals and are painted or coloured to more or less match them. For the viewer, there is more to this position than to simply sort out the “real” from the “fake,” although that is part of the tentative questioning one becomes involved in. How much “reality,” how much pre-fixed meaning is resident in any object? Objects are made by us, and in this sense they contain us, are made of us; it isn't only media, as McLuhan famously observed, that are “the extension of man.” The few pieces of Chiclet gum sitting in the shadows of one of Magor's stacked-plate still-life sculptures are the height of artifice, whether Magor has manufactured them or not. A strange, chemically engineered habit, not quite a food but a moulded thing that seems to speak of Magor's methods and concerns. An insignificance that is capable of invoking cultural and individual memory. In Canada, a stick of gum is more likely to act as an agent of memory than any Proustian madeleine.

Alone in 2009, in the narrow, domestically resonant space of the upstairs gallery at Susan Hobbs in Toronto was a work called *Corner Mouse* (left hand). A simple, darkly varnished wooden corner cabinet about three quarters of a metre high, something from the 1950s or '60s that you might find at a Salvation Army store. On one of its shelves was an ashtray of similar vintage in which a mouse was lying dead. The cabinet was made of real wood and glue, but the ashtray and corpse were cast and coloured by Magor, each one made with great attention to the detailed life of the thing produced. All together, a dead ringer for “real,” like a quotidian scene in a little-used country cottage at the change of season.

But, then, thinking more clearly, I found that the intense sense of the real these objects communicate was somewhat unmade by the scalloped pattern of opaquely cream-coloured glue that the ashtray was half sitting on. What is this dollop of glue doing here? Why would anyone glue an ashtray to a corner cabinet and do it so badly, so obviously? This flourish of process, of showing-as-made, asserts the scene as fiction, as artwork. But the bodily, gluey substance of this bold but seemingly clumsy reveal complicates Magor's act. Glue was once manufactured from the bones of dead animals, and it still retains that bodily character. The mouse, once in living possession of its skeleton, is capable of becoming the substance that visibly strengthens the cabinet's joints. *Corner Mouse* (left hand) is unmade as reality by the very substance that appears to make it up. What seems inanimate becomes animate in the mind of the viewer, before being scattered and backing away into some more complex state. Magor works with the innate complexity of substance, the thin borderline between the artificial and the “natural,” and the mind's wavering and naïve perception of these states.

The genius of objects is that they speak of the precise boundaries of human knowledge, and also of the imprecision of our perception of them. “In solitude, objects are the company we keep,” writes Siri Hustvedt. In Magor's work, objects keep their own company. This includes living creatures, which in



1. *Leather Ashtray on Table*, 2009, polymerized gypsum, cigarettes, wood, 57 x 121 x 63.5 cm. Photograph: Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.

2 & 3. *Leather Ashtray on Table* (detail), 2009, polymerized gypsum, cigarettes, wood, 57 x 121 x 63.5 cm. Photograph: Toni Hafkenscheid. Courtesy Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.



The genius of objects is that they speak of the precise boundaries of human knowledge, and also of the imprecision of our perception of them.

death have become objects. A corpse, like an object of mass production, seems to oppose uniqueness, or at least complicates the notion, demonstrates the replaceable-ness of any individual in the great mass of living things. Magor's works resist language, but like props in a theatre, they seem to belong in proximity to words. One can imagine that, in their solitude, they themselves are strange and literal embodiments of a descriptive quality in language.

In *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), Svetlana Alpers commented on the relationship between language and image in early 17th-century Dutch painting, including still life. "The vanguard of language studies at the time had led away from names redolent with meaning to the things themselves and to what [Sir Francis] Bacon variously referred to as 'the creator's own signature and marks' or 'footprints' or 'stamps' on them. God creates by imprinting himself (as in the imprinting of a coin or a seal) in things rather than by writing texts." Alpers notes that in the 17th century and again in the 19th many of the most advanced artists in Europe adopted a highly descriptive mode. "The stilled or arrested quality (of this work) is a symptom of a certain tension between the narrative assumptions of the art and an attentiveness to descriptive presence. There seems to be an inverse proportion between attentive description and action: attention to the surface of the world described is achieved at the expense of representation of narrative action." In opposition to primarily Italian, allegorical or symbolic works, "northern images do not disguise meaning or hide it beneath the surface but rather show that meaning by its very nature is lodged in what the eye can take in—however deceptive that may be."

In this sense, something of Magor's sculptural still life is recognizable as "northern art." She shares with Dutch art a concern with "the problem of the relationship between art(ifice) and nature." Considering the writings of one of the leading 17th-century Dutch cultural figures, Constantijn Huygens, Alpers concludes that when looking at the ornate and often lavish still life of Willem Kalf, "we have to consider if, more often than scholars have been willing to admit, deception here engages not a moral but an epistemological view: the recognition that there is no escape from representation."

In Magor's work at Susan Hobbs, which dated primarily from 2009, the question of the strategy and nature of representation was asked in an exacting way, however difficult it was to answer. In a series of installations of work from 2007 and 2008 that began its life at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle with the title *The Mouth and other storage facilities* (the mouth here, among other things, suggestive of a cavity diverted



1. *Tray (bird/heart) (detail)*, 2008, polymerized gypsum, 17.75" diameter x 2". Edition of two. Photograph: Site Art Services. Courtesy Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
2. *Tray (bird/heart)*, 2008, polymerized gypsum, 17.75" diameter x 2". Edition of two. Photograph: Site Art Services. Courtesy Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
3. *Twined (table/one)*, 2008, polymerized gypsum, 16 x 16 x 5.25". Edition of two. Photograph: Site Art Services. Courtesy Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
4. *Raccoon*, 2008, polymerized gypsum, 31.5 x 23.5 x 4.5". Edition of two. Photograph: Site Art Services. Courtesy Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

from producing language), Magor's Dutch-like "trust in the attentive eye" of the viewer played out in a different way. In this work, it was more often obviously clear that many of the cast objects were just that. One reason for this was the almost mythic, non-naturalistic or semi-naturalistic pigmentation of some of them, especially the animals. Here, at one station of the journey you made along a tableau of goods strung out across overlapping Ikea-like tables was *Raccoon*. Shiny blue wrappers of Krinos Ouzo candies glittered almost blindingly unstable under extremely bright lighting and were scattered across a cast and tarnished pewter plate on which was arranged a white raccoon curled into the fetal position. Held up by "real" legs, the table tops were cast, "flaws" in evidence like scars and, in places, dusted with pigment that suggested paint, wine or blood. In some works, the paint of a cast cigarette butt or paper candy wrapper had overshot the limits of its moulding and bled clumsily onto a decorative plate. At first viewing, you perceive these objects as "real," and then quite quickly the gap between this perception and what is actually present opens up and you are plunged into an abyss. In this instant of recognition, when "what-I-think-it-is" becomes "what-it-really-is," also comes recognition of one's own flawed and easily lead perceptual apparatus. This is irreversible knowledge. Once you have seen the thing for what it is, you cannot return to the previous state of simple belief. The meaning, whatever it might have been, seems to drain out of the objects on display.



Perhaps paradoxically, there is a correspondence between the wordlessness one is left with when attempting to negotiate the optical and the existential conditions of Magor's work and wordlessness as a strange condition of the allegorical German *Trauerspiel*, the Baroque "Sorrowplay." Beyond both the mimetic attitude with which the allegorist approached nature as a form of transience and decay and his attraction to an abject world of objects and things, there is, in the 17th-century drama as described by Walter Benjamin, a tension staged between the spoken and the written word. The sound of fragmented passages of spoken dialogue oppose the meaning communicated when read on the page (as the *Trauerspiel* often were).

"The spoken word is only afflicted by meaning," Benjamin wrote in 1928, "as if by an inescapable disease; it breaks off in the process of the middle of resounding, and the damming up of the feeling which was ready to pour forth provokes mourning." (John Osbourne, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Verso, 1998) Mourning is a silent, inexpressible condition nearer in proximity to death than everyday experience. It brings living beings closer to inhabiting an object state. ■

E C Woodley is a composer, artist and regular contributor to the pages of Border Crossings, Art in America and Canadian Art. He is currently a candidate in MVS Curatorial Studies at the University of Toronto.





Liz Magor

by Nicholas Brown

Liz Magor's recent sculptures are a danger to themselves. Abandoned trays replete with lifelike leavings from yesterday's parties, they frequently risk damage from real glasses and plates carelessly discarded next to them at gallery receptions. Her facsimiles of edibles and their containers, as well as other materials like clothing items, tree stumps and driftwood can be so convincing as to pass unnoticed by viewers used to the presence of ready-mades in the gallery. This is the sort of work that's inadvertently thrown away by maintenance staff. Magor's process of casting sculptures in polymerized gypsum (an industrial material capable of greater synthetic detail than plaster due to its hardness when formed) from real objects simultaneously asserts these reference objects while displacing them with their uncanny copy.

And yet the uncanny experience here is related to the act of looking, of discovering that we can be deceived by the material's ability to masquerade as the real. One must look closely to notice that things aren't as they seem: a waxen ashtray, curiously drained of lusc, contains a lumpy and resolutely unacceptable fake mouse, though it sits atop an utterly compelling metallic tray (each object composed of the same material). Elsewhere, viewers discover real cigarette butts—a recurring theme for Magor, who insists on smoking her own as both research and method—littered amongst fakes. In cases where the fake is so convincing as to fool the most scrutinizing eye, the work's meaning is uncovered by reading the lists of materials posted on the wall or hand-out. Thus, Magor's works oscillate between an affirmation and a frustration of our senses. Even as we apprehend the material facts of the things before us, we are nonetheless confronted with the enigma of their existence in the first place. The compelling matter-of-factness of the object is so strong in many cases that it causes us to ignore the issue of their referentiality. Cast from originals (which we have no direct access to), Magor's objects take on a surrogate role that threatens to collapse the distinction between sculpture and reference.

It is this status as sculpture that makes them uniquely suspect. Unlike tromp-l'oeil painting, which employs established techniques to convince the viewer that they are looking through a window into a fully formed environment, here each object is a material fact, asserting its identity by what it is made of. It is not merely a question of illusionistic technique, but of the exact copy—the one-to-one Philip Monk, linking the artist's sculpture to her earlier photographic output, has observed, "Magor's mould-cast relationship is the crux of her work," going on to offer "the sculpture seals the surface in a deceptive act."¹ This artificial surface, accompanied as it frequently is with unaltered artifacts from the real world, cannot help but raise niggling questions of authenticity that nudge us towards considerations of what came first.

It is at this point that my observation that Magor faithfully replicates her source objects might not be sitting well with some viewers. One might question the verity of the surrealist, indeed phantasmagoric qualities of works like *Stack of Trays* (2008), in which seven trays pile high, their uneven stack revealing an apparently sleeping rat nestled amongst the comestibles, liquor bottles and cigarette packs. There is nothing straightforward about this relationship, neither in the odd juxtaposition of things and bodies, nor in our awareness that they are rearranged facsimiles of objects taken out of the world and into the artist's studio. Unlike many other artists who traffic in copies, Magor insists on performing the moulding and casting process herself. From her perspective, this is chiefly a matter of process (she formulates this as a question of developing "an ability to find things that would otherwise be hidden"²), but it also affects how we relate what we see to human processes. What may appear to our trained eyes as a readymade is in fact collected, manipulated, and repeatedly contacted all over for impressions that result in its mould. The artist herself acknowledges the nature of this departure from the notion of the readymade, stating, "a readymade has not gone



through a material transformation... it is a language game, not influenced by looking."³ Thus, Magor's sculpture is equally about the transformative qualities of replication of an object into an entirely different material, and about the scopie possibilities of its display in a gallery.

In a body of work that indirectly indexes the body—sculptures manually traced from source objects, themselves harvested from the artist's surrounds—it should be noted that no actual human forms are found in Magor's sculptural output (rodents are another story, but it might be said that they function as detritus objects alongside the cigarette butts and gum wrappers). Unlike many of her peers in the field of sculptural simulacra, such as Ron Mueck and Evan Penny, Magor's work refrains from the spectacle of human cloning and the whole creepy "uncanny valley" phenomenon. Yet, somehow her work feels all the more uncanny for its object-centeredness. Away from the grotesque qualities of simulated flesh and sinew, Magor's work simultaneously narrows and widens the gap of human identification. Rather than confronting people with their own image cleverly duplicated, Magor sets up distorted *mise-en-scenes* that offer a greater power of estrangement by avoiding the directness of the body simulated.

Compared with the deathmask preservation of the above artists, the weight of mortality similarly hangs in Magor's trays and tablecloths. As though plucking the flowers and rotting fruit out of the *vanitas* paintings of 17th century Dutch masters, Magor presents us with our own fleeting desires and the exhaustion of the after-party lull. Walking amongst these ossified pieces, we are subtly confronted as we take our own leisure. Thus is the indeterminacy of an object that simultaneously fools one viewer into resting his drink on its table (that is, its base), while prompting another to reconsider their appetite for excess.

1 P. Monk "Playing Dead: Between Photography and Sculpture" in *Liz Magor exhibition catalogue, Power Plant and Vancouver Art Gallery 2002*

2 *Liz Magor, interview by Jen Hutton in WHAT IT REALLY IS exhibition catalogue, Red Bull 381 Projects, 29.*

3 28.



TORONTO

Liz Magor

SUSAN HOBBS GALLERY

Liz Magor's recent exhibition of sculpture was one of her best to date, combining—with the formal refinement we have come to expect from her—a nuanced mixture of references to domesticity and wildlife, still life, religious art, and Minimalism.

A pair of sculptures, *Bedside* and *Dresser* (all works 2007), installed on the ground floor of the gallery, address the tensions that exist between private and public contexts for the display of artworks and other objects. Each work features a cast of a deer's head, occupying a shelving unit attached to the wall with large triangular brackets so that it projects forward toward the viewer. Each is illuminated by a high-end halogen lighting fixture that looks to have been taken straight from an architect's drafting table.

This installation allowed the two works to waver between the traditions of domestic decor and the institutional and professional associations of more contrived or physically complex methods of display. While alluding to a lodge full of hunting trophies, the unlucky specimens are cut too high on the neck and look too young and too diminutive to serve the demands of machismo.

Stag and doe are both rendered in white, with irresistibly illusionistic details that extend to an unevenness of the cartilage in their ears and the presence of little bumps at the bases of the stag's antlers. This eerie verisimilitude is made yet more strange by the morbid surprise of real hairs creeping out from the sculptural material (a polymerized gypsum). The abrupt realization that one is looking at casts of the dead is tempered by art-historical associations with the painterly tradition of the study of animal corpses. A studio context is further signaled by the artful spattering of wine stains and paint drips on the shelves. But the unnatural blankness of the heads—and the absence of other connections to still-life convention—served to broaden and diversify their semiotic resonance. Their coldly lit white surfaces brought to mind marble statues of the decapitated John the Baptist. This feature also contributed to the anthropomorphizing of the forms and further evoked Christian iconography: Before being cast, woven material was inserted into the animals' necks, and this protruded in a way that recalls the seductive folds of drapery that adorn canonical *Pietà* statues.

Subtle references to the Crucifixion continued in the upstairs gallery with a third work, *Hallway*, featuring the death mask of a pygmy owl whose claws had been pressed together and wrapped around a piece of electrical wire. Like the deer, it had a mostly monochrome surface, with isolated pink and purple details perhaps signifying blood. However, as with *Bedside* and *Dresser*, the spiritual resonance of the work is complicated by its juxtaposition with a domestic appliance—another expensive-looking lighting fixture—and the anonymous industrial surfaces of the shelf, cast in polymerized gypsum, on which the creature lies. Here, as elsewhere in the show, Magor demonstrated a masterful ability to produce formally austere works that still pack a powerful emotional wallop.

—Dan Adler



Liz Magor. *Dresser*, (detail), 2007. polymerized gypsum, hardware, lighting fixture, 84 x 23 x 10".





1

Steinway, on the end of the world:

"Walkers in the twilight of the West, we are bewitched by transitions, sweet mutants and ingenious freaks, things winding down or vanishing into the violet shadows. We are obsessed with the iconography of our fading civilization, the emblematic defeats of its majestic ambitions ...

"In music, drifting chromaticism — In architecture, the patische of organic and historical forms, the pleasures of the cute, the vague, the ominous — In art, the drab play of hungry children in the dangerous ruins of modernity's garden ...

"In painting and sculpture and criticism — yes, principally there: we are curious children, excited by the fragrance and picturesque stain of decay, making an art of enfeebled desire, of theory. We are sure we live in the decline of a civilization, because all our art aspires to the condition of writing."

2

Before you left this time, I wanted to tell you a story, but I couldn't think of one. I guess we could have talked about why being an art critic makes telling stories so hard, but I didn't have the heart for it.

You fly back into town tomorrow, two days later I leave for Germany, for Kassel and Documenta 8. You'll unpack the big brown suitcase, hand it over, I'll pack it and leave, and that's the way it is with us nowadays.

Sometimes I wish you were interested in art — the stuff of it, the talk, the intrigues. Sometimes I wish I were more interested in all that part of it.

I recall that it was different with us once. We once drove down every twisting, hedge-lined backroad in the west of Ireland, stopping at every tumbledown abbey and fort. While we picknicked on chicken and Strongbow cider among the ruins, you would read me the little stories in the *Blue Guide*.

Before you left on your trip south, you gave me a roster of errands to do. I haven't done any of them.

Trips are lists. Toothbrush. Pasta del Capitano *con fluoro, gusto fresco*. Vitamins C, B, and E. Blue throw-away razors. A dozen 5 mg Valium tablets. The cologne you gave me last Christmas. I always take the Book of Common Prayer on trips, then get busy and forget to say the daily prayers. Notebooks, ink cartridges, etc.

Germany is lists; — a theory of what Germany will be like. Lists of artists, art works, issues, dealers, restaurants, key players in the art world game, second-string players, controversies, deadlines, people to see, people to avoid.

The list of Canadian artists in Documenta 8 includes: Robin Collyer, Jeff Wall, Krzysztof Wodiczko, David Rabinowitch, George Trakas, Liz Magor and Ian Carr-Harris.

3

"Our invalids, ourselves! The undesired male body — and who is desired in this dusk of pleasure? — seeks its pleasure in itself, abandoning the complicities of transacted sex, of civilization itself, which has failed us. The weak dazzle, as the male body spends itself into the emptiness, and then the falling back, into the febrile hungers ...

"Our fathers, the patriarchs and master-builders, sought to remake the world in the noble images of grid and theorem. Orphaned offspring of these men, we move out now at dusk into the roofless temples and museums, the deserted graveyards and plazas, hunting in the dark for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. In the shadows she waits for us, her painted smile and red cunt-hair glowing in the gathering gloom, naked Lilith, *theory*, our seductress and destroyer and destiny ...

"We may forgive the liberal, rational spirits of the nineteenth century for their hubris — their haughty bourgeois realism, their good sense. But we will never forgive them for withdrawing from

history before we killed them — for giving us open minds and marvelously clever eyes, then snatching from us the chance to destroy them, and set ourselves free from their heroic projects and their calamities ...

"I am sick of writing this, but I cannot stop writing the sick thought — how we must everlastingly live their failure, fascinated and paralyzed by it, writing it incessantly, originating nothing ...

"The ancestors live among us still, as terrible, unslain absences. Children of the undead gods, we sometimes flee into the waste places, and there begin to fashion some forbidden thing — a story, an object that mirrors the true, instead of incessantly *expressing*. But suddenly, emerging from the darkness into half-light, appears the smile of Medusa, of *theory*, the gaze that turns us instantly into stone. Transfixed by the gaze of criticism, artists become critics, doing the work and will of the hungry ghosts living in us, haunting our conscious lives ..."

4

Toronto. A morning in late spring, a few days before I leave for Documenta. Pale sunlight pressed as peacefully as soft wind against the daffodil paper curtain, spreading in the bedroom's air as a warm yellow glow. I was still in bed, drinking tea, staying out of your way.

You came splashing out of the bathtub in a hurry, bustled naked and dripping into the bedroom, towelling hair, arms, butt as you went around the room, scrabbled in the closet for the clothes you should have laid out the night before.

As you rushed naked around the room, dragging things out of some drawers and throwing them into the big brown suitcase, you gave me the usual list of errands and chores. At last you pulled on something and rushed to the door to catch your plane, kissed me on your way out, warning me, for God's sake, not to turn the apartment into an absolute pigsty while you were away.

Alone again, I stood naked in front of the mirror, imagining your body as I had just seen it, busy and bare, looking at my own body, and noting again, that we were no longer young.

To my mild surprise, it was not sobering or sad, this thought of two bodies somewhat more dilapidated and disheveled than they had been. The mirrored sags and wrinkles, washed in the bedroom's daffodil light that spring morning, perfectly refuted all the utopian self-improvement schemes I'd ever entertained or tried. And somehow that was happy — a decisive piece of proof, of the sort that ends an old, troublesome argument, and lets something new be talked about.

This has nothing to do with art, of course. I don't expect you to agree with any of this. Your nutbrown eyes gleam festively in every light, like the sherry we serve guests at Christmastide from a cut-glass decanter.

5

[Undated entry from Steinway's green book. Written sometime in the spring of 1986:]

Liz Magor: *Regal Decor* (1986).

An installation work hugely filling the gallery space, *impending*.

I am received into it — Engulfed by the Other — No chance merely to view it — no perspective from which merely to see it. The distance is immediately obliterated by its incessant *working* as object, castrating — engulfing — the subject.

The path prescribed by the piece lies always inward — through two orders of defined space.

The *outer space* — a passage lined by tall, hollow columns (each three meters tall) sheathed in linoleum, leading to a huge (simulated) machine — a press for the reproduction of linoleum floor-covering, presumably.

(Synecdoche for the system producing the cultural imprints which have replaced terror as the principal instrument of social regimen-



tation in late capitalist society — the tight-woven fabric of newspapers — magazines — mass circulated photography — advertising — fashion and style and so forth.)

The *inner space* — a privileged domestic interior, notionally suggested by baronial fireplace executed in flimsy *papier-maché*. Behind it — embracing it (as a pop-up book embraces the pop-ups — a huge interior-design magazine open to a photograph of a second domestic interior.

In the photo — (we are constantly moved inward by the composition) — some pictures — a Gottlieb perhaps, other abstract paintings — a plain, squared-off modernist fireplace — over the fireplace a large, square photo over her head — ambiguous expression on her face (post-ecstatic langour? awakening? a moment of relief between contractions?)

The woman is the centre of the piece — Ariadne.

The piece itself — both maze and minotaur.

6

I am going to Kassel. Kassel is in Germany, which is in Europe, and Documenta is Europe. Europe is the West.

North America is elsewhere.

From a brochure published by the Kassel Chamber of Commerce: "Home of Arts! Conference Centre! City of Leisure-time! Kassel, a city with a special atmosphere! City of Fairy-Tales!"

The fairy-tales referred to are those collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and the painter L. E. Grimm, brothers. Their bi-centenary was celebrated in 1986 in the Fridericianum Museum, in which Documenta is to take place next week, in 1987.

Kassel, home of fairy tales, hero tales.

This year, the scheduled productions at the Staatstheater Kassel include: *Götterdämmerung* von Richard Wagner, *Viva La Mamma* von Gaetano Donizetti, *Jesus Christ Superstar* von Andrew Lloyd Webber, *The Wall* von Pink Floyd, and *Love, Death and Tango* von Wilhelm Dieter Siebert und Michael Frohling, among other things.

7

The liberal self-love of the West, Freud tells us, has suffered three immense humiliations from which it will probably not recover.

The *first* came from the cosmology of Copernicus, which dislodged the earth from the centre of the cosmos, and sent it skating around the rim of a vast dimly-sunlit silence.

The *second* came from the biology of Darwin, which stripped us of divine paternity and made us brothers of the animals, and co-sufferers with them of Nature's mechanical sorting and producing.

And the *third* came from the psychological discoveries of Freud himself, who had unmasked the once-sovereign conscious ego, showing it to be a mere puppet puppet-king, manipulated and tormented by revolutionary conspiracies in the body's darkest cellars and sewers.

Freud's triad of humiliations, outlined in an article published in Budapest in 1917, intrigued my friend, the art critic Steinway. He said the article could be read as a bad dream — a dream analyzed more easily as an expression of distraught cultural history than of individual neurosis.

"The West" in Freud's article, argued Steinway, was Vienna; its period of "liberal self-love" was the era between 1848, when a liberal rationalist bourgeoisie took charge in the Austro-Hungarian imperial capital, and about 1890, when the "humiliations" of anti-semitism, nationalism and irrationalist sentimentality were already destroying the old universalist, liberal hegemony.

Of course, Freud lived to see the century's most drastic attack on the liberalism of Vienna and the West, by the Austro-German

fascism of Adolph Hitler. What if he had lived, said Steinway, to see Western liberalism doing to itself what Hitler failed to do — being whirled apart by militarism and greed and injustice, ripped to pieces by the capitalist culture it had historically served so well!

The dream of comprehensive urban planning wrecked by the greed of real-estate developers, governments, the corporations. The hope of a universal extension of human rights, foundering on the reef of national and regional self-interest. The vision of technical mastery over the earth and beyond, perverted into a reign of technological terror over a universally impoverished mankind.

8

Kassel is known as a city of truckstops. It is very near the border between the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic. Documenta is to be opened by the widow of Joseph Beuys, who will plant a tree in the town centre.

The map of Europe is a map of wars concluded and projected — appropriate for the continent which invented total war, then exported it (as political practice) to every corner of the world. Europe is always at war, or remembering war or plotting war, or embarking on wars elsewhere.

These may be the reasons why Europe is the home of the best stories. The great fictions, from Homer through *Beowulf* and *Malory*, to Joyce, were always about only two things — wars and voyages — and perhaps there really aren't any other topics.

In my neighborhood, there is a shabby hall where tottering veterans of the European war of 1939-1945 gather on Friday nights. I like to think they tell stories about the war. Once upon a time, in another time of dissolution and failed hearts, discouraged old veterans would get together in the taverns and tell stories about long-past glories and fights. A boy named Homer sat at the edge of the taberna's firelight, ignored, listening to the talk of sad, grizzled soldiers in their cups, remembering everything.

I hear that the Greeks and the Turks are threatening each other again, the Irish fight the English — generation after generation, replaying the grand scripts of the nineteenth century.

Every now and then, a Polish child playing in the forests is blown to bits by a mine that's been slumbering under the trees for decades. Soviet blood, Islamic blood bleeding, blending every day in the dry soil of Afghanistan.

Documenta is a show of capitalist Europe, hence half of it — a reproduction of the map of wars, occupations, the enduring violence.

9

Steinway on Vienna, Steinway on the West, even our West:

"As the liberal ego fails, the fascination with the patterning of culture — the freely-flowing, sensuous iconography of production — expands steadily, allured by *fabric*, the opposite of *object* . . .

"The mind of failed rational subject — the critic — turns from the concrete Other, and becomes obsessed with consciousness, sensibility, the nuance, pattern. We men of shrunk souls now view the city as a continuous, glowing skin of *building*, an exquisitely patterned textile cast over the abyss . . .

"We slake our lust with bodies confectioned of dreams, clothing, nothing but the sheen of glorious fibres, precious metals . . .

"The critical act becomes the caress of surfaces, the worship of production. The critic descends by night into the engine rooms beneath the city, to gaze fixedly at the machines of culture, ceaselessly producing the decor of seething desire, the *theory*, that has displaced the obsolete city of object, act and project . . ."

10

"The driving anxiety of the art theorist," said Steinway as we kicked



Edmund Engelman; Anna Freud's Consulting Room; 1938. Plate 40 from "Berggasse 19", University of Chicago Press, 1976.

along the sandy rubble of Cherry Beach one ravishingly beautiful summer day, "is caused not by heterodoxy, or even intellectual untidiness, but by ageing."

Of all verbal discourses, theory is the one most ambitious to be free of time, the unknowing that haunts mortal life, death. Hence, it is a vigorous young man's past-time, and no job for men not as young as they used to be, who knows too much about mortality.

In his youth, every critic is a theorist, Steinway believed; in the end, every critic sits in the rubble of his theories, telling stories, killing time, filling up the unknowing.

There is a certain kind of person who begins to write about art because he finds in it the silence and timelessness so absent from everyday life — a secret garden from which ageing is absent.

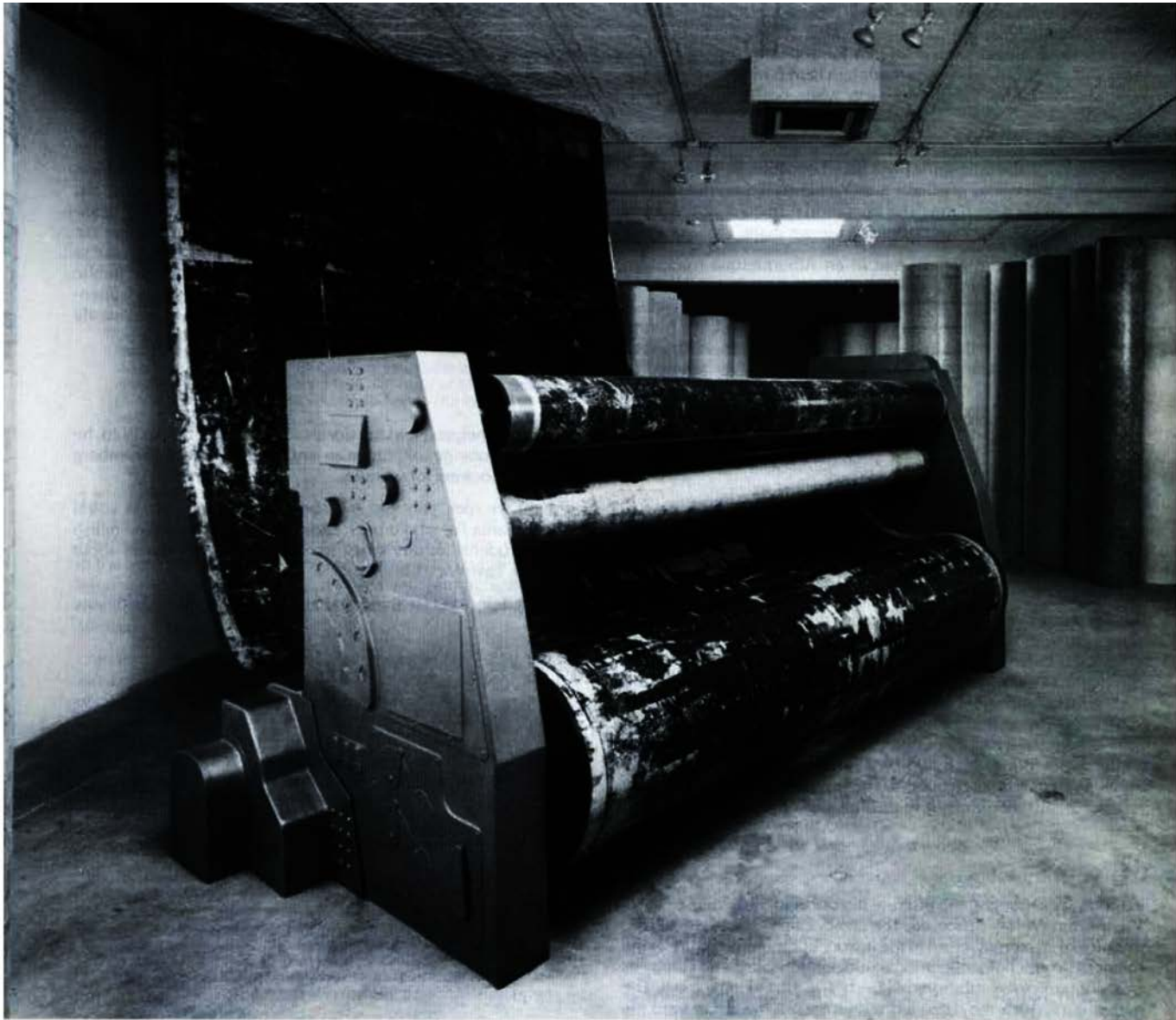
But the work of art necessarily offends because it is vulnerable,

tentative — as threatened by the same inexorable ungrounding and uncertainty as the body — and criticism finds this mirror of the real very hard to account for. Faced with the mute, vulnerable art object, appalled by the *horror vacui* and reminded of his own mortality, the theoretician writes up his fascination as an anti-narrative of production — a non-story.

Steinway believed that theory is the highest form of the decorative — the ultimate, obsessive elaboration of an insight into an exquisite fabric cast across the abyss — the abyss that eventually engulfs the textile of language, giving us an enigmatic silence in return — silence enshrined in stories.

||

[An undated entry from Steinway's green book:]



Liz Magor; Regal Decor (detail); 1986; machine: plywood, masonite, metallic paint, plastic sheet; 4 x 6 x 11 1/2 ft. Photo: The Ydessa Gallery, Robert Keziere.

Magor's *Regal Decor* again — haunted by it.

To go into it — A descent into a sacred grove, from the sunlit clearing into the dusky forest, to meet the goddess.

Or (the same thing formally, lifted from rural setting and installed in the heart of the Greek city) — a transition from the broad, sunny agora (place of conversation, commerce) into the shadowy, many-columned temple.

The mythic route — Penetration of female space, to encounter the goddess in her shadowy shrine — to speak to final meaning, there, shrouded in imagery.

But in Magor's piece, the mythic dance-route is denied — We go inward and find there — not the final meaning behind appearances — but the incessant business of cultural production penetrating, pervading all reality.

The baronial fireplace is naked status symbol, stripped of its function as warmth-giver and re-presented as bare sign of wealth.

The woman in the large photograph is also mere product — a trophy installed over the fireplace — a woman being *medicalized* as well, *produced* — accorded importance as commodity — by the doctors.

The logic of the piece — from the outer world, into the factory (site of linoleum production) — then into the home (site of neurosis production) — and through the photo over the mantelpiece, into the hospital bed (site of the body's production as commodity).

12

For the first few days after you left, I luxuriated in the sudden silence of the apartment, and the abrupt simplification of life. I called in pizzas, drove out to suburbia to drink coffee in the malls, didn't come home if I didn't feel like it. Now it's different. I'm ready for you to come back. When you come through airport customs tomor-



row night, I'll be waiting there.

As we drive back into Toronto, you will have stories to tell — stories about frustrating meetings, business deals that flew, fell through or went on hold, pleasant day-trips into the southern American hills we both come from, where the mountain laurels must be blooming now, showering the forest floor with white petals, a warm June snowfall.

But in the few days between your return and my departure for Documenta, all the little stories will have been told, laughed about, largely forgotten. And gradually we'll settle back into the routine ways we talk — negotiating the operational matters of our busy lives, managing and administering the life we share.

We fell in love the night we met in an Albuquerque truckstop, almost 20 years ago, because we were story-tellers. But as the years went by, we gradually stopped telling stories. Trapped inside a hotel by days and days of rain one August, we read *Wuthering Heights* aloud, and fell in love again. Back in Toronto, we tried to go on reading to each other after dinner, but it never seemed to work out.

"As capitalist-bourgeois culture has moved inexorably into its present bureaucratic form, the personal story has been displaced by the discourse of management as the principal mode of communication between partners. This development cannot be viewed as benign. The story is critical, disruptive and insistent by its very nature, hence capable of defining a personal integrity against the remorseless levelling of the social mass. The discourse of administration, on the other hand, is, by its very nature, a form of mutual policing; the establishment of a centre of police authority in the very midst of intimacy."

We are always "too busy" to read after dinner, or "too tired." We complain, from time to time, about "not having as much free time as we used to have," though there is no objective grounds for this complaint. We always have "something else to do." You and I are both writers, and there is always something to write, of course. Something else to think about, to get curious about. And it's hellishly expensive, living in Toronto, so there's always a goad to work harder, write more, etc. But there is never any time for stories any more. We sometimes wonder why, buy a couple of books, try reading them after dinner, give up after a few days.

13

In Steinway's thought, the discrete historical identity of the city — Vienna, the West — dissolved. The city became instead merely the instance of an eternal return in the history of capitalist culture — the moment in which liberal, rational imagination fails, wrecked by its own contradictory ambitions of liberty and total management. The moment in which the damaged self emigrates inward toward the darkness, where the irrational, forbidden and repressed lurk.

Or the moment in which the irrational forces punch through the weakened liberal rationality which had hitherto contained them, producing the sudden paralyses, the hysterias, the bewildering obsessions in which Freud discovered the key to the wellsprings of personality and history.

Looking out at the world of the late 1980s from his window high over Spadina Avenue, Steinway believed he saw a reprise of that long-past Vienna — a recurrence of the disease of failed European rationality; a return to the same point on Western culture's furiously turning wheel of fortune.

14

Vienna, 1900 — Europe, 1987 — times when the revolutions, the springtimes are all past. Sometimes I try to remember 1967, 1968. Liberal civilization in crisis, poisoned by its hypocrisies — the sulphurously burning ghettos of Detroit, riots in Chicago, barri-

ades in Paris. I watched all this on television, while vacationing in a Georgian country house deep in the Irish countryside.

In 1967, there was something called "the summer of love" in San Francisco. Drug dreams, the occult, digger communism, eros — fumes of suppressed desires, rising to intoxicate and disarray the rational culture which had capped and contained them.

Yet in the 1960s, liberal culture was merely intimidated, not overthrown — I finally did not want it overthrown, despite all the sit-ins and anti-war demonstrations I took part in, despite being a talkative, feisty Marxist for a while. The revolution wasn't coming, the regime we'd worked to get installed in Saigon wasn't exactly Jeffersonian after all — so it appeared that perhaps a deal could be cut with imperialism, after all. A deal that involved my staying loyal to mainstream liberal values — human rights, personal liberty, public compassion and so on — while pointedly not paying much attention to the contradiction between those values and the vastly destructive capitalist culture I live in, and prosper in.

15

The night we met, you told me stories about your father. In 1926, he dressed in an orange suit, drove around town in a sleek Duesenberg convertible, looking for women.

The night we met, you told me about an ancient woman you'd known in Santa Fe, who'd been cadging free dinners from English graduate students for fifty years, in exchange for her stories about being D.H. Lawrence's last lay.

That night, I decided I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you.

16

[Notes on the fireplaces in Liz Magor's *Regal Decor*. Notes on the fire.]

In a footnote to *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud suggests that all human culture may have sprung from a specific act of self-denial by primitive males: the repression of the primordial desire to piss on fire. Hence, the control over fire, prerequisite of all cultural advance beyond barbarism, is grounded in the prior control over urinary function, toilet training.

If Freud is correct, the first class-division would have been between those who could control their desire to piss on fire, and those who could not or were unwilling to do so — thereby creating a progressive, self-controlled elite with power over the fire, and a deprived underclass ideologically portrayed as intractable, dirty, sensuous, impoverished by their own self-indulgence and so forth. Such characterizations of overclass and underclass have persisted down to modern times, of course.

Thus has the fireplace, though obsolete as a means of cooking or heating, come to have peculiar importance in bourgeois domestic architecture during the modern period. To have a fireplace is to be in control of urination, hence civilized — not primitive, disreputable. To have an elaborated fireplace (constructed of costly materials, prominently installed, and so on) is to go beyond merely wishing to see oneself as repressed, and embark on ideological proclamation.

The originals of both fireplaces represented in *Regal Decor* are rhetorical, inasmuch as both are visual synecdoches for the larger social and architectural systems fantasized by their owners. Both, it should be noted, are fireplaces merely for ornamental heating; neither suggests cooking, i.e., alimentation — pissing, defecation.

The so-called "baronial" papier-mâché element in Magor's piece reproduces a pompous, ill-proportioned fireplace from a Victorian pseudo-medieval mansion — a fireplace that, in turn, clumsily mimics a modest hooded fireplace constructed in the true Middle Age (about 1250) at Luddesdown Court, near Cobham, Kent.

Thus Magor signifies one phase of the modern crisis of liberal ego: the attempted retreat of the threatened self, via architectural simulacra, into an imagined time of steady hierarchy, coherently applied repression, rigidly observed prohibitions against the rising



Compost Figures Liz Magor's New Sculpture

Liz Magor's latest sculptures, *A Concise History* and *Compost Figures*, were exhibited at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria from January 9 to February 11. They will also be shown at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery from March 1 to 30 and at Lethbridge's Southern Alberta Art Gallery from September 2 to 30.

Liz Magor's new work must come as a bit of a surprise to those who know her work, as well as for the uninitiated. A brief look at earlier sculpture is useful. The differences between work from, say *Four Places* (VAG, March-April, 1977) and the new pieces are obvious enough, but the connections (and they are numerous) are more interesting.

For several years, Liz Magor has been gathering eccentric, charming combinations of natural materials to form outfits for strange occupations and bizarre hobbies. *Birdnester*, for instance: a little pull-along cart with trays of nests to aid an ornithological merchant in some quixotic world of the imagination. *Beaverman*: a similar paw-drawn arrangement with live-in facilities and all the necessary apparatus for beaver-dam building. Another sculpture provided the complete set-up for a web-maker. There were *Breast Nest Pressers for the Perching Birds of Canada*; a *Hornby Island Tool Kit* with wood and bone utensils whose utility one might speculate about for years; and complete equipment for *Sowing Weeds in Lanes and Ditches*.

One thing these sculptures all had in common, besides immaculate, elaborate craftsmanship, was the absence of their owners. Each piece was the imprint of some extraordinary creature, a lifestyle without a life, suggesting how little we know of one another. Bones were much in evidence, and pickled things in jars, and dried-up plant forms. There was a museum quality to the exhibits, hints of time past and human ephemerality, a certain preoccupation with death, relieved by organic detail.

These deeper preoccupations, these "metaphysical things," as Magor calls them, are more evident in her new work. She has simplified her approach, tried to reach the bare bones rather than get lost in the creative fascinations of the art process. The painstaking, whimsical excesses of her occupational tool boxes were deflecting the viewer from looking beneath the surface of the work. "I got tired of people telling me bird stories," she says. She has not grown tired of birds, of course, just people who view her work as the brainstorm of a mad nature lover.

This is partly her own fault. There is a

self-indulgent, almost fetishistic, quality to many of the early pieces, a quaintness which says that the artist cannot resist throwing in every last possibility. The overall imaginative integrity of the work overcomes this weakness, but the new pieces are in some measure a reaction to a slight lack of control, and reaction is a delicate neck of the woods for artists. A clarification of one's intentions can result, a corollary freedom from distracting idiosyncracies and influences (as I feel happened with the *Compost Figures*). Regressive harping on a theme which has been already resolved can also occur.

A Concise History consists of about forty-five men's old jackets and overcoats dipped in a mixture of plaster and various pigments then hung on coat-hangers from coat-racks made of rusted pieces of pipe. There are six of these racks, each supporting seven or eight jackets. Some jackets contain trousers hung suit-style and one or two coats are hung directly from the rack. One pair of pants swing separately. Magor brought most of the coats back with her

from a trip to Europe and Egypt in 1977, and her observations there have played a role in the formulation of this current work, especially with regard to colour.

The large number of coats and their careful, rather contrived regimentation initially (and intentionally) diverts the viewer from considering the work's meaning. It seems that Magor is caught in a bind: viewers either get the point too quickly or have to be sent on a diversionary aesthetic goose chase, or else have so much fun playing with the piece they never bother to get the point at all. The point, here, is that the coats are the husks and relics of human lives, the discarded shells of humanity, and that man is blind to these rich trails he leaves behind, this glorious garbage and divine debris.

For colour, Magor has recalled the earthy pastels of Greece and North Africa. For texture, she has made the coats architectural, given them the plaster surfaces of old walls, old rooms where generations of human lives were played out. Ochre, sienna and umber evoke Italian memories.

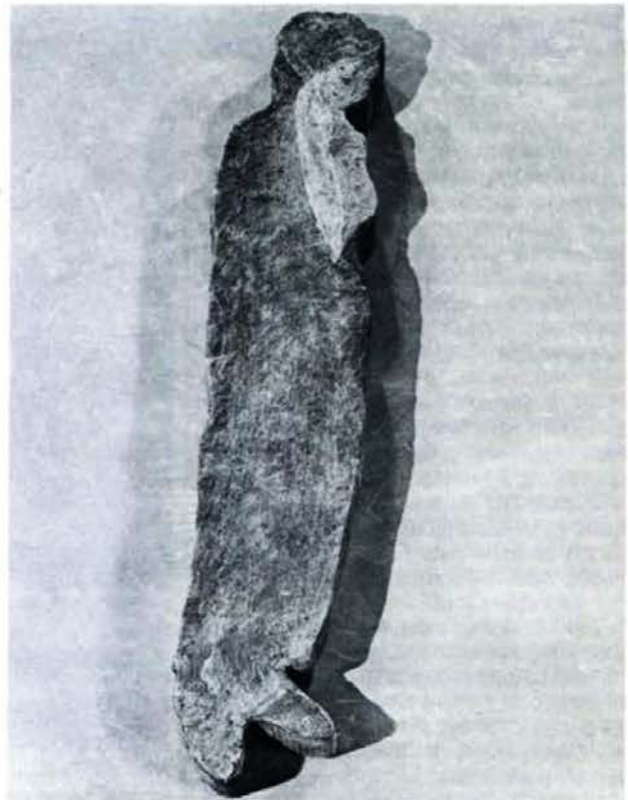
Installation view of Liz Magor's *A Concise History* and *Compost Figures* at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.



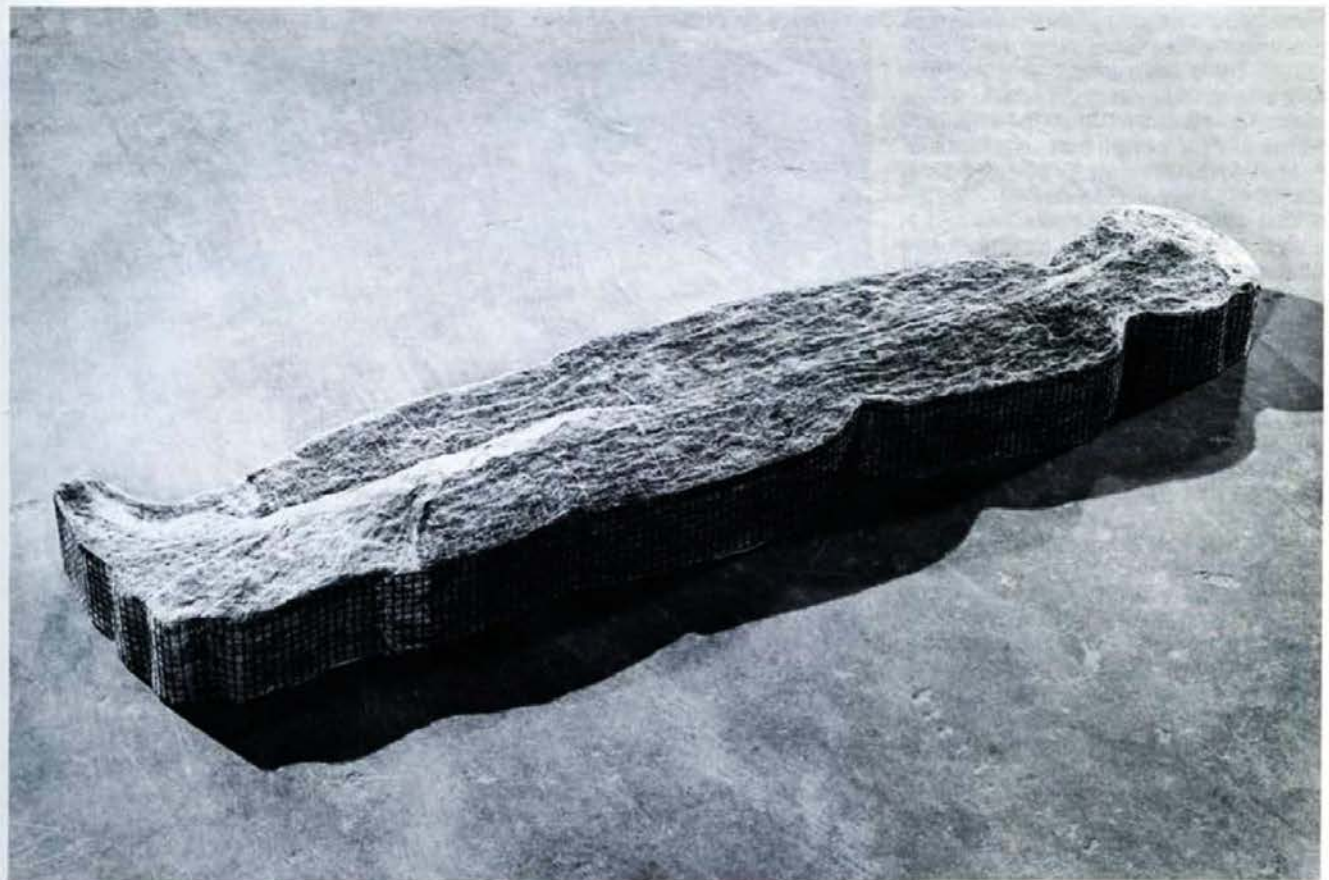
ROBERT KAZIERE



Compost Figure-Leaf (1978), wood, cotton and natural materials



Compost Figure-Mulch (1978), wood, cotton and natural materials



Compost Figure-Grass (1978), wood, cotton and natural materials

On facing page: *Compost Figures-Man and Woman* (1978), wood, cotton and natural materials



Vanguard Magazine
03.1979
3/4



A *Concise History* (detail) (1978), coats, plaster and pigment



Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, photos Robert Rejzner

while peach, salmon, beige and aqua blue and greens continue the Mediterranean theme. Art history echoes off these pieces and there are contemporary links with the figurative plaster works of Kienholz, Segal and Colette Whiten, but the overall effect of *A Concise History* is one of artifice. The past remains stiff and sad.

Magor, who claims that she cannot paint and that her drawings are ineffectual, seeks painterly effects with sculpture. Some of the coats work like drawings; the colouring is chalky and light, and the shadows have been highlighted with graphite. Others are more heavily plastered and act like paintings. The entire work offers a range of art-conscious clues in this vein. The *Compost Figures* continue the sculpture-as-painting ideas using cheesecloth as line and compost as pigment, but offer a number of physical and intellectual contrasts to the coat section. These figures are less acutely art-historical although the recent cut-outs of Anne Kahane, and some pieces, again, by Colette Whiten come to mind.

Magor has taken profiles of human figures from photographs and blown them up full-size to make plywood cut-outs for the base of her sculptures. Then, using a weldmesh or chicken wire mold, she has filled it with a five or six inch layer of wet compost. The resulting object has been wrapped with cotton cheesecloth and set to dry so that the cotton is stained by the organic matter. Some pieces are without cheese-cloth; an outer ribbon of pop-riveted sheet metal is filled with compost, rocks and a strand of old cloth, covered with pine needles, cones, twigs, bits of wood, bark and moss, then sprayed into solidity with acrylic bond-fast — casting in compost. Magor rejected the idea of using a surface of living turf.

The human outlines are disguised and abstracted by the drapery lines of the clothing. Some figures are grouped together: male and female shapes face each other and touch, creating beautiful negative spaces between them. Three figures fit together, emphasizing shared lines. A number of other pieces are slung, coffin-like, on a vertical drying rack. Several kinds of compost are used — grass, leaves or mulch — resulting in different coloured stains to the cotton. The fabric often appears as a lichen, extending the organic nature of the materials used. In one case, the cloth itself has been coloured before use.

Influenced by Egyptian tomb imagery, Magor has created for us a rich overlapping of sensory, intellectual and emotional experiences. The gauze scrim suggests a shroud, and the natural surfaces are like grave plots. The superimposition of the human figure points to the cyclical nature of life, while the "painting" of compost on cotton gives surprising visual results.

Andrew Scott