

Rachel Harrison
at S.M.A.K. Ghent

AN EXHIBITION THAT DOUBLES AS AN ARTWORK AND A CURATED EXHIBITION

Rachel Harrison's exhibition 'Fake Titel' at S.M.A.K. Ghent – gathered from three distinct bodies of art: 'The Help' (2012), 'Incidents of Travel in the Yucatan' (2011-2013) and 'The Sunset Series' (2000-2012) – is readable through at least three lenses: victory over the sun, victory over the sons, and victory for the granddaughter. I briefly discuss the first two before focusing on the third.

Sue SPAID

As stage designer for the Futurist Opera 'Victory over the Sun' (1913), Kasimir Malevich produced volumetrically-shaped costumes in shocking color schemes, an effect epitomized by Harrison's equally-staged, free-standing figures from 'The Help'. If Marcel Duchamp is the originator of ready-mades and installation art, then Marcel Broodthaers, Guillaume Bijl, and Edward Kienholz must be his sons. While Harrison also gains inspiration from found objects purchased online or elsewhere, her installations prove far more malleable since they're comprised of rearrangeable objects and interchangeable sculptures



Rachel Harrison, 'Valid Like Salad', 2012, wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, framed digital print, dog collar, 208,3 x 116.8 x 121,9 cm, courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

that also stand on their own as complete artworks. 'Fake Titel' is a victory for this Duchampian granddaughter on many levels. Harrison's is the rare exhibition that doubles as an artwork and a curated exhibition, though not an artwork and a collection, since the artist doesn't own all of the collection's components. When collections are also artworks, as is the case with Duchamp's sons, each component's extrinsic (monetary) and intrinsic value (meaning) depends on its being exhibited as a collection. This granddaughter has

inherited her grandfather's gift for curated exhibitions, whereby each artwork's intrinsic value increases every time it's exhibited in a different context, something that doesn't happen when collections are exhibited.

REBUSES

The 'problem of reference' is a core theme running through Harrison's oeuvre, though not that of the sons. Before she started embedding reference-eliciting objects like a Hoover vacuum cleaner, Mr. Clean Magic Erasers, a Dick Cheney mask, Syntha-6, or six packs of Pacifico beer, she often affixed framed photographs to her sculptures. She indubitably inherited her grandpa's appetite for rebuses, although her supplemental images sometimes rebuff reference, asserting painting's push-pull, heaving viewers back into the world to ascertain references. Consider 'Valid Like Salad' (2012). Some might not recognize the drawing based on a thirty-year old photo of its star. Even if one identifies Al Pacino, how does Scarface relate to the red dog leash strapped to its fractured geometric totem? Like abstract painting, does it really matter? Situated amidst sculptures from 'The Help', whose cleaning references are clear, one imagines dog walkers negotiating building exteriors. Sited elsewhere, the sculpture would command new meanings. Sometimes, she hangs framed photographs directly on the wall, as with her sunset series, 31 different pictures of the same found photograph, shot in 2000 with a 35mm camera and reworked time and again. This victory over the sun faces yet another, a geometric painting 'Summer Constellation' (1963) by Meret Oppenheim whose 1936 fur teacup anticipated Duchamp's sexy potholders, 'Couple of Laundress' Aprons' (1959).

For this version of 'Fake Titel' (Hannover's kes-nergesellschaft organized the first) Harrison has staged her work in relationship to six artists' reference-extracting artworks, further expanding each component's meaning. Victory-mania escalates as 'Winner Takes All' (2012), three trophy-like forms sporting medal-like gear echoed by three Duchamp 'Sink Stoppers' (1967), reverberates with Yves Klein's 'Nike of Samothrace' (1962) and 'Syntha-6' (2012), a colorful blob sporting muscle-building powder. That Harrison opens a window onto Laura Owens' landscape 'Untitled' (2000) represents yet another victory, since Owens is, after all among the first female artists to build a career while still young. Likewise, the agony of defeat looms large with 'Benched' (2011), three hoop sculptures inspired by the Mayan ball game whose losers were sacrificed, Harrison's disaster-video 'BP' (2011), her photo of the sullied portal to Duchamp's reclining beauty, and an intriguing early 70s painting by overlooked Belgian painter Pjeroo Roobjee. Harrison even pairs one spectacularly rendered drawing of the fallen star Amy Winehouse with Duchamp's 'Wedge of Chastity' (1959). Asger Jorn's vibrant Cobra painting proves both an exacting and shocking complement to Harrison's dazzling figures from 'The Help'.

Those who lump Harrison's sculpture with today's 'slice, dice, and splice' whizzes make a huge mistake. She assembles totalities with worldly references, capable of reflecting multiple contexts, while many others deposit self-referential fragments. As her eleven iridescent wads, a nod to Duchamp's 1953 Dada catalog, suggest, "Non!"

Rachel Harrison, 'Fake Titel: Turquoise-Stained Altars for Burger Turner' until 5 January at S.M.A.K., Citadelpark, Ghent. Open Tue-Sun from 10am-6pm. www.smak.be