

sculpture

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reviews

NEW YORK

Judith Page

Lesley Heller Workspace

At once familiar and strange, disturbing yet comforting, Judith Page's sculptures recycle personal items into enticing assemblages that probe the slippage between dreams and experience, memory and time. Rather than reworking Surrealist obsession, however, these objects, covered with a viscous medium aptly titled Tar Gel and hanging from the ceiling, mounted on the wall, and scattered across the gallery floor as if by chance, disrupt sentimentality for a more abject counter-discourse—one that colludes with the political in a quest for meaning.

At the entrance to the gallery, a pair of dog-faced slippers covered with a molten layer of black Tar Gel set the stage. While the title, *January 30 (Three O'Clock)*, suggests a diary entry, the slippers could have been one of many discarded pairs of shoes from the street outside this Lower East Side gallery. The opposite wall held the remnant of another dated memory, a dangling foot (actually a wooden shoe form) covered in pink Tar Gel, with nails attached to the sole. *June 28 (Aerator)*, an emblem of lack, severed from the body and without function like the emptied-out, barely sustainable, and no longer useful slippers at the door, became the means for taking the night walk of the exhibition's title.

In a cool white gallery, the fraught juxtapositions of Page's sculptures both attract and repel. Forgotten, overlooked, and even repressed recollections of past experience gain new meaning when viewers bring their personal memories and associations into the mix.

Such is the case with *September 15 (Black Tongue/Pink Eye)*, which pairs a pink goo-covered, stuffed bunny hanging from the ceiling, a tangled wire spewing from its mouth, with a pile of photographs clipped from a high school yearbook strewn across floor. The eyes in each portrait are covered with pink medium, concealing the sitter's identity and alluding to infection or blindness. Evoking lost innocence, the whole assemblage infuses seemingly random and disparate elements with the chilling alienation of contagion or terror—not unlike the memory of a plane crashing into a tall tower on a September day not so long ago.

September 15 (Black Tongue/Pink Eye), with its innocuous but ominous hanging bunny, was one of several pieces to use discarded toys as surrogates. The stuffed teddy bear in *February 14 (Bare/Bear)* retains the

Right: Judith Page, *January 30 (Three O'Clock)*, 2009. Tar Gel and mixed media, 3 x 14 x 14 in. Below: Judith Page, *September 15 (Black Tongue/Pink Eye)*, 2010. Tar Gel and mixed media, 108 x 36 x 36 in.

snuggly embrace of childhood. But mounted high on the wall and sporting a crystal penis, it becomes corroded with repressed anxiety and desire. Page often revels in the disturbing ambiguity engendered by her object choices and odd juxtapositions of materials. Hard versus soft, natural materials versus plastic artifice, irregular organic against hard-edge geometric shapes—all perform duets of affirmation and denial, attraction and disgust.

With the exception of the slippers, the sculptures were covered with an oozing coat of pink-tinted Tar Gel, a color allied with adolescent girls, sticky sweet cotton candy, and Pepto-Bismol. While lending a disruptive



rococo veneer, this over-saturated pink "skin" associates certain pieces with the excessive body and sexual sublimation. *June 26 (Boom Box and Beaver)* refashions an obsolete 1980s boom box into a cracked, perversely humorous relic of teenage sexual angst. Sealed with high-gloss acrylic pink medium—one side decorated with a beaver pelt hanging like a tongue from the tape deck and the other augmented with protruding breasts and buttocks—this box morphs into a strange anthropomorphic hybrid that implies sublimation and violation.

Joining a personal collection of objects gathered over a lifetime of experience with broader social and historical narratives, Page has produced an alluring yet treacherous field of dreams filled with sculptures whose unsettling analogies merge memory and time and mine the politics of the personal.

—Susan Canning

NEW YORK

Sarah Sze

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery

The profligate daughter, stylistically speaking, of Jessica Stockholder, Sarah Sze brilliantly but sometimes overwhelmingly delivers on her enthusiasm for arranging things. The sheer amount of stuff in her sculptures invites all sorts of mental activities—categorizing, counting,



and connecting chief among them. Constructed from the accumulated, often marginal objects of industry and everyday life, Sze's work enables us to participate in a spectacle whose interest lies equally in the macrocosm, or overall plan, and the microcosm, seen in the thousands of individual parts that make up her extravagant compositions. The title of a major recent work, *The Uncountables (Encyclopedia)* (2010), exactly communicates the reality of uncountable numbers. The colored plastic bottles, milk cartons, lights attached to wooden shelving, and stacks of small objects were beyond numbering. Such complexity is of a high order, but it also touches the possibility of compositional anarchy.

The viewer could only marvel at the range of materials used, as well as their aura of rationality—an inspired organization to *The Uncountables (Encyclopedia)* yielded all sorts of close-up delight in the placement of disparate elements, often but not always, arranged according to color. As an environment, the work had the fantastic, gimmicky air of a Rube Goldberg machine, albeit one of high culture whose purpose is forever obscured. While the components of these installations always seem stable in their positioning, Sze plays with the possibility that the entire composition may simply decide to fall apart. On some level, *The*