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May 22, 2008

Rebecca Ripple

language/habit/rubber/God

by [John Motley](#)

Los Angeles-based artist Rebecca Ripple's show at Tilt, which closes this weekend, is one of May's best exhibitions, but it manages this distinction in spite of itself. Ripple's four pieces are all exactly stuffed signifiers; a dizzy swarm of interpretations hovers around even the most restrained work here. But that sense of restraint nearly buries the conceptual acrobatics in *language/habit/rubber/God*, so named for the show's four pieces of art. At first glance, the gallery seems too big for the work, which veers from a Duchampian readymade (a rubber glove) to a vaguely floral sculpture in which an ornate lattice of silver wire blossoms out of four sac-like plaster forms. Ripple clearly uses whatever medium suits her purposes, but her playful and, at times, downright brainy approach to concept artlogically unites such diverse work.

The aforementioned readymade, "The Rubber Glove of Christ," is certainly the show's most vexing piece. It consists of a blue-and-green dishwashing glove dusted with gold ink, mounted on the wall, and posed in a bunny-eared peace sign. On the one hand, the sculpture—as aesthetic object—scans as the kind of flip and carelessly tossed-off flotsam that gives conceptual art its bad name. But Ripple's glove proves to be a decidedly fertile symbol. Taking off from the obvious "godliness is cleanliness" connotation, the object's meaning splinters into diffuse commentaries on religion, consumerism, and celebrity culture. For example, the glove's gesture simultaneously references stigmata,

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a papal blessing, or Michael Jackson's glittering glove. That's the "King of Pop" from the "King of the Jews" in one move.

Rebecca Ripple
language/habit
/rubber/God Tilt
Gallery and Project
Space, 625 NW Everett,
#106, through May 24

Ripple's best piece, though, is "Language," a sculpture/installation hybrid that is displayed in an unfinished form. Like "Glove," it is also deceptively simple: A white doily covers an antique oak dinner table and a white buoy. The doily includes the first half of the word "language" and its pattern of expanding and contracting holes is modeled on the cellular structure of bubbles. To create the doily, Ripple taught herself the antiquated skill of tatting bobbin lace; the wooden bobbins can be seen, still attached and dangling from the doily's fringe. These factors all converge for a rather nuanced take on the nature of language. Here, language is presented as a kind of antiquated creature comfort or even a decorative accessory with little to no utility beyond its own ornamental value. Perhaps most compellingly, the doily asserts that language is a kind of blanket or wrapper we drape over the physical world. It hardly fits and the doily's pattern of divergently sized holes obscures what's underneath as often as it reveals it.

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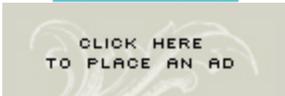


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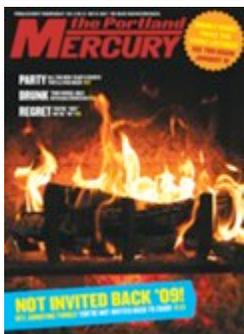
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