

# ART NEW ENGLAND

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## **LIZ SWEIBEL: RE:UNION**

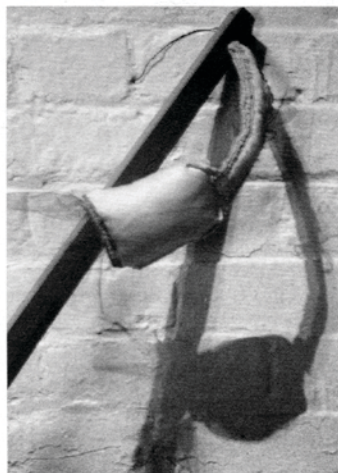
Repurposing domestic materials has a long history both in the domestic arena—as in quilts and sock dolls—and in the art world, where even the most cursory inventory of recent exhibits yields safety pins, shoelaces, twist ties, and yarn. Liz Sweibel precisely forms bits of discarded materials such as fabric, tulle, thread, and cotton into a vocabulary of delicate rosettes, pouches, pillows, and twists. One must therefore look beyond the common denominator of Sweibel's process and materials to find the meaning in her work.

In her central *Re:union* pieces, Sweibel arranges spare interventions on tall, vertical, painted sticks. The stick's verticality dominates each piece; the constructions of fabric, lace, and thread read as secondary. A relationship to the human figure is most pronounced in pieces such as *Re:union II*, which has a latex and tulle "skirt" and a long flaxen braid suggesting an abstracted doll. Considered an installation, these pieces read as a group of figures. Yet the impression on entering the gallery is one of a forlorn fall garden after the frost, abandoned poles punctuated by clinging bits of twine and plant material. The associations overwhelm this work without resolving into a compelling question or answer.

A more successful group of small-scale untitled wall pieces use the vocabulary of the *Re:union* pieces minus the vertical sticks; without the referential ambiguity of the stick the materials and forms and their relationships come to the fore with a clarity and focus missing from the *Re:union* pieces.

A third group of works, also untitled, feels very different: Very small, rectilinear pieces of stitched, folded, and layered white cotton almost melt into the white gallery wall. Here Sweibel most completely transcends and abstracts her materials. Juxtaposed against the *Re:union* and related wall pieces, they become a benchmark of clarity; their elegant simplicity can make the other work feel, by contrast, fussy and fuzzy. Freed from the weight of figurative references, Sweibel discovers a powerful wholeness in these seemingly slight pieces.

Mary Bucci McCoy



Liz Sweibel, *Re:union VII*, wood, paint, fabric, thread, and wire, 2002–2004..