

THE TIES THAT BOND US

Jill Smith

"On the assumption that the lie itself makes people uncomfortable and insulted, the symbolic fabrication of the image affects people, and they automatically find a connection to their memories or experiences."

Together Forever a group show of four female artists on view at Broadway Gallery in September should be lauded for its unique approach to representations of identity and the relationship between the self and the other, as well as for its compelling presentation of four diverse and distinctive female voices that in concert harmonized in exciting ways. Curated by Christine Kennedy, the exhibition featured the works of Alice Lang, Gertrud Alfredsson, Leah Beabout, and Marjorie Van Cura.

One of the most intriguing approaches to the curatorial themes of the show was the soft-sculpture installation by Australian artist, Alice Lang. Employing sewn materials that include nude-colored vinyl, nylon, ribbon, satin, and wadding, Lang's anthropomorphic objects allude to both a fetish object and to flesh itself. Functioning as fine-art-craft hybrids, her grotesque forms exist in states of dynamic tension by evoking contradictory responses: they are structured, yet amorphous; repulsive, yet alluring, familiar—yet surreal. As such, they suggest something of a cross between Maurice Sendak's playful, yet spooky illustrations for his children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are* and Matthew Barney's highly sophisticated, yet equally as bizarre *Cremaster Series*.

For *Together Forever*, Lang created an engaging installation composed of a series of stuffed skin-toned phallic and tumor-shaped forms suspended from the ceiling. A photographic image of the same sculpture being interacted with by a bare-chested man was simultaneously presented. This kind of approach to installation suggests new modes of interactivity between the living subject and the inanimate form of sculpture. Explaining these new forms as "wearable pieces that integrate and interact with the subject," Lang describes them as "parasitic," a severe, but perhaps honest perspective on the relationships we form with others.

Like Lang, Marjorie Van Cura's charming and skillfully-executed multi-media abstract works on panel explore the notion of "relationships with the other" through the formal concerns of organization, pattern, and biomorphic design. Working in unusual media such as galkyd and oil, or carbon and oil, she mounts these delicately-rendered rice paper-paintings on panel. These exquisite images bring to mind organic forms such as the skeleton, the fossil, and the shell, objects that function as remnants of once-living forms. Her entrancing *Untitled 0208*, for instance, an Op-Art graphic composition depicting a gray vertebrae-like

pattern bordered by undulating white lines atop a field of shimmering silvers and periwinkles, carefully straddles the boundary between abstraction and representation. Alluding to both the mimetic mode of the image in the age of digital reproduction as well as the most archaic of biomorphic forms, her repeating patterns and color relationships produce optical effects that as she describes, "create a visually intense, visceral experience,"

Taking a completely different, yet equally as compelling approach to the notion of identity and relationships are the subtlety naïve, yet highly sophisticated works on paper by Swedish artist, Gertrude Alfredsson. Working in pastels, her mystical figurative drawings explore the notion of the inner conflict between a person and her own self. In one image we are presented with two figures, symbolically joined at the head, while in another we see an unknown hand pushing down on someone's head from above; we assume it's the subject's own hand pushing down on herself. Such works evoke the sense of frustration we often feel when confronted with our own worst enemy: ourselves. Like Alfredsson, Leah Beabout presents a collection of works on paper. Her distinctive drawing installation of quasi-diary and journal illustrations was composed of a chaotic arrangement of drawings tacked to the wall. The piece continued Alfredsson's dialogue about one's relationship with one's own life, and the thinking and remembering process itself. Here Beabout, a self-trained artist and rapper/singer, courageously tells us her story; from struggling on the streets to the epic loss of her own child. Each story is told from her own unique perspective of a young woman to her incarcerated lover. The delicacy, urgency and scale of each narrative reflect the destination of each note.

Together, these works, though divergent in style, media, and theme, nonetheless offer forth a distinctly female voice, one that attests to the multiplicity of perspectives – from pathos to celebration; from the divine to the grotesque; from the human to the technological; and from chaos to order – in dealing with the self and her relationship with the other. □



Alice Lang, *Little Ghost*. Courtesy of the artist.