

Objects Food Rooms

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York 1–31 July

This group show, curated by Andria Hickey of New York's Public Art Fund, brings together 12 international artists working mainly in sculpture. The first work in the show, however, is a large wall text, *or* (2015), by Haim Steinbach. Further on, one finds its companion, *either*. But 'either' always comes before 'or' in a sentence, doesn't it?

Not if you're Gertrude Stein, from whose book *Tender Buttons* (1914) this show draws inspiration. The three sections in Stein's book, titled 'Objects', 'Food' and 'Rooms', play with associations we make between words and the objects they describe. Building on that premise, the artists here create associations between materials (including words) and forms in works that reside somewhere between the familiar and the uncanny.

On the first floor of the exhibition, sculptures by Rachel Harrison, Arlene Shechet, Ursula Mayer, Darren Bader and Frank Benson reflect our tendency to anthropomorphise objects as a means of relating to them. For example, Harrison's © 2004 *Hasbro Inc.* (2015) is a structure of wood and cement wrapped in plastic, draped with links of fake sausages and a toy gun, topped with a helmet painted with the Stars and Stripes, and seated in a wheeled cart. The helmet rests on a vertical protrusion that could be interpreted as a head, giving the sculpture the appearance of a stooping figure. It made me think about war veterans, partly because of the flag, gun and cart, which is like a wheelchair, but also because

the American toy company Hasbro is the maker of G.I. Joe action figures.

Harrison's sculpture sits before Luis Jacob's *Album XI* (2013), a row of 40 wall-mounted panels consisting of montages of found images. Four sequential panels with pictures of blank movie screens, bare canvases and other rectangular white surfaces are followed by panels depicting clocks and wristwatches. Individually, such images convey little, but in combination they become something more – a meditation on time's passing, perhaps.

Adjacent are three sculptures by Roula Partheniou, a Canadian artist making her New York gallery debut. Partheniou recreates common items using painted fibreboard and polymer clay. *Packed Boxes with Clutter* (2015) looks like cardboard shipping boxes with other items – dinner plates, board games, tennis balls – sitting on top. *Insulated Partition* (2015) appears to be an unfinished gallery wall, while *Caution Yellow* (2009) looks like a discarded banana peel. Seeming authentic from a distance, these meticulously crafted simulacra raise questions about how much visual information we need in order to recognise an object for what it is.

In the second-floor galleries, three enigmatic 2015 works by Esther Kläs initially appear as outliers. *Half Moon, Double Sun* resembles two casts of skateboard decks sandwiched together, while *2/1 (blue)* consists of two contrasting rodlike shapes, one conveying rigidity, the other malleability. These two works lie on the floor at either end of *In between/SELF*, a sticklike mobile

with two parallel rods lying beneath on the floor. Like Richard Tuttle, Kläs's intention here may be to communicate a visual experience without requiring the forms to mean something.

For a quartet of individually titled but related found sculptural works from 2014, Turner Prize-winner Laure Prouvost composed fanciful texts that imbue the mundane objects with auratic qualities. For example, the wall panel beside a piece of nondescript pink carpet reads: 'This is the carpet that Grandma had in her dreams covering every fields [sic], every trees, every building in the world.' Our impulse to humanise inanimate objects reappears in Prouvost's goofily surreal installation *An e-cigarette and a butter* (2014). The items of the title sit silently on a pair of shelves in a darkened room until spotlights and a recording of a man's voice (the butter) and a woman's (the e-cigarette) come on. The objects engage in a brief flirtation: "I wish I was in your lips," leers the butter. "In mine? Or the person's who is looking at us?" replies the e-cigarette, implicating viewers in their saucy exchange.

Other works, including Magali Reus's wall-mounted sculptures resembling padlocks and Nairy Baghramian's wire *Waste Basket (Bins for rejected ideas)* (2012), its contents oozing onto the floor, confound description since they cannot possibly fulfil their implied functions. Like Stein in *Tender Buttons*, these artworks, and the exhibition as a whole, prompt reconsideration of the assumptions we make about the everyday objects around us. *Bill Clarke*



Roula Partheniou, *Packed Boxes with Clutter*, 2015, acrylic and enamel paint on wood and MDF, flocking on foam balls, 137 × 71 × 71 cm. Photo: Brett Moen. Courtesy the artist; MKG127, Toronto; and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York