

REGEN PROJECTS

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ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Rachel Harrison

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To be a twenty-first-century subject is to engage in countless acts of self-representation. Although "Three Young Framers" included few actual depictions of people, presentation of the self provided the through line for Rachel Harrison's latest LA solo show. The title is a play on August Sander's 1914 photograph of three men on their way to a dance—young farmers who, one hundred years hence, armed with smartphones and selfie sticks, would have no need for someone like Sander to take their picture. Confronting visitors at the gallery entrance was *Open Mic* (all works 2015). This electric-blue, rough-hewn monolith, punctured in its middle by a selfie stick mounted with a nonfunctional display phone thrust aggressively toward the viewers, towered over the space like a cracked-out John McCracken. The sculpture's exaggerated verticality and position atop a white plinth (most of the pieces in the show stood directly on the floor) immediately set the entire body of work in anxious relation to the history of modern sculpture. *Open Mic*'s absorption of the wand of narcissism seemed a kind of homeopathic defense against the conditions of our late-postmodern moment, in which modernist self-reflexivity has become self-obsession and contemporary sculpture is often reduced to a backdrop for photo ops. *Open Mic*'s neighbors, *Chimney Rock*, *Battery Park*, and *Magnum*—characteristic Harrisons with their bulbous, ungainly forms in tacky hues—also wielded selfie sticks and phones displaying stock images, all cheerfully color-coordinated.

Additionally dominating the show was *Exhibition Device*, a labyrinthine architectural concatenation of metal studs marking out a set of transparent walls through which viewers could pass and provisionally frame their bodies. The structure was a clear nod to Michael Asher's 2008 exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, for which he deployed the same building materials to reconstruct each one of the temporary walls built in the museum's history of exhibitions. Harrison's quotation of Asher, however, abandoned all pretense to institutional critique. The metal lattice was pure frame,

Rachel Harrison,
The Vendor (detail),
2015, wood,
polystyrene, chicken
wire, cement,
acrylic, selfie sticks,
70¼ × 28½ × 22".



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abstract and decorative, if somewhat ominous, populated by small brick forms in acid hues and a makeshift platform of these same shapes and cinder blocks atop a wood pallet. The stud, architecture's most basic structural element, was further reduced to a series of crudely rendered sculptural erections: *Blue Stud*, *Brown Stud*, *Yellow Stud*, *Gray Stud*, and *Orange Stud*. With their mottled, opalescent, vulgar colors and rough cement surfaces attractive to dust, these studs appeared especially designed to rapidly age both materially and aesthetically. One couldn't decide whether they were meant to attract or repulse.

Finally, in a back gallery one encountered *The Vendor*, a brownish-purple sculpture whose top spills over in one direction like a putrid bouquet; on its other side, a handful of ready-to-use selfie sticks are arrayed in a built-in container. It was surrounded by *FOMO*, a suite of thirty-four photographs showing scores of footprints in urban snowscapes, their ephemeral patterns captured by a smartphone camera, an elegy to the kind of indexical permanence once, but no longer, identified with photography. In the regime of digital imaging, repetition and dissemination are what afford representations their power, not their authority as unimpeachable documentation.

Given the grotesque, vaguely anthropomorphic constructions that mostly constituted "Three Young Framers," one was surprised to find the postwar sculpture of Alberto Giacometti a strong point of comparison. In the classic reading of Giacometti's figures put forth by Jean-Paul Sartre, no matter how close one gets to these wasted, attenuated men and women, they always appear physically and conceptually at a distance. The latest turn in Harrison's work suggests an inverse but correlative twenty-first-century subject position: As a first-world population cosseted by an overabundance of devices for self-framing and fashioning, we are ever closer indeed—not to one another, but to our individual selves, or at least some image of them.

—Natilee Harren