

# REGEN PROJECTS

Anton, Saul. "Shelf Life." and Bruce Hainley "Blind Alleys." Artforum (November 2002)  
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I N T E R A L



**FORCEFIELD**  
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**RACHEL HARRISON**





In the dimly received 2002 Whitney Biennial commentators from diverse, even rival camps found one bright spot: Rachel Harrison's slipshod constructions that serve both as sculptures and as supports for found photos and objects. In light of the surprise critical accord, Saul Anton and Bruce Hainley offer their thoughts on an art that plays one medium off another.

# Bear Necessities



Spread: Rachel Harrison, *The Honey Collector* (detail), 2002, polystyrene, cement, Parex, acrylic, color photograph, and honey, 65½ x 41 x 32". Opposite page: Rachel Harrison, *The Honey Collector*, 2002, polystyrene, cement, Parex, acrylic, color photograph, and honey, 65½ x 41 x 32". All photos (unless specified otherwise): Oren Slor.





## Shelf Life

SAUL ANTON

It's snotty, I know, but I tend to become that much more interested in an artist if, say, a journalist from one of the glossies turns to me and says: "I don't get it. I mean, isn't this just plain ugly?" Of course, you won't always find the next Matthew Barney this way, but one should never overlook an artist who offends middlebrow cosmopolitan (*Cosmopolitan?*) taste. In any event, it's an exchange I recently experienced in front of a sculpture by Rachel Harrison at Art Basel, where she was one of seventeen artists presenting "statement booths." I've been looking at Harrison's work for quite some time, so I wasn't entirely surprised by the question, though it did provide a perverse confirmation of my esteem for her art.

To be fair, the journalist was not entirely off base. There was something authentically homely and bizarre in the piece we were looking at, *The Honey Collector*, 2002. It was an unlikely cross between a supermarket display stand and a mysterious mystic monolith, done in grayish pale purple, on which Harrison had coyly arranged every brand of squeeze-bottle honey bear she could find. On the back of the structure she'd leaned a board on which she'd pinned a flyer announcing

RELIABLE CAT-SITTER, complete with tear-off phone-number tabs. It truly is a refractory thing. Sure, there are works of art in the pantheon of the anti-aesthetic that are intentionally far more unpleasant, but this one succeeds with impressive assurance in canceling whatever auratic power it can muster. It does so in two ways: by reminding you that it actually could be a counter at your neighborhood King Kullen—well, one covered in cement—and by insisting that, even if you got the reference to the "low," commercial nature of the art object, it doesn't redeem the work or your appreciation of it. "You got it. Goodie for you," it seems to jeer, somehow unmoved by your brilliance and thoroughly unwilling to affirm any critical value you might lend it for making such an observation possible.

Traffic in the aesthetics of the ugly has a long pedigree. It dates at least to the 1863 *Salon des Refusés* or Leonardo da Vinci's caricatures, if not to Longinus's treatise on the sublime. Nevertheless, like most Conceptual sculpture today *The Honey Collector* was hardly designed as an affront to Beauty with a capital B. In fact, my guess is that what really bothered said journalist about the piece—a fine example of Harrison's "what-the-hell-is-that?" sculpture, to quote Bob Nickas's apt description—was the way the work confounded her attempt to understand it dialectically as a critique of commodity fetishism, as lead, in other words, that could be turned into the gold of critical vanguardism.

*The Honey Collector's* refusal operates via a strategy of delay quite literally built in to its two sides. On one side it's a display stand, on the other, a wall—actually, a fragment of a wall leaning against the counter-top structure. Janus-like, these sides designate the aesthetic lodestars of sculpture today: the readymade and the minimal object. If these critical paradigms are seen traditionally as allies in the battle against formalism, Harrison nevertheless envisions them as two aspects of sculpture that are incommensurate if not incompatible: The first type points to its own obvious nature as a sign (for consumerism, commercialism, etc.); the second foregrounds the object's phenomenological status as a thing prior to any meaning. The result is less a synthesis of opposites than a mutual undermining of each paradigm's claim to legibility and critical force. In a manner recalling Theodor Adorno's "dialectics at a standstill," Harrison doesn't so much



resolve an opposition as reaffirm and, to adopt one of Adorno's musical metaphors, "play" it.

This is evident in other works. *Bustle in Your Hedgerow*, 1999, seen at the Whitney Biennial earlier this year, is a five-and-a-half-foot L-shaped object made of wood, Parex, polystyrene, and dark green stucco. It could be taken as an homage to Robert Morris's primary structures or something by Tony Smith, save for the two tabloid photographs of a bloated Elizabeth Taylor mounted on the back. With this gesture, Harrison undoes the claim of objecthood, stressing that this thick, wall-like thing is not merely a three-dimensional object or support but also, figuratively, a veil that hides as much as it reveals. Its bulk makes it obvious that the veil can never be lifted, yet the reading doesn't stop there. This same burly solidity is doubled—obliquely and hilariously—by the no-longer-pixieish Liz herself. The result: a structure

Perhaps this is because Harrison, who is in her midthirties, never attended a graduate program in art and never learned to see installation as a distinct genre, one choice among many in the expanded field; indeed, if anything, she seems to have questioned the form from the very beginning. Her undergraduate thesis show in 1989, an installation set into the window at Wesleyan University's Center for the Arts, already sought to examine the relation between the installation form and the power of the image. Harrison herself attributes this concern to the influence of John Baldessari's work. In the decade



## THE PROBLEM, Harrison suggests, is not that sculpture is a non-referential object but that there's more reference than we can handle.

and an image that refer to each other and their capacity for representation, which, instead of being rejected out of hand, is turned back into the work in a sort of loop. If the piece is reflexive, it is not so in terms of its own materiality but because it is more like a reference machine that circulates meaning through opposing aesthetic poles. The problem, Harrison suggests, is not that sculpture is a nonreferential object but that there's more reference than we can handle.

This may sound like the formula for an artwork informed by academic debates in the aftermath of '60s art, and, indeed, Harrison lays claim to Marcel Broodthaers's mantle, his deliberate use of contradictory statements and his passion for collecting aesthetic models, which she then recycles and dramatizes. Yet, though she fully exploits the dramatic nature of sculpture, she can't be called an "installation" artist in the way that Broodthaers defines the category.

since she began exhibiting, mostly in New York at Greene Naftali gallery and increasingly in Berlin, Paris, and elsewhere, she has considered installation and its claims to universality, even as it has been generalized into yet another formal language—the preferred form of an ever more spectacularized art no longer possessing the critical edge and sense of inevitability that made it the dominant genre throughout the '90s.

Paradoxical legacies such as that of installation art are at the heart of Harrison's practice, but the most important aspect of her work lies less in that now-salonish mode of working than in one that sets her largely outside the post-Minimalist tradition as well as the more academic category of "institutional critique": her embrace of Pop. Harrison approaches sculpture via the royal road of the image rather than through notions of objecthood and materiality; hence, she rejects any priority of the three-dimensional object

over the image, submitting Minimalism to Pop's—and popular culture's—all-devouring maw. In the truly funny *2 a.m. 2nd Avenue*, 1996, a vaguely cartoonish yellow orb with five photos mounted on it like eyes, four of the images are of Johnny Carson standing with different men. Harrison incorporates photographs and Pop images into nearly every work she makes. The manner in which she does so suggests that her sculptures—or "structures," if one prefers—are more like picture libraries, hieroglyphic mysteries that must be deciphered even though they tend to frustrate easy reading. In *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*, 1996–97, she deploys photographs of Bo and John Derek, with Bo appearing to look down at the cans of olives that Harrison has placed below and to the side of her. A parodic attack on notions of sequence and temporality so dear to Minimal and Conceptual artists, the work seems to suggest that such terms always remain bound to the task of representation and as such can never overcome this burden, an assignment they have often been given. Call it Gnostic or Kabbalistic Pop: a Pop practice that remystifies images which seem







self-explanatory and transparent. It reverses the direction of reference in traditional Pop by pointing to something oblique and unexpected in the everyday rather than to the sign-nature of things like Coke bottles or cartoons. In a way, Harrison folds Minimalism's object back into the image, recognizing the insistent objecthood of the image, its dumb obtuse *thereness*, as "powerful" as any "specific" object. Isn't that what the faded glory of Liz is saying here? *I'm still here, darling!*

Similarly, in *No Menus*, 1997, *Jacob's Arm*, 1997, *Picnic*, 1998, and the recent *Seven of Nine*, 2002, which presents a photograph of Marlon Brando's eye mounted on a seven-foot-tall rust brown *thing*, Harrison opposes object to photograph in a way that recalls Dan Graham's use of photography and his particular exploration of circuits of vision, as well as Richard Artschwager's juxtapositions of material and shape. In these works, Harrison effectively exacerbates the opposition of reference and objecthood, perception and cliché, creating an internal system of equivalence and reference that leaves little room for "subjective" interpretation. *No Menus*, for instance, a yellow Styrofoam-brick monolith more than six feet tall, resembles an arrival-departure screen in the bizarre world. Instead of showing schedules, as you might expect from a typical information kiosk, the piece offers two photographs of people walking through a train station, apparently coming and going. On the back, Harrison has mounted an image of

someone walking past a gated store in an anonymous American town. There is no obvious way to decode the relation between this image and the two others, but you might say the figure looks like someone who has arrived too late or someone who cannot look into the kiosk. One recalls the way Matthew Barney's images both promise and deny the meaning so many want to discover in his seductively overloaded compositions.

If Harrison eschews the critical legacy of Minimal and Conceptual art, it's not because she is unaware of their historical importance, but rather because they are dependent on generic forms that today cannot become authentic critical acts in any way. So she dramatizes these critical modes in her works, transforming them into a language of *détournement*, to borrow Rosalind Krauss's description of Broodthaers's strategy vis-à-vis the culture industry's inevitable appropriation of that which tries to escape its clutches. The installation *Perth Amboy*, 2001, is a stunning example. A maze constructed of cardboard set in the middle of the gallery, the totality of the work thwarted one's vision. Yet, as one stepped into the labyrinth, one discovered, tucked in the various corners and miniature culs-de-sac, sculptural tableaux depicting various moments of aesthetic appreciation—a Becky doll (Barbie's wheelchair-bound friend) looking at a photograph taken on the set of *The Mummy Returns*, a Chinese scholar studying a hideously faux scholar's rock, a plaster bust of Marilyn Monroe sit-

ting in a cardboard box, and a can of La Morena salsa sporting a "saucy" Latina on its label who appears to be looking at a reproduction of a painting depicting an art collection, David Teniers's *The Archduke Leopold's Gallery*, 1651. There is also a series of mysterious photographs of a suburban home, the traces of hands pressed against a window evident in some of the photos. The work is based on an incident in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, where a reported sighting of the Virgin Mary in the window of a house drew pilgrims for weeks, many of them moved to make physical contact with the window. *Perth Amboy* clearly plays on the analogy between the desire to see critical apparitions in art and the Catholic pilgrim's belief in visions of the Virgin, but it tweaks the comparison: Isn't it our Minimalist and Conceptual critical desire—the wish to discover resistance to capitalism's power to make anything and everything into a commodity—that we're being shown here? If that's the case, Harrison suggests, then such critical rigor is as much an object of faith—Freud would say fantasy—as the Jersey Virgin.

At issue here is the machinery of dialectical negation that transforms one thing into its opposite, a cornerstone of academic art criticism and contemporary cultural theory but also, at least since the '60s, the culture industry's hobbyhorse, from the pickup truck morphed into a luxury item (Mercedes SUV) to the \$200 ripped jeans to designer cowboy boots. Think how Marc Jacobs's *très cher* and *très chic* trailer-trash designs so easily play the high-low game, turning kitsch "heartland" Americana into glossy continued on page 202



Opposite page, top: Rachel Harrison, *Bustle in Your Hodgerow (detail)*, 1999, polystyrene, cement, Parex, wood, and color photographs, 64 1/2 x 97 x 27". Bottom: Rachel Harrison, *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*, 1996-97, olive cans, black-and-white photographs, and gutter, 21 1/2 x 120 x 5 1/2". This page, top: Rachel Harrison, *Untitled (detail)*, 2001, Formica pedestal, polystyrene, cement, Parex, acrylic, and ceramic figurine, 60 x 24 x 24". Right: Rachel Harrison, *Untitled*, 2001, color photograph, 26 x 20". From the series "Perth Amboy," 2001.



Rachel Harrison, *Untitled*,  
1991, bearskin rug, hair  
extensions, and found  
photographs, 73 x 47".



**ANTON/HARRISON** *continued from page 165*

spreads. You might suspect that contemporary fashionistas are by default neo-avant-gardistas—or, to paraphrase Fredric Jameson, something akin to Delia Brown divas “who read Adorno by the pool.” In other words, anything but critical. Harrison staunchly resists these conversions of base material into symbolic, aesthetic, or critical value by continuously deferring delivery of hermeneutic satisfaction.

In essentially canceling the priority of object to image and adopting the inherently ambiguous mimetic practices of Pop, Harrison is one of Warhol’s most insightful critics, someone who has grasped the radical legacy of his project. She retains his fascination with the image but jettisons its obvious points of reference, borrowing from Warhol what may be described as his dualism—his early intuition that the poison and the cure are perhaps one and the same. One could say Harrison recognizes in Warhol the collector’s utopian horizon as described by Benjamin: the liberation of the object “from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind.” In this sense, *Perth Amboy* should be seen as an endgame in the cycle of spectacularization that is native both to Pop and to installation as a form, a necessary return of the repressed sculpture-as-object, now demoted to one among a possibly infinite number of dead metaphors. Analogously, one might say that capitalism’s transformation of everything into commodities eventually undermines the seductive force of the commodity form itself. Harrison pushes Warhol’s famous dictum to its logical conclusion: If everyone is famous for fifteen minutes, then fame doesn’t amount to much. The pop icon, like icons in every other culture, is as much an instrument of forgetting as of memory. The Hollywood pantheon obscures its gods as much as it reveals them. This is one way to read Harrison’s Marilyn in a box hidden in the labyrinth of corrugated cardboard. Her (long) quarter-hour is up, and now she’s just another tchotchke in a box, as mute and indecipherable as a photograph in which we no longer recognize the faces, a thing—or, as Keats once wrote, “a shadow of a magnitude.” □

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## Blind Alleys

BRUCE HAINLEY

In Rachel Harrison's *Untitled*, 1991, a rank bear fur hangs from nails driven into the wall. Thin, braided plaits of fake human hair (extensions snatched from a roommate) similar in shade to the dark brown fur complicate the nasty thing, whatever it is. On the hirsute surface dangle, rather precariously (making a kind of truncated constellation, *ursa minor* as it were), four tattered photos; Harrison found them abandoned on the street. The hue and hairdos date the snapshots from the late '60s or early '70s. One is of a family—four children, a father kneeling, someone standing, an accordion stretched across hips, the face and shoulder eviscerated. Another picture shows a little girl with a photo album splayed across her lap; she appears to suffer from Down's syndrome. Is our understanding of these forlorn pix and the skin they hang on any more profound than the girl's take on the photo album in her lap? Does she think the album, with its heavy black pages, might make music like the accordion with its black folds? What questions would she want to ask about art? Are they the questions anyone should ask? Another pic shows a wall with a road sign: CAUTION. Take it as a directive on how to proceed, on too hastily deciding what this untitled bear rug with photos is—sculpture? photo?—much less what it means. The bear rug doesn't really frame the photos, despite surrounding them, and while the fur suggests drooping connection to Robert Morris felt pieces and the protruding braids to Eva Hesse or David Hammons, I keep thinking it's like a strange coat of arms. The motto would read: How much meaning can you bear?

Harrison's work is positioned as dealing in the connections and disconnections between (1) the flat, illusionistic space of photography and the volumetric, actual space of sculpture; (2) the readymade and the hand- and/or homemade (cans of peas, found materials, Marilyn Monroe; variegated, at times even glittering, blobby forms and DIY carpentry); (3) '60s formal/poetic Minimal and post-Minimal devices and '80s appropriationist and commodity-critique strategies; (4) artist, viewer, and object viewed, which Harrison often literalizes—*diagrams*—in her pieces with photographic or sculptural stand-ins for people looking. In *Untitled*, 2001, for example, a Becky doll (advertised as Barbie's "wheelchair friend" and the "school photographer" [!]) on the Mattel box) stares at a photograph of a green-screen soundstage, taken on the set of *The Mummy Returns*, the green screen itself, like photography, able to depict or project anything and everything. Or in a framed photograph in *Sphinx*, 2002, art critic/saint Sister Wendy gazes, happily full of grace, at an ancient statuary head. In terms of Harrison's use of such particular surrogates, it is not simply the viewer who's figured (empowered?) as different, disabled, or "challenged"; the artist is implied as well, meaning that you can probably smell the stinky, suppurating wound of Philoctetes (cf. Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow*, which figures the ostracized but unsurpassable Greek marksman as artist, whom society shuns or ignores because of his or her difference, even repug-

nance, until a crisis—when what the artist provides is the only thing that will save society). To put it another way: The stand-in "other" has become *anyone who bothers to try to look and to consider looking*. (Since they are inanimate objects, Harrison's various representations of lookers cannot, of course, actually *see*; in this sense, a kind of *looking-but-not-seeing*, a blind gaze, is depicted.) Given a media-driven, image-obsessed culture that nonetheless devalues when not preventing a sustained education about how art and the visual operate—and how this might be pertinent to a more informed negotiation of life in such a culture—one can understand that, with little of Wilson's romanticism, the artist and the looker might be figured as crippled.

Still, Harrison is no queen of the between. Her work doesn't operate by opposition. In its literalization of what cannot be seen (blind spots), in its being held together by, paradoxically, gaps and holes (especially between different kinds and forms of culture), Harrison's photography and sculpture bear an analogical, even allegorical relation to the cultural/artistic condition in which *opposition has ceased to exist*. Most of her sculptural work defies structuring principles of front and back: Representations of either are only apparent, as in *Sphinx*, where the drywall that displays the Sister Wendy photo seems to situate a front or outside (gallery wall) and the rosy blob on its kooky diagrammatic base a back or inside (storage area). Such strict oppositional spatiality is stymied, confused, by



Top left: Rachel Harrison, *Unplugged* (detail), 2000, wood, electric outlet, and color photograph, 68 x 40 x 24". Right: Rachel Harrison, *Sphinx* (two views), 2002, polystyrene, cement, Parex, acrylic, wood, Sheetrock, and color photograph, 98 x 48 x 65".



attention to how the “base” that supports the pink form resembles other Harrison sculptures (such as *Studio 54*, 1996) while the rosy “sculpture” itself mimics “bases” in other works by Harrison—e.g., the mountainous jade form of *Wardrobe*, 2002. Similarly, the unfinished wood of *Sphinx* recalls the artist’s early installations, like her 1996 debut solo show in New York, at Arena, where various panelings and faux-brick coverings, in addition to little papier-mâché blob shelves holding cans of peas and framed street photographs—some with piles of green garbage bags dreamily skewing the scale of the piles of green peas on the labels of the cans—abstracted the real and realized abstraction by folding the space of domestic, sculptural, architectural, and photographic representation. *Sphinx* is made up of the presentation of a photograph and the presentation of a sculpture; it isn’t “about” the display or framing of either. One of the questions it would seem to ask is, What kind of difference does surface qua surface make when one looks—at a

photograph and at a sculpture, when represented surface and actual surface meet? All of which makes it not only difficult to answer the riddle of where *Sphinx* is (front/back, inside/outside) but what and when it is (is it simply present, or does it re-present aspects of sculptural history as well as of the artist’s own earlier work?). The viewer must continue to circumambulate *Sphinx*—circulation and stasis situating one of the basic differences in looking at sculpture and photography (we don’t usually walk *around* photographs)—and its riddle never settles.

I didn’t think I’d begin my attempt to write about Harrison’s work in such a dutiful way (mention an early “key” piece to lens things through, detail the various constitutive aspects of the work). I was going to start by mentioning my forthcoming book (*finally!*) of interviews with Helen Keller on aesthetics, conducted in 1968, just a few months prior to the grand dame of audio-visual deprivation’s demise. Bringing Helen into this would thematize seeing and the unseeable, methods of reception (Anne Sullivan; braille) effects of mediation (*The Miracle Worker*) and belief Not impertinent matters.

Why would I do that? I want to throw some rays of reflexivity onto the forms of writing about art that often go uncommented on, almost as if they were not forms, kinds of narrative. Not that I’m a big believer in mimesis when it comes to writing in a manner “like” the art about which one writes, but that one way to begin to unpack the question of why Harrison might be having her moment in the sun is in the way her sculpture and photography draw attention—reflexively—to their respective media, their histories, and their modes of reception. In other words, one thing Harrison’s work makes inescapable is the fact of how art materially instantiates the reality or fictionality of the discourses it provokes. By which I mean that to convey most sinuously the complexities of a given work of art, one may have to embrace forms and modes of address beyond art history or aesthetics. For example, consider screening thought about the non visual or nonretinal through Patty Duke—as representative of moving from blindness-as-vision (Patty a Helen) to insight-as-vision (Patty as Anne Sullivan).

What are the questions that should be asked about Harrison’s sculptures and photographs? In the otherwise punitive *October* “roundtable” on the state of criticism, curator Helen Molesworth proffers that Harrison’s “work is, actually, deeply invested in the texts that many of the [*October* school] have produce



about Minimalism and phenomenology and the role of the photograph in spectacle culture” and that the work “maybe isn’t recognized by the very people with whom she’s trying to have a dialogue.” Elsewhere, art historian and *October* editor George Baker nominates Harrison’s “insistence on confronting the aporia between the legacies of Constructivism and the readymade . . . and the almost curatorial use of sculpture as a display surface for photographs” as crucial for grappling with how her work produces meaning and with the meanings produced. There’s nothing wrong per se with either of these critical takes, yet neither provides help in considering the obvious and sustained elements in the artist’s work: her brilliant, consistent deployment of star culture (photographic appearances of Bo Derek, Michael Jackson, Johnny Carson, Elizabeth Taylor, Marlon Brando) and color (ballerina pink, shit brown, jade, glittering disco blue). These aren’t just decorative or whimsical components (although decoration and whimsy are matters contemplated through the work).

Harrison isn’t opposing Constructivism and Marlon Brando; nor is she placing her work *between* the two. But her sculpture and photography preemptively destabilize any reading that would allow the art

This page, left: Rachel Harrison, *Utopia*, 2002, polystyrene, cement, Parex, acrylic, wood, ceramic figure, and pyrite, 84 x 40 x 51. Opposite page, left: Rachel Harrison, *Marlon and Indian* (detail), Parex, acrylic, wood, plastic figure, and color photograph, 51 x 44 x 29". Photo: John R. Glemblin. Right: Rachel Harrison, *2 a.m.*, papier-mâché, acrylic, and black-and-white photographs, 41 x 73 x 29".



historical to rationalize the work—by and/or with the frivolous pleasure of color, of post-Fortensky-*These Old Broads* Liz, of *Dr. Moreau-fat*—“Lying for a Living” Marlon, of the pancake-makeup, friend-of-the-David Gest’s derangement appearing under the sign of Michael Jackson. I’m not certain that this project is ever to be concluded, yet the attempt would seem to be to negotiate forms of thought in a manner analogous to Harrison’s movement through media, not settling for either photography or sculpture or even photography-cum-sculpture, in which each medium serves as a point of return and difference. Harrison is not putting

**HARRISON’S SCULPTURE and photography preemptively destabilize any reading that would allow the art historical to rationalize the work.**

photography and sculpture together to hybridize media or to present neo-Rauschenbergian combines; she’s using them to consider what it would mean, post-postmedium, to endeavor something that would be “sculpture” or “photography,” historically informed but not nostalgic redux. Nothing so programmatic as making sculptures to represent the cultural moment and its lack of a quorum when it comes to whether art matters or what its key critical issues might be, Harrison’s work nonetheless conveys such concerns—the fact that Sister Wendy and Liz Taylor and Becky the Cripple/Photographer have as much to contribute concerning opticality and vision as does any esteemed art historian.

Harrison’s sculpture spatializes and is constructed out of such a critical dilemma. She is taking apart and juxtaposing the constitutive elements of photography and sculpture in a manner reflecting on and influenced by the work of artists from a previous generation, in particular Cady Noland. Where Noland’s personages usually invoke noir Americanness, Harrison’s truck in

the bizarre facticity of existence. Eschewing Noland’s use of silkscreening and employment of newspaper and/or tabloid images (in a manner related to Warhol’s paintings) as sculptural elements, Harrison uses actual photographs and presents sculpture as sculpture (rather than as a Noland-esque stand-in); yet, in a manner recalling Noland, she is sorting out the differences and connections between represented and presented space while pursuing formal issues of medium and why such an approach is still credible.

An example of how cogently Harrison presents some of these concerns is seen in *5 x 7s (A&R Quality*

*Photo . . .)*, 1996, for which the artist had the same negative of a naturally abstract anthill developed at ten stores or labs, requesting an identical process and picture size each time. Each photo came back looking different, in a comically variegated range of hues, and one of the developed images was larger than the requested five-by-seven. Framed together they provide a witty commentary on the medium, on the production and reception of sameness, on the absence of a standard, even of standardization. Harrison opens up the potential of the situation to attempt to respond to the demands of a culture of too much. I don’t think the flux or absence is supposed to be deplorable or depressing.

*The Honey Collector*, 2002: Red & White Honey / US Grade A. Pure Natural / Honey Brother / uncooked no preservatives / Clover Honey. Dutch Gold / US Grade A / Clover / Pure Honey. Sandt’s / Pure Honey / Pure / Clover Honey. SueBee / Premium / Clover / Honey / US Grade A Fancy White Pure Honey. Gunter’s / Pure Honey / Clover / 100% Natural US Grade A. Clover Honey / Dawes Hill / Once Again Nut Butter / Dawes Hill Honey. Nature’s Sweetest Miracle / Stoller’s / Pure / Clover / Honey. Krasdale / US Grade A Fancy / HONEY / Clover. Sandt’s / Natural Unfiltered /

Clover / Pure Honey. I write out the labels to highlight the strangeness and poetry of Harrison’s decision *not* to choose simply a single kind of honey bear. Collector, she is valuing difference, multiplicity, and the minute distinctions that make things matter and create difference. The plastic creatures in *The Honey Collector*, 2002, could be the small pets taken care of by reliable Debra, whose ad on another side of the sculpture announces: “RELIABLE CAT-SITTER / WILL TAKE CARE OF / YOUR CATS & OTHER SMALL PETS / IN YOUR HOME / REASONABLE RATE / EXCELLENT REFERENCES / DEBRA (212) XXX-3240.” The honey bears punctuate one section of the work’s different horizontal, vertical, and almost topographical planes—which at times suggest shelf as stage or stage as shelf (where performers are displayed)—that make up the work’s mauve, almost constructivist form. Here Harrison is staging questions about *continued on page 210*





**HAINLEY/HARRISON** *continued from page 169*

the history of sculpture (its theatricality; its unfinished investigation of sculpture and base; its relation to props, furniture, *stuff*). By including a photo of Brando, she's plumping out ideas of mass; sculpture's relation to bodies and, since the shot seems to be from the actor's self-directed western opus, *One-Eyed Jacks*, to cinematic horizontality, space filled with movement. Diagramming the difference within similitude, the honey bear labels display the fat, dizzying range of difference among nearly identical products. Debra doesn't want to be taken for just any other cat-sitter even though her ad is like so many others seen on coffee house or grocery market bulletin boards. Marlon advertises Marlonness (identity; identity) as well as masculinity and its consumption. Big sweet-eater, he bares the impact of reference on the body. The burden of referential honey, his presence asks: Honey, how much can anyone bear? Lavender brightness, funny honey bears, Marlon's perseverance—*The Honey Collector* sweetens the potentially unbearable by refusing simply to consume it or ignore it. It owns up to it, collecting the situation.

A subtle, brilliant feminist current courses through Harrison's work as well. Connecting the issues of surplus and multiplicity with the feminine (and putting a witty spin on Haim Steinbach's shelving), for *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*, 1996–97, Harrison places cans of olives and photos of Bo on an inverted white gutter, from where we look up to see a literal star. The woman who for a time embodied a number ("10") seems to consider self-definition and a life apart from her scary late husband, John, as she struggles to count the olives on the various cans arranged in stacks to the side of the photos she appears in. At first, Bo seems perplexed, bewildered by how many olives there are. There are too many; she rests her taxed skull on her husband's shoulder. Then she looks as if she might begin to get it—the number of olives—at the same time figuring out that she could do so solo. She's happiest when the label shows only a single olive. Bo can easily count one olive—and she can do it by herself. Everyone may experience Bo-like difficulties. It may be appealing to accomplish a Bo-like

surety (one *is* one), but to speak only in the realm of art—what is the beau and what is not; how to proceed when there's no opposition and too many options to count—means not just a self-forgetting (knowing only one, Bo never could begin a search for self-knowledge ["10"]) but an enervated accounting of culture.

A still from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* provides *In the Zoo*, 2001, not only a mood but also a palette and materials. Unlike many of Harrison's pieces, what's depicted in the photograph gets represented (therefore changed) in the space of the sculpture itself. The teal blue phone snaking through part of *In the Zoo* is off the hook, unlike the teal blue phone in the film still; there, it rests on the polar bear shag next to which Petra waits, her bottle of vodka dulling the harshness of waiting. The photo of Petra is dinky compared to another image it abuts, an almost completely blurred picture of a rooster in a zoo. Cardboard with packing tape attempts to cover part of the lower parts of the makeshift sculpture, barely holding it together. A sign with the handwritten words 3 MILE ISLAND hangs from the piece's midregion. A study in tans, teal, and pink connoting an obsolescent phone booth, *In the Zoo* delivers the nuclear meltdown of love suspended. Is meaning busy or does it never call? Tears wrench emotion but cleanse after blurring vision. The bitter philosophy of Petra, not Immanuel, suggests a place for a Fourth Critique. Not jettisoning the lessons of neo-formalist, neo-Kantian critique but not simply kowtowing to them either, responding to Harrison's work (as to the best of her contemporaries) compels a response enfolding the frivolous, the stupid, the fatly intractable, a Ronellian *beyond of knowledge*. The phone may be off the hook, but we're not. □

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