

REGEN PROJECTS

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Rachel Harrison

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SFMoMA, San Francisco
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Review by Walead Beshty



If Rachel Harrison's West Coast debut elicited quizzical stares, it must have been expected. In contrast to the increasing ubiquity of immersive mega-biennial-style installations, Harrison's contribution to SFMoMA's 'New Work' series seems strangely understated. Harrison's signature historical pastiche in clumpy Technicolor has a refreshingly unapologetic materiality and a disquieting presence. Many claim that Harrison's project is a reworking of the Sixties traditions of Pop and Minimalism. But if so, she avoids the most reductive understandings of both, specifically Pop's anomic glitz and Minimalism's technocratic-spirituality, traditions most often claimed in defence of certain nihilistic celebrations of design culture. Instead, Harrison's slumping and leaning sculptures – garbed in gooey muted browns, greens and silvery blues – are a melancholic reverberation of a Day-Glo suburban utopia whose time has already passed; the visual equivalent of a putrid odour that resists the tastefully modern tabula rasa of the museum.

Wedged into her globby forms is the stuff of debased consumption: economy-brand goods, cheap wigs and old film stills. In Harrison's practice, these offer a potent reminder of our perennial compromise between the image of our desire and the detritus it leaves us with. Such is the case with *Hail to Reason* (2004), a nine-foot-tall sculpture in the stoic repose of a monumental bronze, which cradles a video of a rural auction. Its distended form evokes the campy sets of *Barbarella* as much

as Rodin's *Monument to Honoré de Balzac*, while the auction footage presents a range of dusty second-hand wares, stripped of the aura that once drew their initial owners to them.

Blazing Saddles (2004) echoes the geometries of El Lissitzky's *Proun Room*, John Miller's *Brown work* and Warhol's Campbell's soup cans through the filter of the most memorable scene in Mel Brooks' eponymous film, where the protagonists erupt into a symphony of flatulence after eating baked beans. The scene completes Warhol's tongue-in-cheek celebration of commodity culture by returning his muse to the ether as a gas. But the empty signifiers of mass production that so fascinated post-Minimalist endeavours persist in Harrison's sculptures, re-emerging unscathed in her biomorphically abject forms as if they were passed for their sheer artificiality.

Harrison's evocation of blue-collar suburban aesthetics takes a page from Dan Graham's *Homes for America*, which similarly forces a confrontation between a fetish for serial form and its realisation in the vulgarised quarters of mass consumption. But what Graham failed to locate were the implications of the abject in commodity culture, something Harrison's Frankenstein-like globs make difficult to miss.

Walead Beshty is featured in the 'ArtReview 25: Emerging US Artists'. Turn to page 111

Above: Rachel Harrison, *Hail to Reason*, 2004, wood, wire, polystyrene, Parex, Portland cement, acrylic, DVD player and doilies, 254 x 99.06 x 91.44 cm, detail