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MIAMI / FLORIDA

## Victoria Gitman

Bass Museum of Art

"On Display" begins in the self-portraits inspired by masterpieces of art history that Victoria Gitman copied as a student at Florida International University. In some of these, the female figure wears a choker that later becomes the subject of Gitman's first jewelry painting. The desire to document a significant piece inspired her to develop a whole new series of work.

Gitman visits swap shops and antique stores, where she carefully selects pieces of costume jewelry—necklaces, bracelets, pins, and even a hat pin—that she later faithfully paints or draws over neutral backgrounds. She also finds delicate beaded purses that not only represent a feminine craft but also have connotations as containers of intimate objects such as lipsticks, embroidered handkerchiefs, and mirrors that cannot be seen in the paintings but without a doubt existed and were part of the identity of their former owners.

By representing the purses, craft objects considered inferior to the fine arts, Gitman elevates the value of the feminine arts such as embroidery. Seen together, the geometric forms of the purses contrast with the flat backgrounds on which they are represented and become simple, very minimal compositions that remind us in their formal purity of abstract modernism. Nevertheless, it is impressive how Gitman copies each and every one of the beads, sequins, or pearls that together form ornate objects that contrast with the ultimate ideals of modernism.

The series of jewelry paintings begins with four necklaces displayed in a circular shape over flat neutral backgrounds. The works are inspired by minimal geometry yet they contrast with modern ideas as they reincarnate objects that are heavily adorned. Other works include a hat pin adorned with a flower and two butterfly-shaped pins whose simple compositions become taxonomic representations of feminine symbols inspired by nature. All the costume jewelry represented in "On Display," with the exception of one butterfly made in filigree, are machine made but look so delicate that they appear to be made by hand.

Gitman also presents the series *Beauties*, five miniature copies of profile portraits dating from the fifteenth century. Each represents a torso of a woman adorned with an elaborate hairdo, jewelry, and a luxurious costume of the time. Their facial features, the complex hairdos made with braids and pearls, the jewels, and the embroideries and the pleats of their gowns are drawn with great detail, emphasizing the fetishistic aspect of the original image.

Victoria Gitman weaves relationships among the portraits, the purses, and the jewelry. All of them represent a sort of adorned beauty, created to be exhibited and admired. The accessories and the women who wear them become strange curiosities, bizarre specimens that could belong to a "cabinet of wonders,"<sup>1</sup> delicate beauties with multiple values that, in Gitman's skillful paintings and drawings, attain the maximum status of works of art.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Grim. "Entrevista con Victoria Gitman." *Victoria Gitman: On Display*. Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2005.

Francine Birbragher



Victoria Gitman. *On Display*, 2003. Oil on board. 14 x 13 in. (35,5 X 33 cm.). Private collection. Courtesy: Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles.