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RICHARD GRAY GALLERY

MALIA JENSEN

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Thinking Through Objects

Malia Jensen

BY POLLY ULLRICH

Malia Jensen has emerged from a generation of younger sculptors who express content through a language of hybrid objects, rather than continuing last century's aesthetic exploration of art about art. Her recent exhibition "Conjunctions," at the Richard Gray Gallery in Chicago, forged adroit combinations of materials and meanings to fabricate sculpture of physical, conceptual, and metaphorical depth. Wildness and domesticity, "reality" and myth, humor and melancholy, jeopardy and sanctuary, clarity and obscurity, impropriety and elegance, mischief and tragedy, the unnerving and the darling, the conceptual and the handmade—all intermingle slyly and at many levels in Jensen's sculpture, which embodies contradiction. The tension between opposing elements causes a temporary short circuit in meanings, creating what she calls "a third thing," a new, often unnerving reality.[1]

Seal + Penguin 4 Ever (2008) offers a good example of her tongue-in-cheek approach to "coupling" disparate parts for conceptual purposes. At one level, *Seal* is an outré representation of the hegemony currently enjoyed by unusual materials in sculpture: a polyester resin seal covered in shiny auto body paint (symbolizing the contemporary) straddles a penguin in patinated bronze (representing the traditional). The work is based on a bizarre story recently reported on the BBC: two wildly different animals, a seal and a penguin, were seen mating. *Seal*'s blend of impropriety and absurdity epitomizes Jensen's delight in transgression, even as it offers up her sarcastic anger at discordant and inappropriate human dominance over the natural world, a recurring theme in her work.

This is sculpture that periodically skirts an unsavory edge as it cheerfully dismantles the longstanding Western penchant for thinking about the world in binary terms—mental/manual, intellect/body, culture/nature, good/bad. The work represents an unmannerly critique of enduring 17th-century philosophical premises represented by Descartes's "I think, therefore I am," where the act of thinking—not feeling—assures us of our existence and splits the world into a "superior" mental sphere of intellectual activity and a "lowly" body trapped in its material nature. This mindset has historically tainted the aesthetic status of sculpture, located as it is in the three-dimensional, everyday world of "dumb objects."

But Jensen unifies the ways in which we take meaning from the world: her sculpture allows technical virtuosity and materials to mingle equally with abstract metaphor and linguistic play to achieve an ironic punch. These aesthetic works echo the cultural theorist Bill Brown's call for "a comparatively new idiom, beginning with the effort to think with or through the physical object world...to establish a genuine sense of the things that comprise the stage on which human action, including the action of thought, unfolds."[2] Jensen calls her sculptures "thinking tools," adding: "I think in objects, so I'm interested in a very clear language of things. Linguistically, I'm interested in how ideas exist without a language. Objects exist without a language. I'm interested in ideas that come in through the gut, the intuition that then rises up to the brain."

Not surprisingly, much of Jensen's sculpture focuses on just what the Cartesian "cogito" attempts to cast out—the animal in all of us. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, humans were given sovereignty over the animal world. Yet, antithetically,

Opposite: *Seal + Penguin 4 Ever*, 2008. Patinated bronze, polyester resin, acrylic urethane, and cat whiskers, 20 x 42 x 67 in. Right: *Bathing Skunk*, 2000–08. Cast soap and microcrystalline wax, 13 x 8 x 16 in.

***En Plein Air*, 2000. Urethane resin and acrylic urethane, 6 x 9 x 13 in.**

even as humans have parsed what is "animal" to define the "human," so we have from ancient times drawn on animal qualities of power and the supernatural to expand our own identities. Just as Claude Levi-Strauss's epigram "animals are good to think with" destabilized the boundaries between humans and animals (they teach us how to sharpen our perceptions), so Jensen's use of animal subjects to describe psychological plight violates longstanding assumptions about the superiority of human acumen.[3] Her anthropomorphic *Bathing Skunk* (2000–08), for example, embodies the essence of what it feels like (for a human, presumably) to be in a quandary: it's the image of a happily odorous skunk who, disconcertedly, finds its body cast from pristine soap and wax.

Although Jensen has lived in Brooklyn for six years, she grew up in the Portland, Oregon, area, spending most of her time roaming the forests and woods. She graduated from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 1989 and maintains strong connections with the region and its aesthetic traditions: a recent exhibition at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery and the installation of an outdoor bronze sculpture titled *Pile* (2009) in downtown Portland continued her dryly articulated themes of sharp sedition.

Images of nature and animals form an artistic foundation in the Pacific Northwest, which draws on traditional Native American iconography and the mid-20th-century Northwest School of painting. But Jensen's work goes further. Her animals allow her to actualize and intensify the sense of strangeness and familiarity, the autonomy and otherness, that the material world presents to humans. *Dark Horse* (2008), the speculative image of a house-cat-sized prehistoric horse called an eohippus, is a powerful representation of opacity and otherness.

It is significant that Jensen does not operate within the aesthetic milieu of Rosalind Krauss's "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979), which famously heralded the advent of installation art. Instead, Jensen's sculpture inhabits a discrete—not dispersed—space, offering a physically condensed, one-on-one intimacy of modest

***Dark Horse*, 2008. Polyurethane resin, 16 x 22 x 5 in.**

Above: *Jam*, 2008. Patinated bronze and cast cotton paper, 22 x 18 x 21 in. Right: *Debark*, 2008. Patinated bronze, cast cotton paper, and watercolor, 75 x 11 x 21 in.

scale. She calls it, "anti-stadium art, not spectacle for the sake of spectacle." Jensen seeks "to make smaller connections. It's more interesting if it feels accessible. i want the audience of one person, as opposed to making art for a roomful of people."

The sense of the uncanny in Jensen's sculpture—which includes much more than animal imagery—also sharpens its intimacy and deftly delivered mischief. She has called her work "Northwest Noir," a semi-jocular description circulating among Pacific Northwest residents, who often blame the rainy weather for their brooding, off-kilter cultural sensibility. Frequently, Jensen's sculptures work like visual jokes, amplified by a stand-up demeanor—uninflected and straightforward, delivering a secondary bite after the initial chuckle. *Chopping Pillow (with nails)* (2007–08), for example, hand-carved from a restaurant chopping block, serves up a funny and alarming meditation on our assumptions about places of safety—such as beds. The gorgeously waxed, nailed surface forms a smoothly elegant location for nightmares: you might lose your head if you sleep on it. As in all of Jensen's work, *Pillow*'s loving workmanship and refined details seduce viewers into close quarters, where they find ambiguity and contradiction. "Much of what I do is a complicated obfuscation," she says.

This, indeed, is how Jensen leaves it: stilled poise and material presence run up against, and yet strengthen, the linguistic drive of her sculptures. *Debark* (2008), a cast paper bundle slung over a 100-pound bronze staff, embodies a longing for departure, for escape. But the staff is ponderous, the bundle pitifully tenuous, and, as Jensen implies, there is ultimately no place to go. "This is the terror," writes the anthropologist Ernest Becker, "to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, and excruciating inner yearnings for life and self-expression—and with all this yet to die."[4] Jensen lays down a new set of 21st-century conditions for how humans define themselves within the progression of earthly events. These eccentric, witty works suggest that acknowledging the "animal" means acknowledging the inevitable, that is, coming to terms with the inescapable connection linking the creaturely, the human, and a perishing material world.

Polly Ullrich is an art critic based in Chicago.

Notes

[1] All quotations from the artist are taken from telephone and e-mail conversations with the author. Jensen's solo show at Richard Gray in New York runs from September 28 through October 30.

[2] Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 3.

[3] Andreas Roepstorff, "Thinking with Animals," *Sign Systems Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2001, p. 204.

[4] Ernest Becker, quoted in Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996), p. 15.

Ingenuity trumps cohesion in Malia Jensen exhibit

By Amy Wang, The Oregonian
August 27, 2009, 8:04PM

It's hard to imagine a day when the chance to see new work by **Malia Jensen** sounds anything less than tantalizing. The twin engines of Jensen's studio practice -- a marvelous command of diverse materials, combined with a revolving cast of animals that populate her sculptures and works on paper -- have produced a veritable menagerie of smart, irresistible artworks dating back to her inclusion in the 1991 Oregon Biennial.

"Knee High to a Worm," Jensen's new exhibition of small sculptures and abstract woodcuts, contains at least half a dozen top-shelf works from the artist's New York studio. But taken as a whole, "Knee High to a Worm" feels more like a compendium of recent creations than a cohesive statement. Jensen's signature animals and material inventiveness anchor the show, but works about the human body, creative inspiration and socio-economic dread feel out of place, despite their individual merits.
The artist shows her hand, quite literally, in two bronzes from 2008 that reveal every pinch and squeeze of her fingers in the clay modeling process. "Dog Loop," a small pedestal piece, captures the self-immolating bite of a bronze mutt chomping down on his own tail. Jensen's canine ouroboros isn't just compulsively aggressive and absurdly unself-aware, but the dog's self-reflexive bite also creates a physical and emotional closed circuit that shuts it off from the external world.

When viewed from above, "Salamander Maze," a flattish, circular network of lumpy bronze passageways, suggests a crumbling mandala, or the ruins of an ancient sacred site. But approached from the reptilian perspective -- a squat vantage point not for the easily embarrassed -- its diminutive walls appear heavy and imposing, a **Richard Serra** labyrinth for the lizard set.

A third bronze, the softball-sized "Mud Bubble (bursting)," looks like a cross between an antique diving helmet and a gurgling swamp belch. Bubbles, especially those of the bursting variety, have assumed a more sinister connotation in these dire economic times, and Jensen's murky, frozen dome is depicted at the apex of its annihilation.

Nearby, a sculpture crafted from painted walnut, rope and epoxy offers the fantasy of relief from the malaise of "Mud Bubble." "Emergency Brake (ver. 1)," which sprouts matter-of-factly from the wall, would be a welcome sight in any of life's trying moments.
Similarly, Jensen's dangling light bulb pieces promise the psychic gift of illumination or inspiration, even though they are as achingly wooden as Pinocchio and as brilliantly dim as Jasper John's iconic metal light bulb of 1958.

Anxiety and neuroses thread their way through much of "Knee High to a Worm," but the individual works engage one another only in smaller breakout groups of conversation, to borrow the middle-manager parlance. The good news is that each of the clusters brims with ingenuity, but in a small show like this, one hopes for a more harmonious, choral effect.
Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; free admission; 503-224-0521, ***www.elizabethleach.com****. Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Closes Aug. 29.*
-- *Chas Bowie*, Special to the Oregonian

Opposites attractive and intriguing in Jensen's hands

BY MARGARET HAWKINS
Galleries

MALIA JENSEN: 'CONJUNCTIONS'

- Through Jan. 10
- Richard Gray Gallery, 875 N. Michigan, Suite 2503
- (312) 642-8877; *www.richardgraygallery.com*

Malia Jensen's deceptively simple-looking sculptures, now on view at Richard Gray Gallery, lull us with sweetness and then confound us with contradiction.

At first appearing to be dead-on representations of plain objects such as pillows and bricks or cute approachable animals, Jensen's work soon reveals itself to be a series of riddles or puzzles, the answers to which can only be imagined when we abandon logic for beautiful impossibility.

Every one of Jensen's sculptures in the exhibit called "Conjunctions" contains a conjunction of opposites: soft and hard, dark and pale, heavy and light, spiky and smooth, whimsical and rigorous, innocent and just slightly salacious.

"En Plein Air" is a piled up, outsized pair of shiny white mating bugs. As bulky as tanks and as sleek and antiseptic as hospital equipment, they are the opposite of the skittering blackness we expect of insects. Jensen has replaced revulsion with a kind of bland cuteness, teddy bears in heat, which renders these beetles both obscene and pristine.

Likewise with "Seal and Penguin 4 Ever," which appears to be another mating couple. Here the shininess of a white seal, as contoured and polished as a mint condition 1951 Cadillac, lies atop a dark bronze penguin. The suggestive slope of the seal's lower body and the inert dark mass of the penguin beneath it subverts the first impression of cuteness that these two icons of zoo appeal embody. It's another relationship of opposites, and everything about it is slightly off. The colors are opposite — seals are usually black — and mammals and birds don't mate. The piece is seductive, but not because it appears to be about animal sex. Rather, it's the gorgeousness of Jensen's surfaces that seduce the eye.

Some of Jensen's works completely skirt the conundrum of cuteness. The aggressively ugly "Dark Horse" might be some kind of prehistoric pig or the dinosaur version of its namesake, but it makes us think more of the unlikely contender suggested by the work's title than it does of any actual horse. Then there are her three pillow pieces, which avoid the animate world altogether and instead focus on materials.

For Jensen, materials have meaning. One of the most elegant of the many elegant works in this show is "Chopping Pillow," a kind of visual oxymoron. A chopping block is where one loses one's head; a pillow is where one rests it. Jensen's pillow-shaped hunk of butcher-block functions neither as a chopping block (too curvy) nor as a pillow (too hard), and it already contains pounded-in nails so even if someone tried to use it as a chopping block, any knife that struck it would instantly be blunted. As a utilitarian object, "Chopping Pillow" is a failure and a study in frustration, yet as an esthetic object, it is perfectly self-defended, proving that the best defense is sometimes uselessness.

These contrasts throughout Jensen's work suggest an overriding and obvious theme: Things are not what they appear. But over time, a more subtle version of this idea emerges, that truth is not a simple black-and-white thing and often lies in its own opposite.

One of Jensen's most appealing pieces, a tiny sculpture of a messy bed carved from a bar of pink soap, embodies her idea that truth resides most fully in paradox as well as any of her larger works. Small and adorable, like something made for a dollhouse, "Unmade Bed" is messy yet carved from soap, which is clean. A bed is safe and solid while soap is something that dissolves. Jensen doesn't draw conclusions — deal with it, she seems to say — but her work forces us to acknowledge that nothing is ever as simple as it appears to be.

Margaret Hawkins is a local free-lance writer.

"Dark Horse" is one of the thought-provoking pieces on display in Malia Jensen's exhibit Conjunctions" at Richard Gray Gallery.

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Interview with Malia Jensen

by Abraham Ritchie

December 2008- Malia Jensen is an artist based in New York City, who is exhibiting at Richard Gray Gallery in Chicago through the 10th of January, 2009. Her work features a cast of enigmatic animals in sometimes tragic situations. The plight of the animals is usually tempered by humor and a high degree of attention to material and the overall production. The result is work that is poignant, lyrical and sometimes funny, with a tinge of sadness. We sat down before her opening to discuss her work.

Abraham Ritchie: A lot of writing about your work talks about the use of humor. What does the role of humor play? How do you intend to use it?

Malia Jensen: I think that humor is a survival tool. It's kind of a counterpoint to a bleakness, and I think that there are both things in my work. There's bleakness, there's humor and there's beauty. So it's like they're playing together. Like with the *Bathing Skunk*, he's in a sort of dire situation as far as a skunk is concerned. The skunk is made of cast soap and he's essentially undermining his principal identity as a skunk: being stinky. He's stuck in this situation where he's made out of soap, which is not necessarily agreeeable to his character. So it's funny, but also to me it is like a little, tiny tragedy, this skunk. But it is funny. Then of course the skunk is also in an implied pool, so he'll dissolve since he's soap. He's in a predicament.

AR: The elements of humor that I detected weren't really the laugh-out-loud kind of humor, but a darker humor. Like with *Seal + Penguin 4 Ever* the penguin and seal are copulating but it also seems that the seal may crush the penguin. So is humor a way to, let's say, get a foot inside the door with the viewer and open them up to other possibilities?

MJ: Sure, absolutely. And so does beauty. And the finely made-ness of things. You can seduce someone in, and they might be laughing for a while, but they realize this is somewhat dark. There's a deep sadness in a lot of the work. It's like finding a human condition in an animal parallel.

[. . .]

AR: Let's talk about the animal's personae. Each animal could have a cultural association. For example, what does the bear mean to you?

MJ: It's a loaded animal; it classically operates as a surrogate man. If there's a "man conquering nature" image, it's often man versus bear. The bear can stand on two legs, it has a parallel "man" feeling.

I think we have a simultaneous fear and sympathy for the bear; the teddy bear is a comfort creature, but at the same time it's the most frightening creature. You know, "bears came in and stole our children or,

bears did this. . ." it's not like we have that same fear of deer. Or lions. Lions are so far out of our North American culture and reference, but again we don't think of lions as likely to steal our children or harass us at a picnic.

There's a unique human analog in these primal animals, if you think about our own animal nature. These particular animals embody that better than any other animals could. People can bring their own associations to it; I don't say what I think it could be.

Malia Jensen. *Dark Horse*, 2008. Polyurethane resin. Copyright the artist, image courtesy Richard Gray Gallery.

AR: On the topic of animals of North America, I have to ask, is *Dark Horse* a chupacabra or something like that?

MJ: It's an *eohippus*, a prehistoric horse.

AR: Oh ok. So is it smaller than a real-life *eohippus* would be?

MJ: That's the actual size that it was. I did a series of scale-shifting prehistoric animals, like the 8-foot tall *Giant Beaver*, the actual height of a prehistoric beaver, and the prehistoric horse was small, reportedly it was housecat-sized.

So those were also funny, identity-reference pieces. What makes it a horse? How, even to a scientist or archaeologist, is that a horse? We have this attachment to our identities as being fixed: we have evolved, we're finished, we are a species, this is how we look.

But who's to say? If the horse looked like an *eohippus* that long ago and now it looks like it does... Things keep changing. So I kept playing with that idea, "what is it?"

AR: And obviously by mentioning the chupacabra I brought my own associations to that question. Recently, I was thinking about how cool it would be if we still had North American Camels and the other mega-fauna.

MJ: Yeah, it would be insane. The *Wrecking Pet* piece, was also part of that trio of scale-shifting animals. The prehistoric guinea pig was supposedly the size of a rhinoceros, or something, which is obviously to say that the rhinoceros has a certain given size too. So a prehistoric guinea pig was this gigantic thing. The ones I've made are meant as a studies so they're small, but I want to make it large, prehistoric size, about four feet wide and to be used as a wrecking ball.

Malia Jensen. *Wrecking Pet (Guinea Pig #2)*, 2006. Enamel on bronze. Copyright Malia Jensen, image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

AR: What would that wrecking ball wreck then? Out of curiosity. . .

MJ: Houses.

AR: So anything that needs to be knocked over?

MJ: Yes. I figure that having a guinea pig, it's kind of a destructive pet, the only ones that I ever knew were chewing up everything and destroying the house anyway, so I thought it's a good animal to have as a wrecking ball. Plus, it has the association with "being the guinea pig," it's the test creature, the thing that gets used and abused.

AR: On the topic of guinea pigs and pets, do you own any pets?

MJ: I have two cats.

AR: I noticed that the animals you pick (with the exception of the series we were just talking about) are more domestic, ones that we see in our everyday lives.

MJ: Yes. I edit my animal choices pretty carefully. Someone might say, "Hey here's this leopard and it's totally you." But that's not really what I would approach, it's like the lion, it's too outside of my reference point.

I think that with what I'm choosing, there needs to be a sense of feeling connected to it. The *Seal + Penguin* is a little different because I don't have any relationships with seals or penguins, so that one stands apart. That piece was based on the article that someone sent me - it was an idea that came to me as a piece already, and it was maybe my job to manifest it. It was a real situation that I wanted to translate into a bigger story. I think that the cat whiskers give it a mystical or enchanted feeling.

AR: Because it's so unlikely?

MJ: Because it's so unlikely and there's a kind of romance to it.

[. . .]

AR: What's the importance of place in the work that you make? What is the importance of city versus country [animals]? Some of the new pieces have a more rural feeling.

MJ: I grew up in the country, in Oregon, and it definitely did impact my thinking. I was the kind of kid with invisible or imaginary friends. I would make up scenarios that could play out in nature and in the imagination rather than with friends. I also had a sense of empathy with beasts. So place is really important, how can it not be? It's also how you construct things in your own interior landscape. Like there's a stage, there are players. For me, it all has a certain logic. It's not surreal, in the sense of nonsensical or disjunctive situations. It all makes a certain amount of sense and there's a logic that I adhere to. It may have been something that I made up, but it adheres to it.
- Abraham Ritchie

AUTHOR: Stuart Horodner
TITLE: Portland, OR: Malia Jensen
SOURCE: Sculpture (Washington, D.C.) 20 no10 75-6 D 2001

Malia Jensen is a Portland-based sculptor who exploits traditional modeling and carving techniques to create surprisingly tender and occasionally troubling figurative works. Her earliest pieces included hand-stitched garments for trees and upholstered deer heads that seemed to be distant cousins of the fierce leather masks once made by Nancy Grossman. Since then, Jensen has produced a bestiary of realistic animals that speak to issues of sexuality, desire, and vulnerability. While her technical facility might seem to slot her as a retro-academician, her conceptual clarity and sense of humor help to properly situate her within the current crop of pseudo-naturalists, lncluding Alexis Rockman, Sue Johnson, Mark Dion, and Christy Rupp. These artists explore environmentalism, taxidermy, and history with true-believer passion and a healthy dose of pragmatic cynicism. Her sculptures produced in 2000 include an eight-foot-tall beaver made of stacked recycled plywood, a fiberglass fox surrounded by wax flower petals, birds made of bamyard feces, and copulating plastic ladybugs. The beaver was scaled up by having a modest-sized clay model CAT-scanned at a local hospital. With the pun-laden title of Beaver Story, the bucktoothed beast stands on its hind legs at approximately the height of a one-story dwelling--the tall tale of Oregon's iconic state animal (who might be considered a sculptor, using its teeth to carve some local Earthworks). "Beaver" is a slang term for female genitalia, and given the figure's proportions, Jensen seems to be restating the "Is bigger better?" question, changing it from a male member conundrum to an absurdist vaginal one. Jensen's recent exhibition "Portraits" outlined a loose narrative of adolescent and adult concerns. By including variously formed objects, photographs, and drawings within the same installation, Jensen made clear that she is interested in levels of representation that accumulate meaning through association and sequence. Upon entering the gallery one confronted Horse, a hyper-real, root-beer-colored cast resin sculpture in the theoretical scale of a prehistoric horse (thought to be about the size of a common house cat). Standing on a white pedestal, its body is exquisitely rendered, the muscular torso and compact head (complete with a few idiosyncratic moles) a bundle of dark compressed energy. There is a funerary air to the smallish figure, except at the bottom, where the resin is thinnest and the feet emit a living golden glow. Two Cats were nearby, in the form of black and white photographs with a casual stop-action blur, the pet barely distinguishable from the domestic space around it. These were followed by small wall-mounted Flowers, formed with horsehair fabric on walnut. They recall the early labial constructions of Hannah Wilke and Judy Chicago--part trophy, part corsage. A large generalized Bunny commandeered most of the floor space in the crisp white gallery. Stitched together from sections of worn cotton canvas and leather, it is a potential resting place, perfectly sized for children to hug or nestle into while imagining their own stallions and flowers and kittens. Given Jensen's penchant for wordplay, thoughts of Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunnies were not unreasonable. Two sober Clutch bags were cast in white soap, both shut tight, one with a zipper and the other with a snap. Their physical embodiment in soap alludes to the privacy of the bath, with its rituals of cleanliness and beautification. Purse was the grand finale, a baroque handbag with luscious folds and casually splayed open straps. Cast in the kind of pink plastic one associates with Barbie dolls and dental molds, it is a potent body surrogate. It sat on a wide platform, adjacent to an unframed pencil drawing of itself--evidence of being made and being looked at. Moving from one work to another allowed for a heady relay of references--the ancient horse, linked in size to the cat of today, the tulle-like material for the flower originating with the mane of the horse, and the folds and locking mechanisms of the purses mimicking the intimate sites of female pleasure and pain. Malia Jensen's "Portraits" demonstrates her ongoing negotiation of a complex womanhood that honors feminist and Pop legacies while forming their future.

AUTHOR: Lois Allan
TITLE: PORTLAND, OREGON: Malia Jensen
SOURCE: Sculpture (Washington, D.C.) 25 no9
78-9 N 2006

Malia Jensen's childhood fascination with the plants and animals surrounding her rural, wooded home near the coast of Oregon has stayed with her throughout her career. As a mature, city-dwelling artist, she makes relationships between humans and nature her focus, and her sculptures describe this relationship as more than slightly skewed. Several years ago she took measurements of young trees, which she used to make paper patterns for brightly colored flannel "tree socks" With the finished "garments," she dressed the trees. Extra "socks" hung limply on a clothesline. In another instance, she covered the taxider-mied head and neck of a horse in black rubber that she had cut, patched, and stitched to encase and blind the animal. Since then, she has continued to emphasize, metaphorically, the human predilection for control and sublimation of nature. Her quirky sculptures, produced with meticulous craftsmanship, combine irony and beauty, realism and ambiguity in her subjects, which most often are animals. After making a name for herself in the Northwest with her realistic but decidedly conceptual works, Jensen moved to New York two years ago. Still exploring the same issues, she now finds her subjects in the species that share her Brooklyn neighborhood. Representatives of the most populous, notably rats, pigeons, and flies, were featured in her recent Portland show, "Nature Studies." As I stood in the gallery, I was aware and somewhat annoyed by a swarm of flies overhead. But it wasn't a swarm of flies that interfered with my concentration; it was a large mobile with actual-size, cast resin "flies" moving around as the air stirred. At first, the exhibition seemed merely playful, Jensen's sense of humor working overtime. Very soon, however, it became apparent that the presence of these life-size effigies signified more than amusement. The flies, realistic white rats on a large black garbage bag, a fat pigeon missing a few claws, and a guinea pig configured as a wrecking ball gave rise to questions of place and identity. Representing the underside of urban wealth and power, these creatures contradict the economic and cultural achievements of the city. Although she no longer uses unconventional materials like flannelette and rubber, Jensen's attention to detail and finish remains evident in the bronze and ceramic sculptures she now creates. The patina and enamel applied to the bronze Pigeon Tower produces a uniform dark brown finish on the stack of 10 pigeons that rises from a weathered wood block. An impressive tower, it is reminiscent of Brancusi's many austere vertical sculptures. Another, slightly smaller vertical piece, more a pyramid than a tower, is related to Pigeon Tower, although it isn't recognizable as such. Covered with loosely applied pale green and white enamel over bronze, Stalagmite was modeled from a pile of pigeon excrement. Trash with Rats is an immediate attention-getter, with its replica of a full garbage bag, the top pulled closed as if ready for pick-up. One large white (latex) rat sits on top of it and another ignores a squashed juice box next to the bag. An ugly subject handsomely executed, Trash with Rats pointedly exemplifies Jensen's interest in exploring complex relationships, especially when survival is concerned. As usual with her work, in formal terms, it's a beautiful piece. The white rats are sleek and streamlined, the shiny black garbage bag an enhancing contrast in form as well as color. Contradictions between visual characteristics and content have been a hallmark of Jensen's sculptures. But as her work evolved, the romantic and poetic resonance of verdant Oregon forests disappeared. Apparently it has been replaced by a recognition of the alienation and struggle inherent in all of nature. Like her subjects, Jensen is adapting to her new environment.

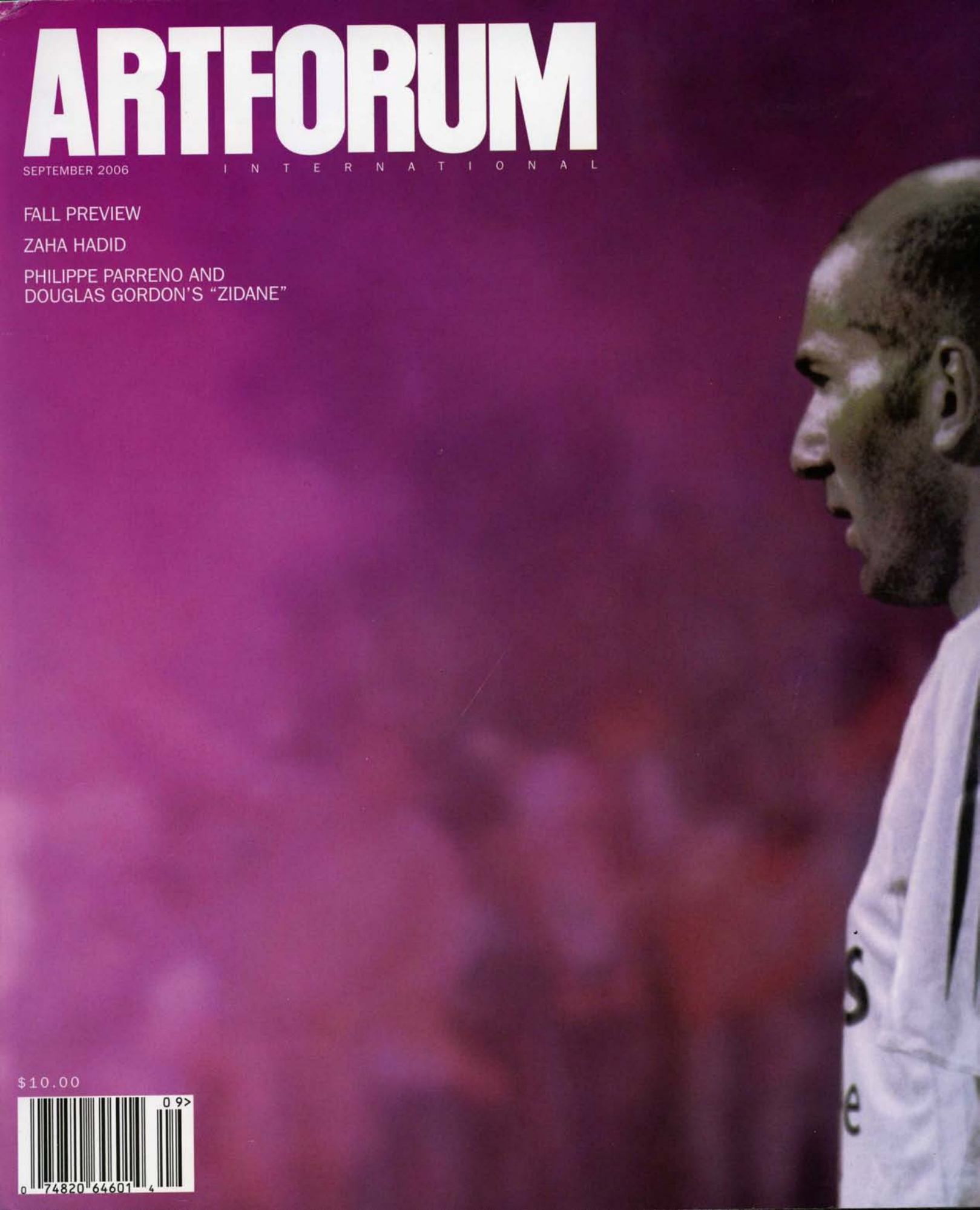
ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2006 INTERNATIONAL

FALL PREVIEW

ZAHA HADID

PHILIPPE PARRENO AND
DOUGLAS GORDON'S "ZIDANE"



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PORTLAND, OR

Malia Jensen

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

It's tempting to characterize Portland-bred, Brooklyn-based artist Malia Jensen's recent solo show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery as a classic case of the country mouse in the city. Jensen's work has often trafficked in animal forms, and the shift in iconography from forest creatures to rats and pigeons following the artist's move from the Northwest to New York two years ago is hard to ignore. But to boil it down thus would be unfair and would discount her work's wry humor and its lucidly drawn tension between form and content. Sometimes, apparently, the country mouse is just naturally as refined as its metropolitan cousin.

Jensen's career took off in the early 1990s, when she began making taxidermied forms investigating the dark comedy of death and its display, with undertones of sexual perversity: a deer upholstered in red rubber; an eyeless black rubber doe. In the years since, she has acquired a regional following for her deft play of sign, surface, and scale, a material and semiotic slipperiness that turns a horse into glass, a pig into newspaper. Among the more accomplished pieces in her portfolio are *Beaver Story*, 2000, a nine-foot beaver made of used, layered plywood (an ode to the region's first mammalian land developer, and a monumental, if deadpan, anti-phallus), and *Purse (in soap)*, 2001, a carved soap purse sporting vulvic drapery and stamenlike clasps.

Malia Jensen, *Pigeon Tower*, 2006, enamel on bronze with wood base, 25 x 6 x 6".

In this show, Jensen further extends her themes of nature and signification via a concise handful of three-dimensional pieces. *Pigeon Tower*, 2006, is a stack of bronze pigeons that form a shaft recalling Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Column* sculptures—a study for a larger monument designed to be erected in an urban park and host real pigeons. *Stalagmite*, 2006, uses the same bronze and patina material to rather different effect; it's a satisfyingly lumpy pile that speaks of gradual accretion as opposed to flight. *Trash with Rats*, 2006, is a diorama of a black garbage bag, including a juice box with a straw, and rats made of latex enamel on canvas. *Wrecking Pet*, 2006, is a small bronze guinea pig with a hook attached to its back, an adorable substitute for a standard spherical wrecking ball. Hanging over the show like a halo was an elegant mobile of flies, *Fly Mobile*, 2006, which completed the urban ecosystem and highlighted the works' ambiguous drift between cute and grotesque, the lyrical and the rotten.

This show also saw Jensen expanding her practice into photography and cartooning. The cartoons—one-panel, *New Yorker*–style numbers—are especially satisfying. *Worried Coal*, 2006, hits a grim note, with two lumps of coal sitting in a mine shaft, one opining, I FEEL SICK; *Animal Thing*, 2006, could be read as commentary on the artist's own place in an art world lately smitten by depictions of forest life: A bear says to an owl, I'VE BEEN DOING THIS ANIMAL THING FOR YEARS.

Indeed, at a time when artists have been returning en masse to the natural world for inspiration—has the plague of wolves and owls in galleries finally abated?—it is ironic that Jensen has turned her eye to the world of urban fauna, though it's not necessarily surprising. Her work has consistently gazed on the mute mysteries of nature, but always with a pronouncedly linguistic orientation, and an almost incidental art-historical allusiveness (hints of Alberto Giacometti, Claes Oldenburg, and Alexander Calder are all detectable in this show). While passingly affined with recent trends toward the animaloid, Jensen's oeuvre points more forcefully in the direction of such sculptors as Robert Gober and Katarina Fritsch, arch craftspeople in whose work irony and spiritualism are hard to tell apart.

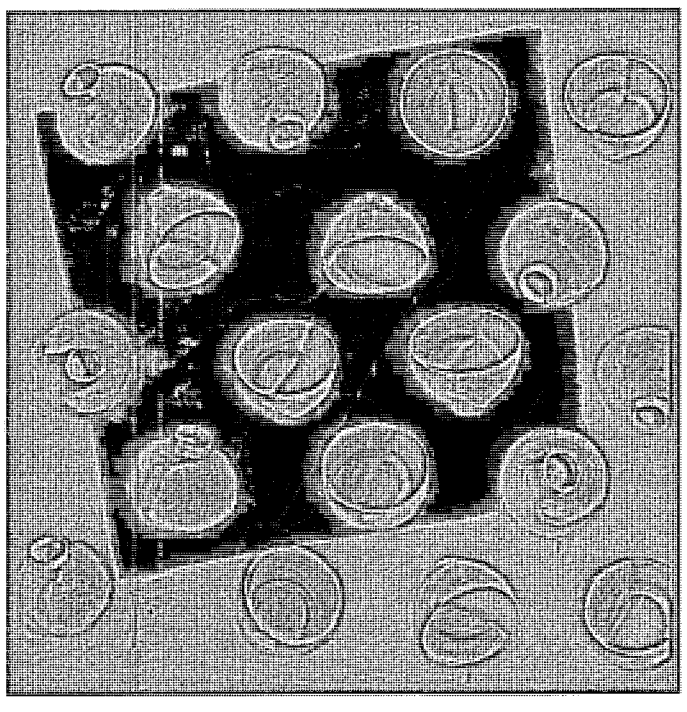
—*Jon Raymond*

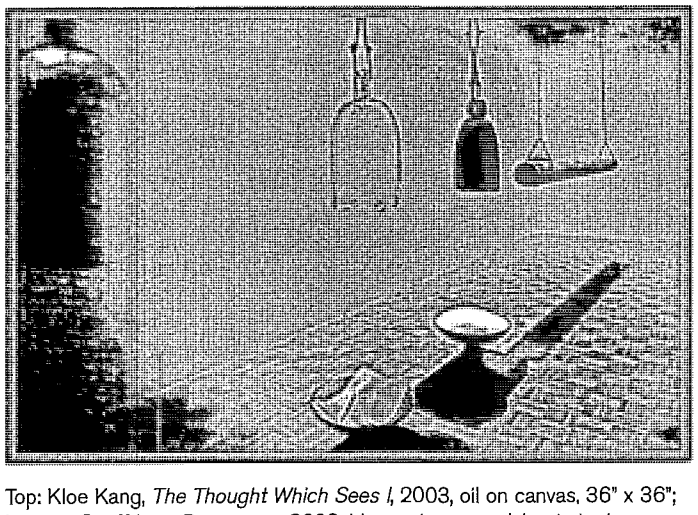
after monumental temple bells of cast bronze. Each bell has been given a different surface treatment symbolizing different states of social/cultural engagement. The most compelling statement in this exhibition is Jeeun Kim's *Dream of Returning Home*, an installation of one hundred small boats carved from solid blocks of salt, suspended and floating in space in front of one of the gallery's stone walls. It is a delicate distillation of the immigrant's story, told many times over, of a one-way passage from one culture to another, of dreams too often dissolved in the harsh solvent of reality.

—Marcia Morse

Contemporary Korean-American Artists of Hawaii closes January 6, 2004, at The Contemporary Museum at First Hawaiian Center, 999 Bishop St., Honolulu. Other artists in the exhibition include Ezekiel Chihye Kim, Chang Jin Lee and Jooyi Maya.

Marcia Morse is a freelance writer based in Honolulu.





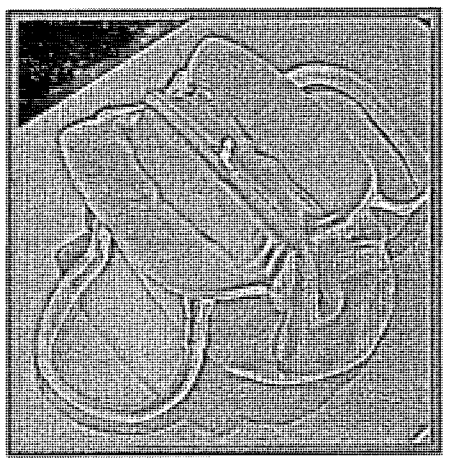
Top: Kloe Kang, *The Thought Which Sees I*, 2003, oil on canvas, 36" x 36"; bottom: Geoff Lee, *Resonance*, 2003, blown glass, wood, bent steel, enamel, gold leaf, rice, paper and brush, 18' x 10' x 2', at The Contemporary Museum at First Hawaiian Center, Honolulu.

Oregon

'Core Sample' throughout Portland

Without a doubt, *Core Sample* was the largest, most unusual display of art ever held in Portland. During one week, about twenty-four exhibitions of local art organized and produced by artists were held in storefronts, an abandoned factory, at PICA (Portland Institute for Contemporary Art), showrooms and on the streets. In addition to mounted displays there were video and film presentations, individual projects, and performances that occurred throughout the city. There were panel discussions, gallery talks and, of course, parties. It was advertised, tongue-in-cheek, as "art in a city that has everything except cash." What it has is a plethora of energetic, talented artists, many in their twenties and thirties and some new to Portland, with a can-do spirit. The sluggish economy was no deterrent. In fact, it worked to the advantage of the enterprise as it made possible the commitment and long hours of volunteer work by underemployed artists as well as a supply of empty commodious spaces.

Conceived by Terri Hopkins, the director of The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, Randy Gragg, the architectural critic at *The Oregonian*, and Matthew Stadler, a novelist and publisher, the exhibition of exhibitions came about as a response to *Baja to Vancouver*, currently on view at the Seattle Art Museum. If *B2V* offers carefully selected current exemplary art being produced in West Coast cities, *Core Sample* was its counterpart—a comprehensive, albeit brief, experience of the dynamic mix in Portland. A "core sample" it was, but it can also be thought of as a measure of core temperature. Was its heat a momentary flare-up or does it signify a more permanent strength that will propel Portland into art world recognition?



Malia Jensen, *Purse*, 2003, cast soap, 7"x 15" x 20", at Bridgeport Condominiums, Portland. (Photo: Basil Childers.)

All the curators of the weeklong shows, with the exception of Stephanie Snyder, director of the Cooley Gallery at Reed College, were artists. Each was free to choose a theme as well as artists. For example, Snyder's *Second Cycle* carried out her interest in cast-off materials and items that have been recycled as art objects. The visual standout was a tall, colorful pillar, *Parade*, created by Paige Sàez with Rose Wooderson from crinkled flowing yarn unraveled from afghans. Malia Jensen, whose conceptually based sculptures appeared in two *Core Sample* shows, curated *Draw*, which brought together sketches, preparatory drawings and finished drawings by both young and well-established artists. Henk Pander, a longtime painter of large historical paintings in the European realistic tradition, contributed six large ink drawings with the narrative complexity of his paintings. They were a marked contrast to the much younger Kristan Kennedy's felt-tip drawings of penises in various states of flaccidity. A memorable one, of a very droopy member, had the presumed owner's name printed above and the line "I loved you once" spelled out below.

Although one might have expected an overall pronounced tilt toward off-the-wall and abstruse work, that wasn't the case. As might be expected in such a large assortment, the work ranged from sophomoric to superbly thought provoking. There was nothing audaciously ambitious in the manner of New York's annual batch of rising art stars, but a lot that was sophisticated, well conceived and visually intriguing. Many pieces continued the long regional association with craftsmanship and materials, quite evident in Jensen's stark white, beautiful cast soap sculpture of a full-size woman's purse (seen in *Crafty* curated by Jonathan Raymond). Also notable were two striking pieces in Jeff Jahn's *Symbiont/ Synthetic*, a show aimed at revealing symbiotic relationships, both good and bad, between natural and manufactured co-inhabitants of the world. Both pieces were displayed in the large windows of a corner showroom, where they dramatically represented the curator's premise. Matthew Picton's sparkling, spreading suspended web, *Rubber Parking Lot Drawing #1*, began as cracks in the pavement from which he made castings in synthetic materials. Bryan Suereth's *Unauthorized Plants* consisted of two very large houseplants, their stems wrapped in bright green plastic and their ornamental leaves painted, one in red, the other in yellow.

The largest and best exhibition space, called the Belmont Factory, was located several miles from downtown on SE Belmont Street. Formerly a garment sewing factory, its use was donated by the owners. Ovid Uman, an artist with construction experience, then took on the major design and construction jobs that turned it into a functional, first-rate showcase for art. As an indication of the building's size and scale, the first piece visitors encountered upon entering was an actual 1965, battered Chevy van resting on its hubs, which had been transformed by Bill Daniels into a vehicle with masts and sails that was towing a rowboat followed by an inner tube. At the other end of the 18,000-square-foot space were James Harrison's two towering (approximately twenty-five-foot high) towers constructed from blocks of two-by-fours. In between were spacious spaces for Pablo de Ocampo's large piece consisting of text taken from a U.N. resolution concerning Palestine and written on the floor with grains of sand; *Reallagories*, curator Andrea Borsuk's show of conceptually based paintings (reviewed in this issue of *Artweek*); and *Hunt*, which slyly addressed the action and results of hunting and was organized by Michael Brophy and Vanessa Renwick.

All this and much more made *Core Sample* unique, both a delight and a revelation. Its revelation was in demonstrating that this city has an identity, a vitality, a creative diversity and an indomitable spirit very much its own.

—Lois Allan

Core Sample closed in October at the following Portland venues: Belmont Factory, the Maytag Building, 1039 NW Glisan, Bridgeport Condominiums, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Independent Publishing Resource Center, The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, the Portland Building, Seaplane, Pacific Switchboard, southwest corner of NE 23rd Avenue and Alberta Street, Holocene and Holocene Satellite.

Lois Allan is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

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Pacific Heights

Portland adds distinction with a museum expansion, a growing gallery district, an innovative outdoor-art program, and new talents

BY MICHAELA BANCUD

COURTESY PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

Attitudes toward Portland are changing. Although it has long fallen under the umbrella of the Pacific Northwest (Oregon, Washington, Idaho, northern California, western Canada, and even Alaska), the city is emerging with its own distinct identity. Stuart Horodner, who earlier this year joined the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art as curator, is optimistic about its growing art scene and its place in the national arena.

"It strikes me that the excellent works and deeds done here have been kept a secret," says Horodner, who was previously director of the Bucknell Art Gallery in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. "Few artists have been able to live and work in the region while managing careers that reach people elsewhere. My sense is that this is quickly changing." Horodner sees Portland's transformation as part of a larger cultural shift. "Traditionally dominant art cities are being joined by Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Miami, and, yes, Portland, as sites for serious production and discourse," he says.

A number of developments have raised the city's national and international art profile. These include the Portland Art Museum's recent renovation and expansion, a growing gallery district, an innovative outdoor-art program, and new talent.

COURTESY PDX

ABOVE Nancy Lorenz's *Pearls*, 2001, is at PDX Gallery this month. TOP Bruce Guenther, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Portland Art Museum.

Horodner, along with Kristy Edmunds, executive director and curator of the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, highlights some of these talents in the exhibition "Northwest Narratives." On view this month, the show features 20 artists and examines the diverse sensibilities specific to the area. Often referred to as Northwest Noir, the regional esthetic is a dark and quirky one, informed by grunge music, *The Far Side*, *Twin Peaks*, serial killers, and Tonya Harding. Artists in the institute's show include landscape photographer Terry Toedtemeier, filmmaker Vanessa Renwick, and painter Michael Brophy, known for his sinister images of forests ravaged by the timber industry.

Portland galleries have been pitching in to help increase popular awareness of the city's art, stimulated by the success of First Thursday, which debuted in 1986. On the first Thursday of each month, most of the galleries on the west side of the Willamette River open their doors and present the current month's show. On the east side of the river, several galleries host a similar event at the end of the month called Last Thursday.

Many galleries are clustered in the Pearl District, a downtown area once home to the rail yards and now the site of a thriving art enclave. An addition to the neighborhood, the Savage Gallery, opened earlier this year. Located next to a former vacuum-repair shop, Savage represents well-known international and regional figures, including Portland conceptual artist Tad Savinar and Seattle glass artist Dale Chihuly. Tracy Savage, who has

COURTESY PORTLAND INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Pipo Nguyen-Duy's photo *An Other Western: Anonymous Portrait*, 1998, is part of "Northwest Narratives," an exhibition this month at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art.

collected privately for ten years, felt the timing was right to open her gallery. "There are people here who want to see and want to collect work from other places," she says. This month, Savage shows work by New York artists Bryan Hunt and Brice Marden.

Also in the Pearl District are the Margo Jacobsen and Mark Woolley galleries. This month Jacobsen presents Phyllis Yes's "Daily Bread" series, a group of 365 paintings, some with paint-covered slices of bread attached to the canvas. Meanwhile, Woolley features two Portland artists—David Reager, who creates topographical, maplike wall reliefs using slate, hydrocal castings, and metals; and Laurie Austin, whose sculptures of steel and hair—dog and human—explore issues of race and class.

Jane Beebe's PDX Gallery represents some of Portland's hottest emerging artists, including the sculptor Malia Jensen, painter Eric Stotik, and multimedia artist Storm Tharp. Jensen's work is drenched in a Northwest esthetic. The artist's exhibition last year at the Portland Institute featured a beaver, the official state animal, made of layered plywood. Standing eight feet tall, it was the approximate height of a beaver in the Pleistocene era. Jensen, who also included a skunk carved of white soap emerging from a bath, humorously addressed the way society has tidied up nature over the years. Today, the beaver sculpture dwells in the atrium of the Wieden+Kennedy advertising agency, around the corner from the Portland Institute's galleries.

About a mile from the Pearl District is the Laura Russo Gallery, which opened in 1986. It focuses on Northwest contemporary art and this month features abstract paintings by Portland artists Gina Wilson and Lucinda Parker. In downtown Portland, the Froelick Gallery shows Utah artist Brian Kershisnik, whose magical-realist paintings depict such incongruous imagery as people learning to fly.

Some of Portland's most interesting art projects can be found outdoors. Bay Area artist–turned–Portland resident Harrell Fletcher, who received a grant from the Regional Arts and Culture Council, unveils his project this month, which involves a series of spotlights and motion-detector lights along Portland's new streetcar route. The pedestrian-activated lamps, which will light up fire hydrants and a sign on an old mattress factory that reads "bits and pieces," for example, will operate from dusk until midnight.

The newly created Pearl Arts Foundation is also organizing projects that will add to the urban landscape. Paige Powell, former associate publisher of *Interview* magazine in New York and now a Portland resident, launched the nonprofit foundation in partnership with Portland developer Homer Williams and River District Development. "This kind of relationship between corporations and a foundation is relatively unique," says Powell.

COURTESY PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

The Portland Art Museum's recently completed renovation and construction, by Ann Beha Associates, includes the new 60,000-square-foot Hoffman wing.

and the dark, brooding attitude—and reduces others such as color to the bare minimum. But the conceptual ideal comes at the expense of the physical; he sacrifices immediacy to studied constraint. His work now borders on the unreachable, the manipulations so subtle as to almost escape notice, except when the works are grouped together. Pushing the notion of complexity in simplicity to its extreme, he has denatured clay and wood, perhaps the most earthbound of materials, rendering them ethereal.

—Twylene Moyer

Portland, OR

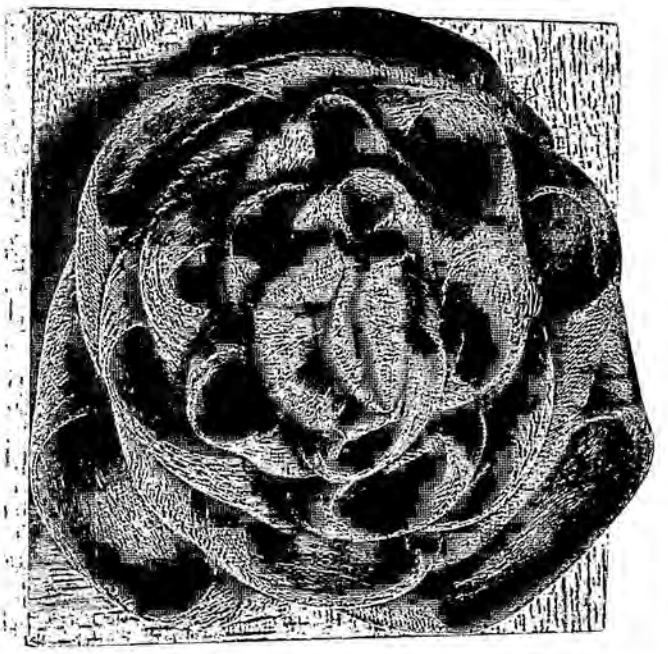
Malia Jensen

PDX Gallery

Malia Jensen is a Portland-based sculptor who exploits traditional modeling and carving techniques to create surprisingly tender and occasionally troubling figurative works. Her earliest pieces included hand-stitched garments for trees and upholstered deer heads that seemed to be distant cousins of the fierce leather masks once made by Nancy Grossman.

Since then, Jensen has produced a bestiary of realistic animals that speak to issues of sexuality, desire, and vulnerability. While her technical facility might seem to slot her as a retro-academician, her conceptual clarity and sense of humor help to properly situate her within the current crop of pseudo-naturalists, including Alexis Rockman, Sue Johnson, Mark Dion, and Christy Rupp. These artists explore environmentalism, taxidermy, and history with true-believer passion and a healthy dose of pragmatic cynicism.

Her sculptures produced in 2000 include an eight-foot-tall beaver made of stacked recycled plywood, a fiberglass fox surrounded by wax flower petals, birds made of barnyard feces, and copulating plastic ladybugs. The beaver was scaled up by having a modest-sized clay model CAT-scanned at a local hospital. With the pun-laden title of *Beaver Story*, the bucktoothed beast stands on its hind legs at approximately the height of a one-story dwelling—the tall tale of Oregon's iconic state animal (who might be considered a sculptor, using its teeth to carve some local Earthworks). "Beaver" is a slang term for female genitalia, and given the figure's proportions, Jensen seems to be restating the "Is bigger better?" question, changing it from a male member conundrum to an absurdist vaginal one.

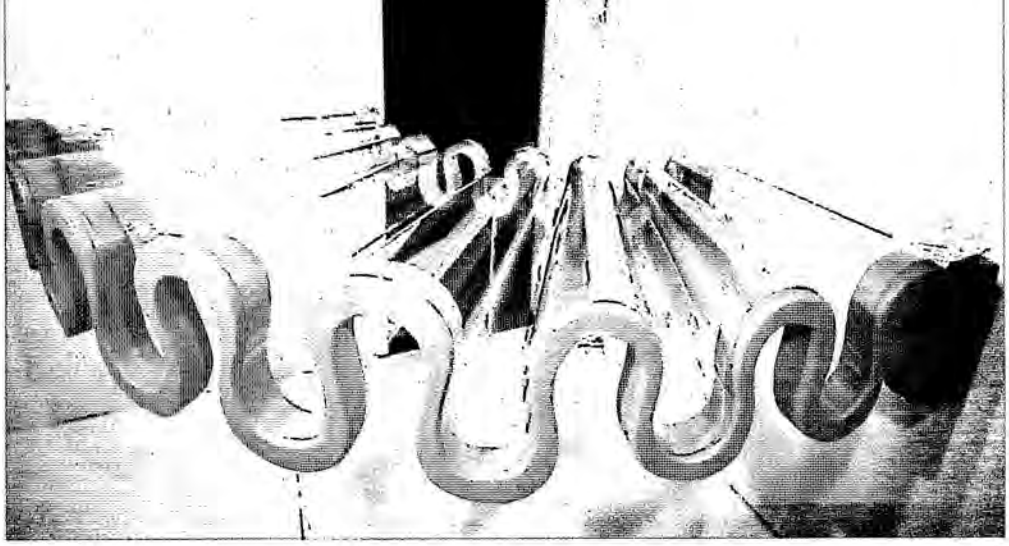


Above: Malia Jensen, *Flower*, 2001. Horse-hair fabric, 6 x 6 x 6 in.
Below: *Bunny*, 2001. Canvas and leather, 38 x 69 x 32 in.

Jensen's recent exhibition "Portraits" outlined a loose narrative of adolescent and adult concerns. By including variously formed objects, photographs, and drawings within the same installation, Jensen made clear that she is interested in levels of representation that accumulate meaning through association and sequence.

Upon entering the gallery one confronted *Horse*, a hyper-real, root-beer-colored cast resin sculpture in the theoretical scale of a prehistoric horse (thought to be about the size of a common house cat). Standing on a white pedestal, its body is exquisitely rendered, the muscular torso and compact head (complete with a few idiosyncratic moles) a bundle of dark compressed energy. There is a funerary air to the smallish figure, except at the bottom, where the resin is thinnest and the feet emit a living golden glow. Two *Cats* were nearby, in the form of black and white photographs with a casual stop-action blur, the pet barely distinguishable from the domestic space around it. These were followed by small wall-mounted *Flowers*, formed with horsehair fabric on walnut. They recall the early labial constructions of Hannah Wilke and Judy Chicago—part trophy, part corsage. A large generalized *Bunny* commandeered most of the floor space in the crisp white gallery. Stitched together from sections of worn cotton canvas and leather, it is a potential resting place, perfectly sized for children to hug or nestle into while imagining their own stallions and flowers and kittens. Given Jensen's penchant for wordplay, thoughts of Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunnies were not unreasonable.

Two sober *Clutch* bags were cast in white soap, both shut tight, one with a zipper and the other with a snap. Their physical embodiment in soap alludes to the privacy of the



bath, with its rituals of cleanliness and beautification. *Purse* was the grand finale, a baroque handbag with luscious folds and casually splayed open straps. Cast in the kind of pink plastic one associates with Barbie dolls and dental molds, it is a potent body surrogate. It sat on a wide platform, adjacent to an unframed pencil drawing of itself—evidence of being made and being looked at.

Moving from one work to another allowed for a heady relay of references—the ancient horse, linked in size to the cat of today, the tulle-like material for the flower originating with the mane of the horse, and the folds and locking mechanisms of the purses mimicking the intimate sites of female pleasure and pain. Malia Jensen's "Portraits" demonstrates her ongoing negotiation of a complex womanhood that honors feminist and Pop legacies while forming their future.

—Stuart Horodner

Seattle

Jennifer Heishman

SOIL Gallery

Springing from nothing, "air space," by Jennifer Heishman consisted of four sculptural installations that use simple, ephemeral materials to reflect the value of livable space. She creates an illusionistic atmosphere that downplays the real in favor of the virtual. Unlike works that rely on irony, sensation, and words to connect with the viewer, Heishman's work is minimalistic and modest in size; it toys with neither symbols nor appalling shock-effects. Instead, the artist transcends form and explores the act of looking in order to highlight the importance of one's physical surroundings, as well as artistic technique.

Set among white walls and a gray floor, *Space Divided Space* consists of a large, translucent sheet of white vellum arranged to look like a funnel and attached to the gallery wall. Two corners fold outward from the center like a shirt collar, as strands of white ribbon suspended from either side attach to two large, turquoise balloons. Heishman's application of curving white lines across the floor alludes to stone inlays seen on walkways in Greece and references bodily movement. The use of lightweight materials allows this piece to move and sway, revealing a peaceful study of symmetry and balance combined with a bit of chaos.

The site-specific installation *Heavenly Perspective* unites art and architecture within a small enclosure. Using a raised floor and three mirrors to completely cover the small ceiling, it attempts to miniaturize viewers, transforming them into art objects. The reflection from above does nothing more than create a self-inflicting voyeuristic gaze.

Within the gallery's third space, Heishman uses two works to present two different visual transformations. *Party Favor* initially looks like an orange Elizabethan ruffle suspended in mid-air between two perpendicular walls. Although two thin rods of clear plastic lend some support to the thick Mylar, this piece is quite fragile. Other than flex paste, only complimentary forces, exchanged between several sheets of clear polystyrene and the curves of this orange synthetic, hold the work together. This piece, with its visual tension springing from the interaction of concave and convex surfaces, attempts to capture the idea of physics within an artistic setting. From a distance, it resembles static movement.

A sense of ascendance plays itself out in *Sliding Scale*. Consisting of 11 sheets of white tracing paper, roughly four feet in length, which are secured to the wall and floor at a 45-degree angle, this piece reflects a series of warm colors in the shape of long, narrow ovals that range from dark orange to a canary yellow. Stretching 17 feet in length, the white paper gradually camouflages into the white room, extinguishing the reality of an enclosed setting and creating a pure realm of forms. Although the expansiveness obstructs space, it offers a compromise since it creates an illusion of more.

Throughout this show, Heishman applies the right combination of space, color, and light to make each component a success. Eschewing symbolism and visual references, these works point beyond societal issues to the expressive, artistic process. Heishman, moreover, clearly chooses not to explore art as a material, tangible object but rather as a feeling or idea. Using visual deception, she creates space beyond what truly exists within the gallery's enclosed architectural setting. As such, her work adds value to the act of looking, which has lost ground in the face of serial imagery created by current mass-marketing campaigns.

—Jill Conner

London

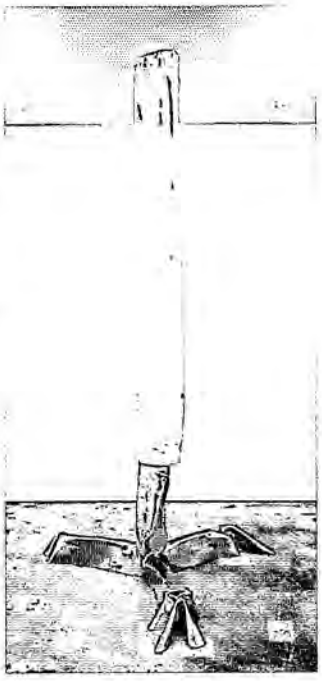
"Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972"

Tate Modern

This is the first major exhibition to examine collectively the work of 14 artists of the "Arte Povera" group. Co-organized by the Tate Modern and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the show will travel to the Walker (October 13, 2001–January 13, 2002); L.A. MOCA (March 10–August 11, 2002); and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (October 17, 2002–January 12, 2003).

Exhibition curators Frances Morris (Tate Modern) and Richard Flood (Walker Art Center) brought together 140 important works by Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Piero Gilardi, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio

Above: Jennifer Heishman, *Party Favor*, 2001. Polystyrene foam, Mylar, tape, flex paste, and pigment, 5 x 11 x 4.5 ft. Below: Luciano Fabro, *Foot*, 1968–71. Metal and silk, height variable.



BOTTOM: GOETZ COLLECTION, MUNICH

AUTHOR: Pat Boas
TITLE: Malia Jensen at PICA
SOURCE: Artweek v31 no9 p28 S 2000

The characters of Animalia, Malia Jensen's show of recent work at the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, inhabit the ambivalent space of the fairy tale where social codes mask a pervasive sexuality. Capitalizing on our uneasy relationship with the natural world, Jensen has assembled a cast of gentle woodland creatures immobilized by choices or mutely aware of their inescapable natures. These allegories about carnality, progress and gender roles are pitched from a thankfully unfeminine—yet definitely female—point of view. Do what we might to place ourselves above our animal friends, we are, like them, "stuck in our own natures." But just how the story gets told depends not a little on who does the telling.

At the entrance to the exhibit is Mr. & Mrs. Grouse, a life-size rendition of the game birds bowing and pecking companionably on a shelf. The title recalls the way children's stories not only anthropomorphize the animal world, but also slather everything over with a veneer of respectability. These are not just any pair of birds doing what birds do, but next-door neighbors of the Little Red Hen. Except in this instance, they have been fashioned carefully out of cow dung. No substance could be more natural, yet few are less socially acceptable as objects of contemplation.

Mr. & Mrs. Grouse provides a key to Jensen's strategy for constructing meaning. Jensen chooses materials as much for their cultural associations as for their formal power and juxtaposes those with titles that discourage simple readings. Take Vulpes Fulva Fulva, a sly sound-play (Latin for "red fox") in which the central animal has been cast out of fiberglass and finished by an auto body shop to a champagne-colored luster. The bewildered animal confronts a forked path of red wax flower petals vague enough in shape to either resemble tongues, female genitalia or maybe even drops of blood.

According to Jensen, "the fox has in front of it an array of sexual options, questions of vulnerability and indulgence, relationships to beauty and narcissism." But the paths branching off in a significant "V" are identical; there is no basis on which to make a choice.

Gender confusion animates the pair of oversize humping ladybugs entitled En Plein Air (Ladybugs). Cast in pristine plastic, these white on white creatures caught in the act have been so literally sanitized that they nearly disappear. Equally quiet, but without a shred of sexual doubt, is the seductive assortment of wallets and change purses cast out of soap—a material that vanishes with use. Arrayed on a shelf against the gallery's back wall and displaying all the details of their well-used originals, they are intimate repositories that evoke the origami of female anatomy.

Also cast of soap, the nearby Skunk Takes a Bath catches the animal in a meditative pause. The resigned hunch of his shoulders as he pulls himself up from a turquoise pool suggests a moment of clarity in which he sadly realizes that no amount of bathing will rid him of his essential nature. Spring Tree, on the other hand, a walnut trunk oozing electrical wires instead of sap and illuminated by blossoming halogen lights, strives to maintain its "treeness" in the face of that overpowering human intervention called progress. Yet despite its truncation, the weathered surface of its silvery bark reminds us of the kinship among all things biological.

Billed as the exhibit's centerpiece, Beaver Story is a giant model of Oregon's state animal fashioned out of rough slices of layered plywood. Jensen confesses to being

obsessed with this icon of the region, “the original logger,” ever since she learned that prehistoric beavers commonly grew to over eight feet tall. This monument to that earlier glory sets us wondering about our own evolutionary fate, while inviting a series of word plays that, in the context of the other work, naturally includes the sexual slang. Given the hegemony of the phallic, can anyone blame Jensen for asking “is bigger better for a beaver?” The answer, however, is obviously not, for survival required a considerable scaling down. Meanwhile, outside PICA’s new Pearl District home, those other builders, stuck in their own essential natures, scurry about the area’s vacant lots busily filling every empty space.

Despite its size, Beaver Story resonates less than Skunk, the change purses or Spring Tree. Yet, taken together, the separate pieces of Jensen’s Animalia hold each other in a playful tension, well suited to what the show’s curator and PICA director Kristy Edmunds calls “our ongoing conflicts with the most primal of issues.”

ADDED MATERIAL

Pat Boas is an artist and writer based in Portland.

Malia Jensen: Animalia through September 17 at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 219 NW 12th Ave., Suite 100, Portland.

Malia Jensen, Spring Tree, 1999, walnut trunk, sockets, wire, bulbs, 91″ × 48″, at the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art. (Photo: John Valls.)

MALIA'S `ANIMALIA'
By D.k. Row
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Summary: Malia Jensen's menagerie of sculptures is full of tricks, twists and sometimes deeper meanings.

If you visit the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's minimalist space this month, you're probably not expecting an encounter with nature, "red in tooth and claw." But that's what Malia Jensen's always fascinating and often compelling new exhibition, "Animalia," delivers -- at least in part.

Next to an 8-foot-tall beaver made out of horizontal sheets of plywood and among seven other sculptures of mating ceramic ladybugs, contemplative fiberglass foxes and lounging birds made out of cow dung, looms a 7foot-tall walnut tree trunk. Neatly plumed and hilariously retrofitted with electrical wires and sockets, the oncemagnificent hunk of wood now emanates only an unnatural, sepia-colored glow.

One could rightly interpret the sculpture, called "Spring Tree," as the sum of its disparate parts: nature and industry in a quirky, humorous embrace that touches on our region's ambivalence about them on the cusp of a new century. But the halogenically bright-and-flashing sculpture is a deeper cultural puzzle, a metaphor that opens the door on a host of other impulses that have nothing to do with sacred forests or the dire desires of the big, bad city.

"Animalia," PICA's third exhibit in its new gallery inside Wieden & Kennedy's luxurious offices, may take its cues from the dueling worlds of roaming animals, primeval forests and city buildings. But it finds its truer, and deeper, meanings in the landscape of the human condition.

For anyone who's familiar with the work of Jensen, 34, who's been one of Portland's more critically lauded artists since she graduated from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 1989, such multiply layered illuminations are a matter of course.

Consider some of the Hawaii-born but Oregon-raised Jensen's previous sculptural works. Filtering a genuine wonder of the natural world through a post-Pop conceptual lens, she's fashioned everything from a taxidermist deer form wrapped in a flannel print of Elvis Presley to a naughahyde-upholstered birdhouse hiding a small ceramic wolf.

But aside from their distinctly Northwest love of craft and dark strain of humor, Jensen's nature sculptures are really vehicles to meditate on such non-flora-and-fauna dilemmas as carnality, gender roles and a postadolescent sense of emotional dread.

More often than not, in "Animalia," those oblique metaphors hit their mark, revealing Jensen's mordant, observational voice and only occasionally descending into a facile predictability reminiscent of the work of 1980s art provocateur Jeff Koons.

Take "En Plein Air (Ladybugs)," for example. In what could easily be interpreted as a borrowing from Koons' kitschy, intentionally shallow Pop concoctions, Jensen captures two plasticcast polka-dotted bugs locked in an oh-so-compromising mating position. Usually Jensen would come out the better in a comparison to Koons, the former stockbroker turned art kingpin. But here, she seems to emulate Koons' transparent attempts at unveiling the perverse banality behind reality- attempts which are themselves thin-blooded descendants of Marcel Duchamp's influential appropriations of "everyday" objects.

Far more poetic but even more Koonsian and just as flat is "Vulpes Fulva Fulva," an installation that presents a cast fiberglass fox resting a bit too pensively in front of a delicately littered path of paraffin-made petals. Striking out into more heart-tugging terrain than usual, Jensen tells us that the slickly fabricated metallic fox has many "sexual options" ahead of it, with the flower petals symbolizing that Pandora's Box of "vulnerability and indulgence, relationships to beauty and narcissism . . ." If Jensen knows how to wield double-edged wit to ambiguous effect -- as in "Spring Tree"-- she has yet to master the more bluntedged and difficult weapon of sincerity.

Still, most of the time, Jensen hits the bull's-eye -- or something close to it -- as in "Mr. and Mrs. Grouse," a slightly mean-spirited zinger that plays like a swift, underhanded punch to the gut. Creating what looks like a boringly quaint scene of two birds- the eponymous Mr. and Mrs. Grouse --Jensen's banal pastoral homage ascends to perversely persuasive heights when the viewer realizes that the birds are made out of cow dung.

Then there's what could be the show's most seductive piece, a series of soap sculptures that simmer with a number of elusive meanings. Laid out on a small shelf on the gallery's back walls, several pastelcolored soap bars molded from real wallets and

pocketbooks await examination. More than recontextualized cleansing products and money-holders, the soap sculptures become "elevated" cultural repositories, touching on issues of personal privacy (private information carriers offered up in a public space) and the paradox of money (so dirty yet "cleaned up" here).

Jensen was originally a painter and switched to making sculptures several years ago. What distinguishes both the good and less successful works in this exhibition is their sustained level of superior craftsmanship -- part of the Northwest tradition. The sculpture that will impress, even awe, most viewers will be the steroid-sized toothy beaver at the center of the gallery. Hunched over, its paws raised bunny-like, the dopey but lumbering beaver seems to be begging for food.

"Beaver Story," as the brilliantly hilarious piece is called, gathered momentum in Jensen's mind after she found out that the Northwest beaver once stood a proud 8 feet tall before being cut down to comparatively Lilliputian size by the quirk of evolution. It's a tale of the environment, full of ironic twists and turns that resonates for obvious reasons. Jensen calls the beaver the "original logger" and references other similar evolutionary fates. So, fittingly, Jensen recreates the ancient towering beaver by building one out of sheets of horizontal plywood, and painstakingly, if imperfectly, gluing them atop one another.

For a deeper view of the sculpture's orientation and even a bird'seye glimpse as to how Jensen's mind works, walk a few paces farther into the gallery's project room. There, Jensen has gathered many of her exploratory works for the piece, including a clay model of the beaver and a group of X-rays that map out the proportions of each plywood layer. Jensen's cheeky sensibility emerges in several jokes interspersed amid the neat clutter of roughly drawn sketches and various kinds of outlines. Look, in particular, at the wall opposite the X-rays and you'll notice a smirky but somehow touching photograph of the clay beaver passing through the X-ray machine.

Whether or not you're moved by, or can laugh at, the photograph of the little beaver passing bravely through the futuristic Xray portal, might well predict how you respond to the exhibit as a whole. Jensen's work can be funny and touching, even a joke without a real conclusion. But its power depends on whether you accept Jensen's sculptures as pointless parodies or nervy allegorical tales.

That said, it may be helpful to remember that, historically, the greatest public objection to art - from film to music to visual arts -- has been its perceived inscrutability. For Jensen, maker of complex puzzles, that can't be a soothing thought, especially coupled with our prevailing desire in both life and in art for tidy, comfortable resolutions.

Indeed, Jensen's not an artist who intends to propose answers in her work, only questions. It's a sign of the budding complexity of her artwork that often those questions take us to the threshold of deep emotional considerations. But it's also a sign of its quirky but skin-deep texture that it sometimes fails to morph into anything more complex than a pithy joke.

Still, if you're unwilling to buy into "Animalia," consider it in light of PICA's status as an arbiter of local cuttingedge taste. Four months ago, French conceptual artists Alain Bublex and Marie Sester had the honor of inaugurating the new PICA space with their slick, avant-obscure show "Fictional Cities." Freely employing such media as video projection to oftenponderous effect, Bublex and Sester's urban-futurist musings were predictably fitting as PICA kicked off its marriage with the local advertising kings that house the gallery.

But even though Jensen's a completely unknown name beyond the region, this third show at the new space strikes at the core of PICA's aspirations: giving local artists a museum-level venue to show their most ambitious work.

Appropriately, PICA executive director Kristy Edmunds has high hopes for the exhibition. A catalogue is being produced, and Edmunds is talking to several curators at prestigious experimental art venues around the country so that the show can be seen outside of Portland.

That's an important consideration for many reasons, but mostly because it helps to raise public expectations for local artists, galleries and museums while also attempting to project art made here into a national orbit. Within that larger context, there's no question that "Animalia" is the right sort of question for PICA to embrace.

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ILLUSTRATION: 2 Color Photo by ROSS WILLIAM HAMILTON- of The Oregonian Staff

3 color photos

Photo Caption: Summary: Malia Jensen's menagerie of sculptures is full of tricks, twists and sometimes deeper meanings.

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PLAZM MAGAZINE

Plazm Magazine: 15 Years of Documenting Creative Culture

Malia Jensen

by Jon Raymond

Not an esoteric idea, really, or very hard to grasp, but the kind of little idea that can gently work a very large power, growing from the smallest fraction of importance to a breadth and scope that somehow inflects the entirety of everything. Just think how tiny and spread out all that pain is; it adds up in a way. Imagine all the little blind worms in the world, all their thin pink skin bending and writhing and hurting in tiny segments, and then zoom out to where the earth's horizon curves away. From underground where the worms hurt, to the dirt they eat, to the trees and leaves and out into the sky, the pain echoes and multiplies until something wavers and warps and it becomes apparent that things are much different than they were just moments before. When leaves shimmer in the sun now, they are pretty and in pain. It is delicious, like a loose tooth rubbing against a cluster of nerves.

This kind of gentle yet resounding yet darkly limned effect is one that Jensen has been re-creating in her artwork since beginning to show it

in the early 90s. In doing so, the Portland artist has returned again and again to the world of animals–deer, opossums, birds, goats–and more specifically to the world of feelings that lie just beneath their furry faces. To get there, Jensen has often made recourse to the weird art of taxidermy, finding something in its inherent violence, and its futile attempt to disguise it, that dovetails nicely with her own creepy-cute sensibility. In “Beauty Mark” (1994), for instance, the muscular bust of a deer finds it’s skin rendered in the shiny black rubber of an innertube, neatly riveted along the sinuous contours of the animal’s neck and face in dominatrix-y fashion. A red, circular patch falls on it’s neck like a hickey, and nubs protrude where antlers once were, neither of which detail raises the piece from its coma of blank inexpression. “Long Mile” (1993) reprises the same fetish-ish surface, lying on the floor in an unnerving lump, its muscles firm but its form all truncated, like a cuddly, mutant fawn seizing up on the forest floor. Unclear whether flayed or bound, both animals present unsettling images of fear cloaked in cuteness, or maybe vice versa. Like an unexpected encounter in the woods, they charge the air around them with spooked tension, then nervous laughter, then tension again.

Among Jensen’s more recent endeavors is a proposed public sculpture, yet unmade, featuring a thirty-foot tall beaver constructed from the wreckage of a demolished Portland, Oregon onramp. Entitled “Rubble Beaver,” the idea crackles with the vaguest of polemical impulses, tapping the almost totemic status of beavers in the Northwest (they’re Oregon’s state animal) to make an ambiguous statement regarding regional identity and the politics of place. Further, in the context of Portland, a city growing in fairly dramatic bounds, “Rubble Beaver’s” slim semiotic valence combines with its gargantuan scale shift to form a clever, even mind-bending, commentary on the telos of urban development. By using the ruins of the enlarging city to memorialize its first land developer, the beaver, Jensen attends to the unpredictably disfiguring effects inherent in both shrinking and swelling, and to the unbreachable gap between time and site. Ultimately, her sort of monstrous monument folds together polarizing discourses of growth and contraction, creation and destruction, industriousness and frivolity, all in a single, dense package.

Like many in Jensen’s menagerie, “Rubble Beaver’s” lattice of sustained tensions can give the illusion of something like inner calm. Like the puns she embeds in many of her titles, Jensen’s objects move with equal force in distinctly different directions, following both irony and sentimentality to opposite yet oddly adjacent endpoints. Its a trick that turns fitful in a piece like “Pillow” (1994), a wooden chopping block carved in the shape of a fluffy bed pillow. Though it looks demure enough at first–the soft corners, the slight indentation where the head goes–a moment’s contemplation uncovers a devious logic blooming beneath its polished surface. Like a coin spinning on end, the sculpture’s concise visual pun flutters back and forth in the span of a thought, turning from slicing to sleeping, dicing to dreaming, in punishingly lucid revolutions. In a way, its not so different from Jensen’s other, animaloid pieces, which likewise flash between biting and inviting with the abruptness of real pets.

With no eyes, mouths, or ears, Jensen’s senseless animals often appear helpless prey to the sadistic whimsy of their creator. As their materials jar against their shapes–one deer head is upholstered in the red rubber of a hippity-hop toy; another deer, this one a full-body, aluminum-leafed plaster cast, lies broken into three pieces–Jensen’s sculptures seem to ache with cruel, unresolved comedy, like cutting remarks left unacknowledged, or punchlines only half-heard. Indeed, Jensen’s imagination doubles its dark meanings in almost a sing-song voice, suspending delicate contradictions between sign and surface to unlock both muted horror and strange, mournful longings in the natural world it watches and of which it’s part. Sort of like Nature itself, whose self-consciousness never really awakens, Jensen’s creatures inhabit a world where emotional need precedes sensual awareness, and where the brute ability to feel, in humans and dumb animals alike, often arrives as something of a miracle.

 Orginally appearing in Plazm 20. Text by Jon Raymond, design by Riq Mosqueda.