

ARTFORUM

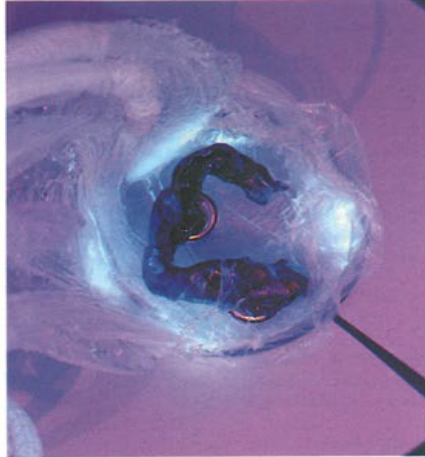
VANCOUVER

Rochelle Goldberg

THE APARTMENT

Ceramic forms that resemble excrement and snakeskin, fiber-optic cables drenched in resin, deflated pleather cushions—Rochelle Goldberg's sculptures beckon like abject sirens, compelling the viewer to touch them. *Lust*, which appeared as a parenthetical in "The Local Link (Lust got in the way)," the artist's first solo exhibition at the Apartment, demonstrated the centrality of desire in her production of objects that simultaneously attract and repel.

Two of the sculptures were self-illuminated by LED lights embedded within their fiber-optic-cable limbs in an otherwise nearly dark gallery. Both the floor and the bottom seventeen inches of the gallery walls were painted gray; in such low light, it was difficult to ascertain where floor ended and wall began, almost as if the space had been flooded. Another illusionistic ruse appeared as one's eyes adjusted: Three mirror-plated tuna cans, *Comma*, *Cut*, and *Cuna* (all works 2014), seemed to be mounted on one of the walls. On closer inspection—as one reached out to touch them, that is—it became clear that they were actually recessed into the wall.



Rochelle Goldberg, *Pit Organ* (detail), 2014, ceramic, clear resin, fiber optics, LED lights, steel, mirror-finished cans, water, 22 × 45 × 49".

Goldberg's most effective sculpture avoids simple readings. *Pit Organ* comprises a number of objects arranged together, the most prominent of which are the aforementioned LED-lit cables. The cables, whose transparent resin cover makes them appear to be dripping, are draped over a steel casing and gathered at its base, where a coiled ceramic object, suggestive of human waste but impressed with a snake-skin pattern so as to resemble a molted skin, rests alongside two more mirror-plated cans. Viewed in dim light, the amorphous structure was bizarrely alluring. In *Cold Storage*, a ceramic bowl with similarly reptilian surface treatment resembling a snakeskin toilet sits atop a steel case; optical cables curl underneath it, like cyber shit.

Fiber-optic cables and LED lights are means of transmitting and displaying the information we consume—the latter lighting the screens of our iPhones and Jumbotrons, the former linking vast online networks and hiding within the infrastructure of the buildings we inhabit. Goldberg's work, which couples these technologies with the distinctly earthbound medium of ceramics, makes visible the guts of contemporary life. In rendering the texture of snakeskin on the glazed surfaces of her handmade clay pieces, the artist exploits the techniques of commercial manufacturing. Her juxtapositions of new and ancient materials and processes calls to mind, of all people, art critic John Ruskin, who in 1859 championed a notion of "manufacture" that might be understood in contemporary parlance as "handiwork." Even as we have become distanced from such handcrafted production, it is now through the touch of the hand that we activate our devices. In Goldberg's show, the shiny glaze of industrial ceramics glimmered in the LED light, and the archaic and modern meanings of manufacture overlapped.

The works achieved their strongest effect by means of their arrangement. *Placeholder* and *Place Maneuvered*, deflated-looking pleather cushions cut into odd shapes and tossed onto the floor, might have seemed underwhelming if considered on their own. Placed next to *Pit Organ* and *Cold Storage*, however, they worked wonderfully as aesthetic antimatter. A tension between the attractive and repulsive balanced the exhibition, and the pieces functioned most successfully as an ensemble—cryptic objects in concert that seduced the viewer with the raw underpinnings of bodily and technological networks, those we prefer to keep hidden.

—Aaron Peck