



REVIEW - 10 MAR 2017

Liz Magor

Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland

BY AOIFE ROSENMEYER

As with the most perceptive of short-story writers – Lucia Berlin, for instance, or Lydia Davis – Canadian artist Liz Magor is able to mine the commonplace to find drama in life's minutiae. 'you you you', Magor's most extensive exhibition in Switzerland to date, follows closely on the heels of a major survey show at Montreal's Musée d'art contemporain and, while not on the same scale, offers a broad and very welcome introduction to her work.

At one end of the large, single exhibition space are objects with a homely mien, including blankets and decorative knickknacks; towards the other end are larger, more dispassionate offerings such as *Near Clear* (2005): a lone mop abandoned against a wall. But despite this slight division, there is continual seepage between these two notional areas. Pedestals are eschewed, with most sculptures placed on the ground or propped against walls, while the recurrent motifs-cum-materials of cardboard, silicone covers and blankets regularly intermingle. Nowhere is this clearer than in the freestanding installation *One Bedroom Apartment* (1996), a circular fortress remade here (in part) with local paraphernalia: packing boxes, wrapped mattresses, potted plants, books, crockery and bric-à-brac. Collectively, these elements might make a home but, grouped here, in seeming anticipation of removal, they are distinctly unwelcoming.



Liz Magor, *Good Shepherd* (detail), 2016, polymerized gypsum, wool, plastic bags, plastic sheet, cardboard 133 x 262 x 31 cm. Courtesy: Sammlung Migros Museum für Gegenwartskuns; photograph: SITE Photography

Elsewhere, as if to further emphasize this alienation of the familiar, Magor imitates more commonplace materials such as fabric or metal with polymerized gypsum: were it not for a pearly sheen or an abnormal physical imperfection, they would be entirely credible. *Chee-to* (2000), for example, looks odd but plausible: a heap of stones, under which the titular orange snacks can be seen peeping through. However, examine the sculpture closely and it will become clear that the stones are not stones at all, but gypsum imitations: once again, the artist challenges us to question our presumptions.



Liz Magor, *Stack of Trays*, 2008, polymerized gypsum, chewing gum, found objects, 25 x 45 x 47 cm. Courtesy of Private Collection, Calgary Canada; photograph: SITE Photography

Magor frequently constructs an opposition between the idealized pursuit of an outdoor life and indoor domesticity, only to then playfully undermine it through the vernacular of North American frontierism. *Tent* (1999), for example, is a sleeping bag-shaped form of rubber and nylon propped against the wall, its dark surface textured like tree bark with a knothole where a head might be. Such barbed, black humour often seems to be Magor's means of countering a pessimistic view of humanity's frailties. In *Carton II* (2006), a block-like pile of folded clothes (deceitful gypsum, again) is sawn in half to reveal a case filled with countless packs of cigarettes, matchboxes and chewing gum. Similarly, *Tweed (Kidney)* (2008) comprises a cast of a woven jacket, out of which pokes a herniated tequila bottle (or kidney). Time and again in the artist's sculptures we find this push-pull of reassurance and violence, domesticity and wildness, which enfolds care and warmth with (self-)destruction.



Liz Magor: 'you you you', installation view, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 2017. Photograph: FBM Studio

In the centre of the space, three swaddled, baby-like forms with protruding hair (*Sleeper #2, #6 and #9*, all 1999) creep like stranded seal cubs across the floor, mournful little beings and grace notes to the larger works. Several found and repaired woollen blankets dangle from the walls on dry cleaners' hangers, stains re-marked, moth-holes sutured. This is Magor at her searing best, when her imagery suggests that nurture is a double-edged concept; that care can manifest vulnerability. But her manipulations of the specific and the quotidian work on a broader level too, with the near-perfect imitations of materials eventually circling back on themselves and forcing us to question exactly what the terms 'natural' or 'real' mean to us.