



Liz Magor, *Coiffed*, 2020, painted plywood, fabric skirting, silicone rubber, artificial hair, acrylic throw, woolen blankets, silver fabric, linen, jewelry boxes, costume jewelry, packaging materials, 2' 3 1/8" × 12' 11 7/8" × 8'.

Liz Magor

FOCAL POINT GALLERY

“Material talks,” the Canadian sculptor Liz Magor has said, and in “The Rise and The Fall,” an exhibition of ten works spanning 2017 to 2021, it’s true. A panoply of sculptural assemblages large and small unfolds across three rooms: real stuffed animals (birds) and fake stuffed animals (toys). Rubber replicas of fake stuffed animals made strange (a life-size, powder blue, fantastically white-maned lion with a sooty, hollowed out eye socket). Real fur (rat skins) and fake fur (hairy white boots). Woolen blankets, linen, silver fabric, trinkets. A sea of flimsy transparent plastic boxes is like shimmering mausoleums for crumpled cellophane, patterned tissue paper, candy wrappers, twine, gold foil, old sweaters, toys torn asunder: eyes and limbs and torsos and stuffing innards strewn about.

Magor is a regular at thrift stores, where she gleans worn and familiar effects that are “free in a way, empty of their original purpose and no longer the target of human interest.” She repossesses and reappraises these items, which she calls “zero” things, often setting the discarded articles alongside versions of their ilk that she has transmuted. For *Leather Palm*, 2019, she cast a well-creased leather glove in polymerized gypsum, setting it palm up on a low circular wooden side table stained with sticky rings of liquid, as if from some social gathering long dispersed. The glove is solid but appears pliant, still bearing the form of its wearer, as gloves so often do. A half-smoked cigarette sits affixed to its cuff and clumps of white ash have fallen into the palm of the glove, as if the sculpture might double as a decorative trompe l’oeil ashtray.

“I need to transform things to better capture and understand the constituent properties of the materials and processes that form the objects of the world,” Magor has said—as though her practice might return these objects to some autonomous state, unburdened of our cloying, fickle desires and able to enact their own affinities. Two white Yeti boots stand facing each other on grubby yellow boxes cast from cardboard in *The Boots*, 2017. Each shoe is gripped from behind by a stuffed animal made from a similar synthetic textile, as if mistaking the footwear for a long-lost family member or lover. In *Delivery (sienna)*, 2018, a silicone rubber version of a “stuffie” (as the artist calls them) dangles from a tangled bunch of colorful twine, grasping in its hands a garment bag emblazoned HARRY ROSEN. I hadn’t thought of that upscale Canadian men’s clothing store in years.

The gesture of embrace, of inanimate things holding each other close, recurs throughout Magor’s oeuvre, akin perhaps to the artist’s own gestures of embellishment—how, as she says, she “rises up” the objects of her attention to suggest new ontological relationships. In *Perennial*, 2021, an old duffel coat has had its holes and imperfections valorized with silver, bronze, and gold embroidery. In *Coiffed*, 2020, a blue lion lies on its side on a wide, skirted platform, alongside a collection of open ex voto-like jewelry boxes. But the most tender offering is *Wasted*, 2021, a thin silver wedge cast from cardboard, whose slender ledge holds a stuffed bird (real). A tag on its ankle reads YUCATAN, JUNE 1887. Beneath its soft brown body a dark-blue shadow, like a condolence, has been painted. If Magor’s work is about what and how we love (until we don’t), it is also about the labor of art as an invested form of looking: one that is transferred to the viewer, who is asked to question the ways in which meaning is assigned—in life as in art. Even the most forsaken things do not disappear when our backs are turned—a reality both ecological and ideological. That includes art objects and the humble material resurrections they offer, if we pay attention. How ordinary, how remarkable, how enduring.

—Emily LaBarge