



Liz Magor *The Separation*

Liz Magor's solo exhibition *The Separation*, at MOCA Toronto, evoked a familiar yet ingenious sense of intuition. Unfolding on the open gallery floor, varying moments of suspense invited viewers to reassess their surroundings as they made their way through the complex installation of sculptures and objects. Dominating MOCA Toronto's expansive industrial architecture, transparent acrylic cubes occupied the centre of the space. Each cube contained a selection of everyday and mass-produced items, such as plastic toy animals, ceramic cups, folded duvets, silk scraps, and rugs, curated alongside Magor's playful memento mori, including tiny bird skulls with googly eyes on them. Wrapped in sheets of Mylar, the cubes refracted light, transforming them into colourful and shiny presents. Like gift-box sets to be browsed in a shop, items were repeated, rearranged, and customized to create infinite combinations of contained narratives.

Magor, recognized as one of Canada's leading contemporary artists, investigates sculpture's narrative potential. In this exhibition, she explored human desires and emotional investments in material possessions and provoked reflection on our relationship with commodities and the societal constructs surrounding them. This objective was most evident in her incorporation of silicon models and stuffed animals into the installation. Above the river of acrylic boxes, three stuffed monkeys hung upside down from metal bars attached to the concrete ceiling. Complementing the gallery lighting, each monkey held a custom lamp, spotlighting the objects inside and on top of the acrylic vitrines. The gleeful and glistening set provided a much-needed emphasis on the excessive consumption of labour and resources—an objective reinforced by surrounding larger dioramas featuring bricolages of workshop furniture, miscellaneous objects, and animal bodies.

In one corner of the gallery, a silicon rubber heron lay flat on a worktable, balancing an upside-down coffee table teetering

on its edge. On the shelf below, a stream of collected seashells and small items were spread along the length of the table. The *mise en scène* here suggested an act of wagering in which life, work, and infrastructure are weighed against the violent process of commodification. Magor provided another example in a different corner of the gallery; a stuffed baby giraffe lay on a worktable, and a silicon sculpture of a lion rested on a fur rug with colourful fringes between a workbench and a coffee table. In today's hyper-capitalist society, the values of love and sentiment can often become entangled with material consumption, leading to questions about the true nature of our connections with others. Upon leaving the exhibition, I contemplated the significance of the presents I had bought for my friends over this past holiday season. Wrapped in festive paper, these gifts symbolized commodified sentiments, prompting me to ponder the environmental impact of such a common social practice.

As I reflected on the exhibition's themes, I wondered about the sustainability of our relationships and the broader implications of our consumer-driven culture. By seamlessly blending familiar objects with artistic expression, Magor challenges us to confront the ways in which our desires and attachments shape our identities and relationships. Her art serves as a poignant reminder of the power of art to stimulate introspection and provoke meaningful dialogue about the pressing issues of our time.

Tak Pham

Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto

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Liz Magor

Nomad, 2019, installation view, 2023.

Drift, 2021, installation view, 2023.

Photos: Laura Findlay, courtesy of the artist & Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York