

Reviews: New York

Jane Benson

Black & White

"May he who loves not others love himself," utters a slighted admirer in one version of the tale of Narcissus, and the plea is answered by Nemesis, or righteous anger. For the works in this show, "The Chronicles of Narcissism" (all 2006), Jane Benson combined elements of the Greek myth with those of such tales as *The Ugly Duckling*, mixing humor and pathos in her otherworldly

sculptures and installations examining narcissism.

Benson's use of materials showed an impressive economy of means: objects amass layers of significance through their literal as well as their metaphorical senses. In

Plucked and Fucked (Naked Song Thrush), a featherless, taxidermied sparrow is stranded atop a pedestal made

of stacked, ragged glass fragments. At play here is the notion of the ivory tower—a secluded place whose inhabitant becomes immersed in his or her own brand of escapism. In *Flaming Vanity*,

fragments of mirrors under a wood platform shoot out like flames beneath a pyre. According to myth, Narcissus burns with love for himself, claiming that nothing but death will set him free.

In the show's centerpiece, a plucked swan balances on one claw of its right foot behind a mirror, both resting on a dilapidated wood platform. The bird's lack of feathers and its inability to view its reflection emphasize its vulnerability as well as its innocence. Given the bird's less than graceful appearance, this state is perhaps preferable. The piece raises questions not only about how we identify ourselves but also about the subjectivity of that process: how do we interpret what the mirror reflects?

Benson also presented a series of globes and antique maps covered with pieces of mirror, addressing how globalization affects identity. Another series here, "Bitches," consisted of smoking jackets and scarves made of fabric sculpted to fall in graceful, feathery tatters that bordered on disintegration—an appropriate metaphor for the ephemerality of appearances. —Sandra Ban



Jane Benson, *Naked Swan*, 2006, Plexiglas, taxidermied swan, lights, two-way mirror, aluminum, and silicon, 43½" x 24½" x 74". Black & White.

JANE BENSON

THE CHRONICLES OF NARCISSISM

La primera exposición individual de Jane Benson en la Galería Black & White en Chelsea está dedicada a los conceptos de la cultura contemporánea. Titulada *The Chronicles of Narcissism*, las distintas series de material gráfico de Benson que integran los bailes de las discotecas, los cisnes "desplumados y tullidos", las chaquetas de cachemir humeantes, y los quebrados espejos empotrados forman un montaje narrativo de objetos obsesivamente contruidos y deconstruidos que hacen referencia al mito griego de Narciso, al *The Ugly Duckling* de Hans Christian Andersen y a los términos psicoanalíticos de la auto-obsesión y de la fase del espejo/reflejo.

En los últimos años el tema principal en el que se ha centrado es la representación de la naturaleza dentro del ambiente creado. En 2002, creó para el World Financial Centre, una serie de falsas plantas que se aumentaron de forma sutil pero laboriosa. Las hojas de los falsos árboles revelaban formas poco naturales (triangulares, cuadradas y con agujeros), creando fantásticas mutaciones genéticas futuras, y la sensación de que no todo funciona bien en el mundo.

Otro reciente trabajo escultórico de esta artista es *Monument to Weeds* (2006), realizado para una exposición en el Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo y en el Bartram's Garden de Philadelphia, lugar en que se encuentra el jardín botánico más antiguo de América. El monumento conmemorativo de Benson a las hierbas indígenas (ruda, marihuana y varios tipos de cardos) que el Ministerio de Agricultura estadounidense consideraba nocivas, sirve como metáfora de las políticas de inmigración cada vez más restrictivas de los Estados Unidos y de otros lugares.

Desviándose de su interés por la flora, la exposición de Benson en la Black & White está más relacionada con la fauna (cisnes desplumados y un pinzón) y con las superficies brillantes que rodean al ego. *Disco Globes* (2005-2006) y *Naked Swan* (2006) reflejan a los espectadores, profundizando en la cuestión de la necesidad de verse a uno mismo dentro de una obra de arte (o de cualquier otra producción); un comentario apto para el mundo del arte y el contexto en el que se sitúa, orientado al consumidor. Sus cisnes recuerdan a la cirugía plástica fallida y la fracasada vanidad, presentando argumentos a favor de la autenticidad física y cultural, más allá de la imagen fugazmente percibida sobre una superficie brillante.

Sarah Reisman



Jane Benson. *The Naked Swan* (2005). Cortesía de la artista y Black&White Gallery

Jane Benson's first solo exhibition at Black & White Gallery's new Chelsea location is dedicated to the conceits of contemporary culture. Entitled The Chronicles of Narcissism, Benson's various series of artworks that integrate disco balls, "plucked and fucked" swans, paisley smoking jackets, and smashed vanity mirrors form a narrativistic assembly of obsessively constructed and deconstructed objects that make references to the Greek myth of Narcissus, Hans Christian Andersen's The Ugly Duckling, and psychoanalytic terms of self obsession and the mirror stage. In recent years, Benson's subject matter has focused on the representation of nature in the built environment. In 2002, for the World Financial Center, she created a series of fake plants that were subtly but laboriously augmented. The fake trees' leaves revealed unnatural shapes (triangulated, hole-punched, and squared), creating fantastical future genetic mutations, and the sense that all is not right in the world. Another recent public sculptural work is Monument to Weeds (2006), made for an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art and Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, the site of America's oldest botanical garden. Benson's memorial to native weeds (goats rue, marijuana, and various thistles) that the US Department of Agriculture deemed noxious serves as a metaphor for increasingly restrictive immigration policies in the United States and elsewhere. Departing from her interest in flora, Benson's show at Black and White is more concerned with fauna – plucked swans and a finch – and the shiny surfaces that surround the ego. Disco Globes (2005–2006) and Naked Swan (2006) reflect the viewer, calling into question the need to see one's self within an artwork (or any other production), an apt commentary for the art world and the consumer-oriented context in which it is situated. Her swans are reminiscent of failed cosmetic surgery and vanity gone awry, making a solid case for cultural and physical authenticity, beyond the image fleetingly perceived on a reflective surface.

Exposición realizada en la galería Black & White (Nueva York) el pasado mes de octubre.