

David Altmejd & Lizi Sanchez in London

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Lizi Sanchez, *Bernice*, 2011. Wood and painted styrene, 110 x 110 x 60cm. Courtesy of the artist.

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By Jeanine Wollard

Walking into David Altmejd’s solo exhibition at Modern Art I expected to be welcomed by his signature chaotic flamboyance, but instead I was confronted with a surprisingly restrained version of the artist’s work. Where is there to go these days for a fix of chunky, rude, glitzy maximalism if not via Altmejd?

In this exhibition, the usual outrageously vajazzled mounds of hairy wilderness are nowhere to be found. In their place are large Perspex vitrines, containing what appear to be systems of neatly arranged objects. I hadn’t ever thought of Altmejd in terms of visual systems, but on reflection I

can see an underlying language of formalism. Mixed in with an ode to the slick draw of the spectacular world of display culture, what I had acknowledged previously as a reference to refracted mucky glamour now prevails as an important structuring co-ordinate in the work.

Le Ventre is the most constructed of the pieces in this show, and takes the form of a cavernous beast with a disturbingly gaping orifice. Nodding to the playful grotesqueness of previous works, paradoxically the delicacy of a careful artisan is utmost in this beautifully woven sculpture. Clear Perspex walls act like an incubator for a precious species, allowing the fragility of the work to be shielded from the outside world. Appearing to take the form of a lone swan, Le Ventre is made from multiple strands of pastel sewing thread that physically draw the shape of the sculpture. Traveling in and out of holes in the Perspex, the thread creates a 3D Spiro graph, like the imaginary traces of a pastel firework swung in the dark. As perfectly crafted as a digital image, Le Ventre speaks of delicate medieval tapestry methods and multiple hands at work—the dreamy ideal of the historical artist’s studio as a space of skilled artisans.

Lizi Sanchez’s solo show “Beyond The Pearl” at Standpoint Gallery is at odds with this concept of the artisan. Bernice the first of her four works is a beautifully smooth packing crate, adorned with billowing over-sized baroque ribbons. Bravely decorative, this sculpture talks as much about the notion of the art object as an opulent gift as it does about the materiality of the work itself. The satisfyingly well-made packing crate takes centre stage here as a celebratory object, the handy work of the unknown (soldier) carpenter, and vessel of fragile, prized delights. It seems in this work it’s enough that the crate merely pertains to luxury, even if its protected passenger is kept a secret. Playing with formal sculptural concerns such as scale and functionality, Sanchez presents us with objects that recall art practices that historically deal with materialism and the market. Her works could almost be the designer cousin of a Claes Oldenburg or Jeff Koons.

Pearl on white, On Stripes, On Chocolate Brown and Pistachio On White is another sculpture that sits like an abstracted slice of tactile, sumptuous material. Functioning as both plinth and sculpture, an over-sized cartoonish pearl balances on a sheet of aluminum foil, which could almost have been cut from a Daniel Buren wallpaper (if it wasn’t for the labored hand painted stripes.) And this labor seems to be Sanchez’s constant pre-occupation, the volatile relationship between the crafted artwork and its place in a market of desirable things. Whereas in Altmejd’s practice, high production costs are taken for granted, even forgotten in the commercial gallery, his wonderfully fantastical aesthetic whisks us away from dwelling on such things. In the context of the project space however, luxury and methods of display are subject matter in them selves. Sanchez’s work continually plays a game of positioning itself between product and art object, where the question of making and production in a market driven world are utmost. Yet her works are by no means passive in their sumptuous presentation, with every polished surface there’s the subtle mark of the artist that refuses to be ironed out.