
NEW YORK

Julianne Swartz

Josée Bienvenu Gallery

“Hope,” Julianne Swartz’s second exhibition at the Josée Bienvenu Gallery, consisted of eight kinetic sculptures and three sound works,

including a collaborative piece with Matteo Ames in which multiple music boxes play a dissonant version of “It’s a Small World After All.”

Swartz’s organizational structure and intensely personalized attention to details create magic from sparse formal means and simple, directly used materials. Micro-movements (swaying, waving, trembling), as they relate to time, height, weight, color, speed, volume, and placement, hold the viewer’s attention. The forms, essentially long, tendril-like wires set to motion (using clock motors), extend out of concrete blocks and

Julianne Swartz, *After all*, 2007.

Music box movements, wood, wire, electronics, Plexiglas, and motors, dimensions variable.

have the attenuated visual presence of line drawings. Succinctness and a slow-burn enchantment pervade the space, matched by an overall impression of exposed physical and psychological vulnerability. Low, blocky cement forms or chunks of concrete



BOTTOM: COURTESY JOSÉE BIENVENU GALLERY, NY

serve as bases for the works, and while they recall industrial origins, they feel handmade.

In *Garden of Infinite Hearts*, Swartz's variously sized and stacked blocks recall miniature modern buildings with antennae jutting into the sky above. *Obstacle Mountain*, with its extension wire and plastic bag, seems to negotiate its way over and around a tiny cement island, gently recalling the psychic space of resistance and release. In *Touch Knowledge*, an LED, placed at the end of a hair-like wire set to move in a circular motion, gently flickers, firefly-like, as it glances against a nest of thicker wires encircling the cement

distance to be floating black dots in a tangle of mesh become, on closer viewing, two dozen activated tiny speakers installed in a corner. They dangle from the ceiling at different heights in a tight confetti of red, yellow, and blue wires. This is *Body*, which chatters away in low murmurs, its electronic entrails and circulatory system flayed and suspended for public view. As one's ear gets close to a speaker, a compassionate-sounding male or female voice seems to offer consolation with phrases such as "Let me help you" and "You don't have to be afraid."

"Hope" is Swartz's most condensed, poetic, and rigorous exhibition to

DALLAS

Katie Pell

McKinney Avenue Contemporary

For San Antonio-based Katie Pell, customization is an act of empowerment. Pell tricks out ovens, vacuum cleaners, and toasters in order to resist the dictates of consumer culture. She takes time to pimp household appliances as a means to deny instant gratification. Customization is the layman's philosophical rumination: it slows things down a bit. Pell sees the DIY culture of Home Depot not as revolutionary, but as a force to decelerate the pace of our collective, throwaway society. It's all about improving one's lot piece-

Electrolux with the words "hot rodli-ness" painted in silver. A translucent baby-blue gauze sheath covering the hose makes the picker-upper read like a 1950s virgin bride in waiting.

Pell's household appliances transform the deadpan irony of Duchamp's readymades into raucous gender critique. In appropriating customization for the kitchen, her work might seem nostalgic at first. But it renders obsolete the old truism that a woman's place is in the kitchen. Next to the seven pimped-out kitchen appliances, Plexiglas-covered pages of colorful illustrations from Pell's *Bitchen Book* lined the wall. The



Julianne Swartz, installation view of "Hope," 2007.

base. In *Hope 1*, a long wire with a minuscule snippet of paper attached at its end and bearing the word in microscopic letters shudders in the air so as to render it an unreadable flag of promise.

Swartz's sound works, *Box*, *After All*, and *Body*, are distinctive in how they meet, confront, and eventually seduce the viewer on tactile and auditory fronts. What appear from a

date. Compelled as she is by the experiences of transmission and effect, secrecy, deferral, containment, and renewal, her use of febrile mechanization and measured time in "Hope" reaches a new level of sophistication and nuance. While Swartz's work has always inferred psychic dispositions, psychological dynamics, and human limitations, in her current pieces, the expressed need for connection becomes conspicuously palpable and poignant.

—Dominique Nahas

meal rather than all at once. The work in "Bitchen" screams that life is a work-in-progress.

When coaxed by Pell, *Bitchen Stove*, painted hot pink with purple racing stripes, shoots yard-high flames from its burners. Souped up with red-hot flames painted on its back end and air shocks underneath, *Hot Rod Hopper* pops, sighs, and jumps forward as Pell commands it with a remote fashioned out of an old electric mixer. *Heaven Vacuum Cleaner* is a baby blue

broken narrative of this comic combines the banality of suburban life, art-school angst, the ecstasy of garage-sale treasures, and the cynical power of a big-box discount retailer, All-Mart, offering the "Queen of the Hill" back-story behind Pell's re-fashioning of household appliances.

If the appliances testify to Pell's love of kitsch and skilled craftsmanship, the mid-size digital prints of smiling female friends and family members reveal her experimentation with high-tech photoplay.