

Liz Magor's *I is being This* is only about itself



The multicomponent, mixed-media installation, *Being This*, is mounted on three walls of the Catriona Jeffries Gallery.

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December 4, 2012

Liz Magor: I is being This **At Catriona Jeffries Gallery until December 22**

Liz Magor has an astonishing ability to surprise her viewers, often by undermining any assumptions we might have about what exactly it is she does. In the past, she has evaded questions about what her work means, insisting that it is only about itself. Still, precisely because her sculptural practice is so unusual, so unexpected, so *individual*, we want to interpret it, parse its forms and media, and make verbal sense of the nonverbal ways it has come into being. Sometimes, however, materials and processes make their own sense, exert their own gravity, demonstrate their own metaphysical laws.

Our first reaction on entering Catriona Jeffries Gallery, where Magor is showing an array of new works, is delight at the lushness of its physical presentation. There's a sensuous complexity of colour, texture, and pattern here, demanding and rewarding a close examination of each and every aspect of what seems to be a crowd of headless portraits. The multicomponent, mixed-media installation, *Being This*, is mounted on three walls of the main gallery, in salon-style groupings of subtly altered found garments. Clothing, whether it comes

from Holt Renfrew or Value Village (the source of much of Magor's raw material), effectively symbolizes the beings who once wore it and the bodies that once gave it shape.

Each of the 100 garments is meticulously snipped, stitched, rearranged, embellished, layered, labeled, folded neatly into a generic retail box, and framed with tissue paper. All seem to clamour for attention, projecting identities that fixate on highly visible labels, logos, sales tags, and insignia. Often, the labels have been exposed, transposed, replaced, or turned inside out or upside down, suggesting how we try to shape the social and material elements that shape us—or at least our personas.

In many cases, Magor has folded sleeves and appended gloves, scarves, cardboard cutouts, and other surrogate hands in a way that points at the labels, logos, or insignia, as if to reiterate, "This is who I am!" The product branding ranges widely, from "Boboli" to "Rusty's Towing", and from "Edward Chapman" to "SFU", "Carnarvon Baseball", and "Dawson City, Yukon".

Occasionally and paradoxically, given the beauty and exactitude of her workmanship, the artist has tucked what look like bits of garbage beneath semitransparent pieces of fabric. Cigarette butts, crumpled candy wrappers, a champagne label, and the kind of sample credit card that arrives unbidden in the mail all speak to material and materialism, consumption and orality. A separate but complementary work, *Study for a Farce*, employs elements similar to *Being This*, suggesting not only the theatrical nature of clothing but also the fakery and untrustworthiness of the act of representation.

Consumption, orality, and fakery also lurk behind *The Rules*. While beach-combing on Cortes Island, Magor collected some 12 dozen cylindrical pieces of driftwood and painted them to resemble cigarettes. In size, they range from logs to branches to twigs, and although their scale is rarely cigarette-like, their shape and proportions are—remarkably so. In an artist's statement, Magor describes these objects as being "dressed in the costume of a cigarette...hoping to pass as such". Their knobs, bumps, bends, and splits, however, betray their true identity.

Standing upright in orderly lines, these pseudo-cigarettes assume a comically militaristic presence. They're like a parade of farcical soldiers and cadets, mismatched in size but wearing the same tidy, tactless uniform. Devoted to some benighted cause, lodged somewhere between addiction and desire, they are making a sincere but unsuccessful attempt to be what they merely represent. They are trying, but failing, to undermine the essential thingness of things.

<http://www.straight.com/article-849476/vancouver/liz-magors-i-being-only-about-itself>