

## The familiar transformed into the mysterious

The Globe and Mail, Saturday May 7, 2011



### Liz Magor at Susan Hobbs Gallery

*Until May 28*

The re-purposing of familiar, everyday objects into high-concept art commodities is at least a century-old practice. (Many would argue that crafters, who turn scraps of all sorts into decorative art, have been doing it forever – but that's another column.) Two new shows, one at Susan Hobbs Gallery and the other at MKG127, breathe gentle puffs (quite literally at MKG127) of new life into the practice by reworking objects so familiar, so tame and easily overlooked, they are almost abject.

Liz Magor's sculptures at Susan Hobbs Gallery look, at first, like leftovers from the backroom of a dry cleaner – which, in a way, is exactly what they are. Magor has taken a series of found, often much-abused (and perhaps once much-loved) woollen blankets, cleaned them up and hung them along one wall of the gallery, complete with giant dry-cleaner hooks and paper or plastic dry-cleaning covers. So far, so what?, you may well ask. Take a closer look.

Magor, a master at re-contextualizing the banal, has gently intervened, inserting her presence on each blanket and thus marking them as unique objects. Holes have been covered or ringed with gobs of gypsum; stains have been re-stained, coloured over with fabric dyes; loose tags have been put back on, but backwards, or re-applied with diaper pins and tears have been repaired with scribbles of coloured thread.

Blankets that existed only in fragments have been sewn together, made into composite blankets that resemble mid-century abstract paintings. Another has had its once satiny hem removed and replaced by a (very convincing) plaster version cast from the original. In the gallery's upstairs space, an enormous dark-blue blanket (so dark I thought it was black) hangs horizontally across the wall, with all its many holes covered in silver gypsum – looking, nicely, like a twinkling night sky.

Magor sets the blankets' connotations of comfort and reassurance against the actual, distressed surfaces of the blankets, and thus the surfaces subsequently suggest disruption and incompleteness. And she does it all so quietly, it's creepy. As a lifelong insomniac, I read the blankets as a metaphor for troubled sleep – everything necessary to permit a comforting nap is still present in the blankets (softness, density, soothing colours), but the small imperfections nag at the viewer, much the same way small noises or prickly worries pester light sleepers. And don't get me started on my fear of bedbugs.

...