

Art and Cake, November 27, 2017

Phyllis Green
Life after life after life
Chimento Contemporary
November 4 - December 16, 2017

By Jody Zellen



In “Life after Life after Life” Phyllis Green presents an array of objects —some are wearable, suspended from the ceiling on hand crafted wooden supports that look like walking sticks— others are sculptures on casters that can be repositioned and moved around the gallery space alluding the the idea that nothing is static or stationary. Even an image of a cloud filled sky, entitled “Sky Shade,” 2016 has moving parts. That these objects are in flux challenges the traditional notion of a static exhibition and this is exactly Green’s intention. In this body of work, she is suggesting things change and has fashioned an exhibition that connects the material and spiritual worlds.

Green’s approach to making art has recently shifted. During her travels in India and Asia she became fascinated with the concept of enlightenment and the possibility of looking at the world in a new way. Seeking a sense of calm, Green began to engage with spiritual ideas and the ensuing body of work reflects this transition in both her life and and art practice. Rather than making static objects, Green creates interactive sculptures that pose philosophical questions. Often based on Vedic parables, the works engage viewers on multiple levels that range from the formal and artistic to the conceptual and metaphoric. For example, a green fabric coat lined with white feathers delicately hangs from the ceiling, balanced upon a hand carved wooden stick. The suspended garment entitled “Close your eyes and feel peace. Open them and ask what I can do to make this world better,” 2017 evokes the idea of floating and flying away and instructs viewers to be mindful.

Similarly, in “Trees and Birds,” 2017 Green creates a sculpture based on a Vedic story in which birds flutter around a tree trying to reach the top. Green relates it like this: “As they move upward, the birds pause frequently to taste the sweet and bitter fruits. The most beautiful bird sits serenely at the top.” In Green’s execution, a 3 tiered, striped Dr Seuss-like hat made from yellow, orange and blue feathers signs for the beautiful bird and hangs from the ceiling, hovering over a thickly textured, hollow brown resin tree-trunk on casters. According to Green, “the bird becomes a hat, the crown of an object that is part costume and part sculpture. This sculpture and the objects that surround it, are infused by an awareness of the challenge that such spiritual aspirations impose on this turbulent, hate-filled, material culture, and by the humor and whimsy that are required, in part to navigate it.” As Green remarks, this artwork calls attention to the dualities implicit in any proverb and the space between what is imagined, desired and possible.

Green’s forms are minimal and elegant. She is an accomplished craftsman and each element created has a specific role to play in the installation. That these artworks can be worn, entered into and moved across the gallery gives them purpose beyond objects hanging on a wall, they are active rather than passive and a subtle call to action. “Five Sheaths and Me,” is a photograph that documents Green wearing her different colored sheaths which are suspended from the ceiling near the image. Each sheath is a different color representing holistic states of consciousness: flesh, blood, mind, intellect and bliss. They take cues from the photograph and beckon the viewer to imagine being enveloped in these colorful garments.

The works in “Life after Life after Life” connect the body and the spirit. They are conceptual works that are simultaneously representational and abstract. Green has succeeded in creating a compelling and evocative series of artworks that are both sculptures and costumes that link nature and culture to states of consciousness.

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