

Raised in Craftivity

Nick Malewski

The exhibition *Raised in Craftivity* at Greenlease Gallery put a fresh new spin on an older idea. In 1988, Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* inspired a show of textile works by women artists that explored the idea of women's ambivalence about needlework because it has been a medium of constraint as well as one of resistance. *Raised in Craftivity*, curated by Maria Buszek, assistant professor of art history at the Kansas City Art Institute, included a wider variety of media and works by both female and male artists. The show presented works addressing the concept of artists being similar to animals raised in captivity, but the craft that threatens to domesticate them is the same that promises to set them free. The artists interpreted this theme in a variety of ways, using traditional materials to tackle contemporary issues and unexpected materials to reference traditional ones.

Orly Cogan's stretched and hung vintage table linen, entitled *Samson*, dualistically presented woman as a potential savior and undoer of men, conflating two biblical characters — Christ and Delilah — within a single figure. Cogan embroidered a nude woman at the center of the cloth, bleeding from her hands, feet and vagina — perhaps a feminine interpretation of stigmata — encircled and adorned by a small congregation of people. The title also evokes the woman who weakened

Samson simply by giving him a haircut. The fact that the composition is arranged on a cloth intended for plates of food adds yet another level of symbolism to this work.

Laura Splan's *Zoloft, Prozac and Thorazine* pillows are visually attractive for their bright color combinations and soft texture, but are not as conceptually layered and complex as Cogan's linen. These latch-hooked rugs, filled with polyester and shaped like oversized pills, bespeak two kinds of comfort: the physical support of something fluffy pillows and the medicinal support of antidepressants. The show also featured a chromogenic print diptych by Splan called *Blood Scarf*, which presented an inventive use of materials but lacked the immediacy of her 3-D pills. The piece photographically displays the sort of blood, sweat or tears that might go into making a winter accessory; the artist knit vinyl tubing, filled with what appears to be blood, into a scarf and then photographed it wrapped around a woman's neck.

Ben Schachter demonstrates amazing aesthetic sensibility with *Industrial Folk*. Schachter used flexible metal conduit — the kind through which electric wires might run — and orange, green and blue cable ties to craft an oval-shaped rug. It was one of the few pieces in the show that makes no apparent social

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Elaine Bradford, *Dominant Male of the Blue-Striped Variety*, 2005, mounted deer heads, crocheted yarn, buttons, 73" x 53" x 16". Collection of Justin Boyd, San Antonio, TX.

commentary — it does, however, express that any medium can become beautiful.

Elaine Bradford's *Dominant Male of the Blue-Striped Variety* seems humorous and surreal, but it also has serious feminist overtones. When the artist assumes

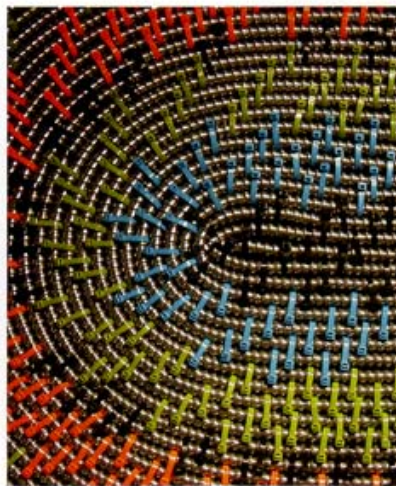
the role of huntress, hanging the heads of two deer bucks on the gallery wall and covering them with black and blue striped, crocheted sweaters, male dominance is certainly called into question. There is also a sense of gentle mockery in completely covering the faces, making the trophies look like ridiculous animals from another planet.

This judiciously installed exhibition included other notable pieces by artists working with earthenware, glitter, and found objects. The art in this show reflects the sensibility of Buszek's other projects, such as an anthology she is editing called *Extra/ordinary: Craft Culture and Contemporary Art*. •

Nick Malewski has a B.A. in studio art is completing an M.A. in art history from Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, Georgia. In addition to writing for *Review*, he has written for other publications such as *District*, *Drain*, and *The Pitch*.



Laura Splan, *Blood Scarf*, diptych, 2002, C-prints, 24"H x 20"W each (diptych dimensions 24"H x 42"W).



Ben Schachter, *Industrial Folk* (detail), 2003, flexible conduit and cable ties, 30" x 40"