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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Tatiana Trouvé at the Gagosian Gallery



Robert McKeever/Gagosian Gallery

An untitled architectural installation by Tatiana Trouvé at Gagosian Gallery.

By ROBERTA SMITH

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My opinion of the American gallery debut of the Italian-born, Paris-based sculptor Tatiana Trouvé dipped when I read the first line of her statement at the top of the news release: “The work is situated in an open space between matter and memory.”

This vague open space is by now so clogged with artists as to be meaningless; it's everyman's land. Luckily the art on view is more specific, ambitious and intelligent, even if many of its ideas are traceable to others.

Born in 1968, Ms. Trouvé had her first solo show in 2000. This late start, by current standards, may explain the imposing range of her efforts. Each of the show's five rooms presents different ways of combining the found, the made, the literary and the spatial.

In the first, a series of low cylindrical radiators cast in concrete and three pairs of leather shoes (actually black cast bronze) create a mood of upstairs-downstairs glamour. We're in a modern mansion where servants of different ages and sexes have turned in for the night, leaving their shoes to be polished. The cast-concrete forms of Rachel Whiteread are evoked, as they are in a later room where casts of mattresses and pillows are supported by black metal floor-to-ceiling pipes.

In the largest room a series of expansive wall drawings introduces deep illusionistic spaces with images and materials (cork) that commingle the domestic, corporate and industrial (libraries, bedrooms, laboratories, fuel tanks). Copper and aluminum tape crisscross the floor, connecting the scenes and skirting small boulders inset with bronze casts of worn bars of soap. In another room "Untitled (The Fridges)," a kind of sculpture cum scatter piece, is sveltely turned out in wood-grain or blue Formica, which covers all the forms and accumulates in thin strips pierced with quantities of rings. The work includes six small saw horses and two matching polygons on wheels that are pushed together, which means that the plaques on their facing surfaces can't be read.

The show's tour de force is "Untitled (Room 3)," a glassed-in installation that involves a rusted gas can, a shortened pool cue, miniature doors with stylish handles, trapdoors; an inside room with a cleverly used mirror and a floor covered with sand, another boulder with bronze soap, drips of black paint and clear resin, and smoky smudges. The slick and sinister effect is of a high-end torture chamber.

This impressive show is not entirely free of the academic tone-deafness of Ms. Trouvé's statement. Her work synthesizes an eclectic range of sources — Richard Artschwager, Reinhard Mucha, Ange Leccia, Eva Hesse, Damien Hirst — with a commanding grasp of space and narrative. But it can also be laboriously contrived. Literary suggestion supersedes form; details prevail over wholes.

The best thing here, sculpturally speaking, runs through the middle of "Untitled (The Fridges)." It's a narrow trough cut into the cement floor and filled with black asphalt.

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