

Sheila

KLEIN

Kate

PETLEY



Similar

Differences

This exhibition continues Art League Houston's ongoing commitment to support the creation of new work and showcase artists whose innovation provides the community with access to a variety of artistic styles. In this show woven stainless steel, vinyl, photographic film, and fabric are the sculptural materials subject to the ingenuity and technical acumen of these two artists. Motivated by a desire to transform physical space and atmosphere, they are equally engaging in the exacting arena of public art, the more intimate scale of a gallery. Those who have not had time to stop and linger at Petley's ethereal Air Drops and Klein's brilliant Leopard Sky at Intercontinental Airport, now have a chance to fully enjoy the work of these two stellar artists.

Debbie McNulty
Executive Director Art League Houston

Northwest coast artist Sheila Klein and Colorado based Kate Petley met while working on their respective commissions at the Bush Intercontinental Airport in 2005. Kate noticed how Sheila's use of fabric related to her own earlier work, which sparked dialogue between the two artists. Both realized that they shared similar ideas and sometimes similar materials, but their approach, process and end results were very different. Similar Differences is a continuation of their dialogue.

While considering the collaboration, Kate sought to capture her own interests authentically. It was important to relate her use of light and light materials to Sheila's handling of light objects that create volume with weight. Complimentary Relationship, an installation composed of transparent screens formed into tubes, is about light and reflection, an idea that has been important to her for a long time. Her goal was to capture these elements as directly as possible.

Kate uses transparency in complicated ways. Of note: the basis of the background film is made from handmade objects and in the end we actually see that object twice. Starting with a crude handmade scrim that Kate describes as 'Matisse on drugs', she suspends the scrim, shines a theatrical light through it, which causes it to cast reflections. She then photographs the reflections – the idea being to capture the reflection of the object, not the object itself. The reflections become film and the film is bent into imperfect eight-foot tubes that are x-laced together with monofilament.

The reflective depth coming from these shallow objects reduced by the fundamental elements of the process is essential. Starting with the object made from a reflection, into an object that again makes a reflection, it is difficult to tell where the piece ends and the reflections on the wall begin. The installation subsequently relates to the wall and floor, a basic architectural ingredient and a common thesis in Sheila's work.

Nine Mala, a suspended wall sculpture, is based on ceremonial necklaces from India that are used for protections from the nine planets. The necklaces, Navratra Mala, used much in the same way as the Catholic rosary, were an integral component in spiritual disciplines. Nine transparent 9x9 inch squares recreate semi-precious gemstones draped with beaded lace and film brilliantly reflect shadows on the walls. Kate's exploration of the conditions of light and atmosphere in Nine Mala once more emphasizes the reflection, not the object.



For thirty years Sheila Klein's art works and installations have reflected the architectural underpinnings and connection between things. It is a premise she has interspersed with elements of design, fashion, and theatre. Her ongoing interest in sculptural and architectural relationships is clear in Belt. The exterior piece, woven of stainless steel yarn, spans a gap on the outside of the building and explores the play between material, process, site, and concept. The "building jewelery" recalls leather tooling, lace or barbed wire. There are noticeable relationships between Belt and Nine Mala – the intricate weaving in Belt and the interlacing chain loops that connect the "gemstones" are just one connection seen in the two works.

Sheila's interior installation, Thin Place Threshold, both theatrical and architectural in essence, involves multiple layers, membranes and color blocks that draw the viewer through a passage of manually operated kinetic fabric drapes. The drapes are made from hi-tech mesh fabric that moires and creates illusion. The six layers, which could be a set, stage or runway, create entrances and exits, passages and corridors and allows individuals to move through them on a journey. Thin Place Threshold could be viewed formally as a color field painting; the viewer determining how active or passive the piece is, a concept that Sheila constantly explores – the interweaving of two and three dimensional works.

The witty and beautiful curtain wall diptych, Grecian and Venetian, hints of colonnades and pergolas, with columns that are buttressed together, constantly jostling up against each other. Equally, we think of fashion – perhaps a section from her mother's closet, of chorus lines and again we think of color field painting. She successfully conveys her passion to create art that "dresses the world" at a more intimate human level with Vestment and In/Out Apron. From the series, Other Clothing, Sheila explores the notion of how people adorn themselves and the signals that are conveyed from that adornment, i.e. urchin, princess, witch doctor. The use of imagery in clothing – aprons, shawls and religious vestments creates a body of work that is an ethnographic view of souvenirs or artifacts of Klein's world.

In Similar Differences the artists bump into each other in sometimes obvious but at other times not-so-obvious-ways. Sheila's work is architecturally based, about altering spaces, transformation and creating private and public experiences; about the interconnectedness of things and the uncovering of the architectural foundation of all objects. Although some of the work is soft and ephemeral it has volume and presence. Kate's work concerns conditions rather than actual physical space as she examines atmospheric and mystical elements within her work and world. Both use materials that possess translucent qualities. Their approaches are blended and holistic yet experiential, traditional and formal – sometimes rather brazen, Baroque and minimal. Showing the work side-by-side and finding the similar differences in the work serves the artists well, separately and together. Janet Phelps New York / Houston.

Clockwise from top: Installation - Thin Place Threshold and Complimentary Relationship Kate Petley Complimentary Relationship 96" x 14" x 12" each piece, Kate Petley Nine Mala 2006 dimensions variable, Sheila Klein Grecian & Venetian 2007 96"x90", Sheila Klein Thin Place Threshold 2007 108" x 120" x 180"

Kate lives in southwestern Colorado, where little distracts her from making work that ranges from gallery exhibitions to site-specific installations and public commissions. Her next project involves video projection into a historic water storage tank and is planned for Fall 2007.

Sheila lives on a farm with her husband artist Ries Niemi and sons Rebar & Torque. She recently produced a performance on a loading dock called "We're Busy". The world is full of shimmering, floating ideas of beauty and sense, Sheila wants to catch 'em all in a jar.

Janet Phelps is an independent curator and art consultant based between Houston and New York.



Nine Mala
2006 (detail) Kate Petley



In/Out Apron
Sheila Klein from "Other Clothing" 2006

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