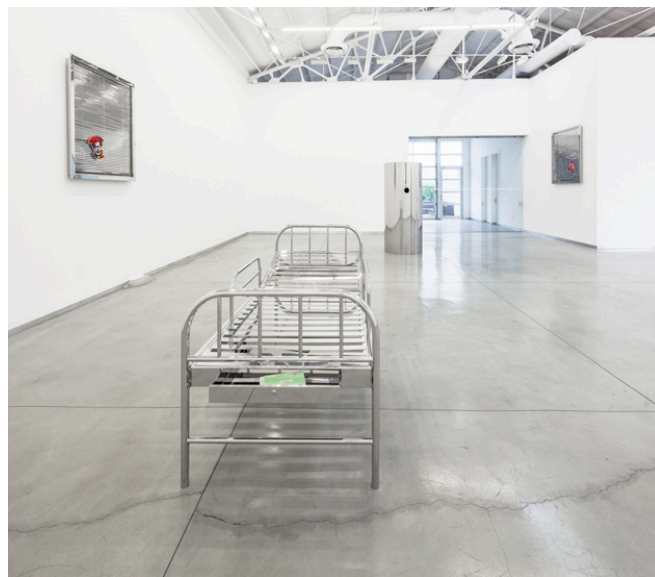


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January 24, 2013

Notes on Looking

Kathryn Andrews D.O.A./D.O.B. at David Kordansky Gallery



Kathryn Andrews
D.O.A. / D. O. B.
Installation view

Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

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The 'white cube' of the gallery looks even more starkly white than usual as I enter Kathryn Andrews' exhibition. There are three shimmering objects on the floor (a bed frame and two oval columnar shells that could be futuristic ticket booths), and three on the walls (these are windows with glass-enclosed Venetian blinds), and they all shine relentlessly. The sculptures are made of polished stainless steel and, in another instance of relentlessness, their surfaces reflect light and me and each other and the surrounding white walls; they are difficult to look at, they almost defy my gaze. I stop momentarily. I feel attracted by the perfection of these beautiful objects as well as frightened. I love shiny things, but here I feel oppressed, and as though I am being observed and judged, and I think that certainly, given the drabness and portliness of my middle-aged self, I don't measure up to these... objects of desire, these objects on display.



Kathryn Andrews
Still Life (Woman with Fruit), 2012
Stainless steel, resin, foam, paint, performance
85 x 26 x 26 inches (215.9 x 66 x 66 cm)
Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

One sculpture, the nearest to the entrance, *Still Life (Woman with Fruit)*, 2012, lists among its media 'performance,' and I learn that for several hours during the opening reception a woman stood inside this sculpture; her naked body was painted in psychedelic fruit patterns and she wore on her head a basket or bowl of fake fruit. From

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the perspective of the party-goers, one could only see the steel sculpture and the fake fruit rising from the open top, wobbling and dipping as the model strained to keep still. While this might have been comical – I think for a moment of playing a joke on the seriousness of minimal art, say by placing fruit on a sculpture by John McCracken, or on a Lucite Robert Irwin column – then I think of the seriousness of this endeavor, of directly implicating humans in one's work. To view this work with its performance I need to climb a stool to peer inside – and down – at the contained woman/model. Since I have chosen to observe, I cannot then blame the artist for what I see, and for the feeling that I am somehow taking advantage of this model. Sure, I know, the model was paid, she entered into a contract to perform this task, but still I feel vaguely like Louis XVI. I don't want this responsibility of finding pleasure in her discomfort, even if it is a modest one. Because I am human, and can empathize, I put myself in there, in her place, and then I am faced with myself, and utterly alone. (My self-awareness is becoming a theme in this show, and it makes me uncomfortable. I feel I am being examined here as much as the art.)



Kathryn Andrews
Still Life (Woman with Fruit), 2012, (detail)
stainless steel, resin, foam, paint, performance
85 x 26 x 26 inches (215.9 x 66 x 66 cm)
Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Looking again at *Still Life (Woman with Fruit)* I think of Jeff Koons and his late-career cheerfully beguiling oversize puppies and bunnies; both Koons and Andrews

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use quicksilver finishes in their work, and so both face the viewer with themselves. But where Koons elides the responsibility for human interaction with his sculptures (the only possible reaction to Koons' work is to like the sculptures a lot or not at all, and one never needs to feel guilty for liking them), by forcing me to consider the human experience that is part of her presentation, and then because she makes me feel equally responsible for a performer's experience, as for my own, it seems to me that Andrews acknowledges arts roots in humanism. That I like a thing tells me something about myself, and in our market-based culture, when I buy something my act has implications beyond the pleasure of the purchase and my delight in ownership. Kathryn Andrews' fierce scrutiny of human motives leaves me no choice but to recognize myself as a moral agent.



Kathryn Andrews
W. G. Heirens (November 15, 1928 – March 5, 2012), 2012
Stainless steel, paper, ink
39 x 80 x 39 inches (99.1 x 203.2 x 99.1 cm)
Image courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Another sculpture, *W. G. Heirens (November 15, 1928 – March 5, 2012)*, offers a seemingly clear-cut morality play. A stainless steel recreation of a hospital bed frame contains, in the nurse's drawer at its foot, a birthday card either from or to the serial murderer named in the title. Appreciating the cold beauty of the seamlessly crafted

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bed frame, and then finding and learning of the significance of the paper card in the drawer, I feel this connection between purchased criminal readymade, or prop, and artwork is too obvious. I know already that Andrews' artifacts are morally ambiguous, and her use of purchased and rented props and readymades makes me suspicious, too. It is significant that for the enclosed birthday card the media are listed as paper and ink, so the only connection to murder comes by word of mouth. Doesn't this fact of transmission of salacious details, of rumor, implicate the transmitter in the crime of directing attention where it ought not be paid? And does it make me, the eager listener, doubly guilty?



Kathryn Andrews
W. G. Heirens (November 15, 1928 – March 5, 2012), 2012, (detail)
Stainless steel, paper, ink
39 x 80 x 39 inches (99.1 x 203.2 x 99.1 cm)
Image courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Looking through bed frame's stainless steel slats to the floor, I find that the sculpture nearly disappears; the silver of its metal matches closely the tone of the burnished grey concrete of the floor: the two materials vibrate in my eye with the same frequency, and cancel each other out. Laughing to myself, I think of John Baldessari's famous 1968 artwork *This is not to be looked at*, a printed painting which has the title sentence lettered across the bottom of a pictured ArtForum magazine. It seems with *W. G. Heiser...* that Andrews' scrutiny extends beyond individuals as responsible parties (artist, viewer and performer) and questions also the moral agency of art in the world, and of the art world itself, which can be defined as a group of interacting agents whose ambiguous relationship to morality supports the questions that artists such as Kathryn Andrews raises.

D.O.A. / D.O.B. is replete with cinematic references: *Still Life (Woman with Fruit)*

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brings to mind the talented Carmen Miranda (and Miranda's presence brings to the conversation yet another example of a woman being paid for her own exploitation), the teenage killer W. G. Heiser's story was made into a movie by Fritz Lang, and in a third sculpture, *Lethal Weapon*, film is underlined as source material by the presence of a pistol from the movie of the same name.



Kathryn Andrews

Tot Finder (Summer Varietal), 2012

Stainless steel, Plexiglas and archival pigment print
52 x 46 x 3 inches (132.1 x 116.8 x 7.6 cm)

Image courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles



Kathryn Andrews

Tot Finder (Winter Varietal), 2012, (detail)

Stainless steel, Plexiglas and archival pigment print
52 x 46 x 3 inches (132.1 x 116.8 x 7.6 cm)

Image courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

More than *Lethal Weapon*, the film that comes to mind as I bend over to peer into the sculpture's dark hole is Thomas Edison and Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* from 1903, which presaged all the violence currently present in films and which included a scene with the outlaw leader pointing and firing a pistol into the movie audience. In stills in a book, as I first saw this historic moment in film, the pistol's barrel is surrounded in a black frame by a cloud of smoke, and the simplicity of this effect relates to Andrews' presentation and physically engages me in a way that Hollywood

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special effects do not. Additionally, Andrews' sculpture asks me to bend, almost to bow. This coerced body language of voyeur and supplicant moves Andrews' work beyond a currently vogue and easy reference to the relationships among prop and film and art, and into a question of power: who has it, who accepts its guidance, and how do we judge it morally?

Kathryn Andrews' three window sculptures – each titled *Tot Finder*, with a seasonal designation in parens as though the sculptures might be flowers – promise and frustrate display by using the structure of surveillance while denying the opportunity to engage in the act of looking, and watching. Each sculpture consists of a window frame hanging on the wall, with glass enclosed Venetian blinds suggesting that one could, if the orientation of the blinds was altered, see through. Equally, these blinds create the feeling that one could be observed.

But looking closely, I find that a polished steel plate closes off the back, I also find that, despite my assumption of the blinds being encapsulated in a glazed vacuum (as is often done in architecture for weatherproofing) the glass, the blinds and the steel plate are each fitted into the frame separately, they are not glued down. This makes them feel fragile to me, and dependent for their manufacture on human hands.

In the past Andrews has offered (required of?) collectors of her work participation, and perhaps the feeling of authorship – for example by making work that must be installed adjacent another piece to make sense, and by including balloons that one may and may not inflate – yet demanding that said inflations take place only at times specified by the artist. In the loose construction of *Tot Finders* the artist has found a way to make of her collectors preparation staff (or potential prep staff, since I can't imagine anyone with the means to purchase these sculptures actually putting one together).



Kathryn Andrews
Tot Finder (Fall Varietal), 2012, (alternate view)
Stainless steel, Plexiglas and archival pigment print
52 x 46 x 3 inches (132.1 x 116.8 x 7.6 cm)
Image courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

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The mortality that is implied in the murder bed of *W. G. Heiser*, with the dates of birth and death in the title, and in *Lethal Weapon*, is reiterated in *Tot Finders*. The title makes reference to placards that parents would place in a home window and in the window of a car when a baby was present, and Andrews' use of elaborately painted clown faces makes a joke of this title even before one sees the work. Looking at *Tot Finders (Summer Varietal)* the horrific clown face is already there, looking back, as though waiting for the viewer. I don't find a sympathetic call to aid a child, rather this is a threat, "Look here at your own danger." Once again, every physical aspect of these sculptures pushes me away. The reflections in the metal, the closed blinds, the scary clown, all have the effect of grabbing my attention and simultaneously rejecting it. I suspect that what happens in this exchange, as with the other works in *D.O.A. / D. O. B.* is that my attention is focused on the relationships among the objects (myself and the artist included) rather than on the objects themselves.

Kathryn Andrews' *D.O.A. / D.O.B.* employs cold materials, questionable performances and callous pop references, and the works require a viewer to engage with them physically and intellectually. While her manner of display appears bloodless and without heart, my experience of the exhibition brings me to appreciate Andrews' blunt, theatrically spare explorations into human motives and power negotiations. If in a past generation Antonin Artaud used emotional cruelty and the drama of the theater to inquire into the human heart, in our current time I think Kathryn Andrews employs tools of emotional restraint and the drama of the art world to similar intellectual ends.

Kathryn Andrews, *D.O.A. / D. O. B.* is on view at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles through February 2, 2013 <http://www.davidkordanskygallery.com/>



Kathryn Andrews
D.O.A. / D. O. B.
Installation view
Courtesy David Kordansky
Gallery, Los Angeles