



New York – Margaret Lee: Closer to right than wrong/ Closer to wrong than right at Jack Hanley Gallery Through March 9th, 2014

March 8th, 2014



Margaret Lee at Jack Hanley (Installation View), via Art Observed

ABOVE: MARGARET LEE'S DOTS (DALMATIAN), 2013. OIL, ACRYLIC, LINEN, WOOD, FOUND OBJECTS, AND PLASTER PAINTING. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK HANLEY GALLERY. PHOTO: JOERG LOHSE.

Currently on view, Closer to right than wrong/ Closer to wrong than right is Margaret Lee's second solo show at Jack Hanley Gallery. For the exhibition, Lee—co-founder of the Lower East Side gallery 47 Canal, an arbiter of art-world cool—has assembled a showroom of sorts, featuring an array of furniture-like pieces festooned with a uniform black and white Dalmatian print. While Lee's previous work frequently dealt in a brash take on domestic objects, such as eggplant or cucumber-shaped telephones, the tone of the current exhibition is comparatively subdued. A tongue-in-cheek minimalism prevails, with polka dots turning the installation's assorted objects—a chair, a lamp, a side table, and even a painting on the wall—into the sort of kitsch that undermines what could otherwise be mistaken as a serious design sensibility.



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The installation has a decidedly modular quality. A lack of distinguishing characteristics between its constituent parts suggests a kind of absurdist, cartoon-like version of Design Within Reach or Ikea. By clustering all of the work onto a showroom-like plinth, which is placed at the center of the considerably larger gallery room, Lee unsettles the viewer's sense of space, flattening and reducing the installation's tactile qualities. Perspective slips away, and objects lose their differentiation, in a kind of parody of the ideal of perfect arrangement: so perfect as to be practically invisible.



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The exhibition is suggestive of a slippage between modernist design and consumer aspirations—the inevitability of the avant-garde winding up as mass-produced consumables. But Lee also locates a certain joy in the tension between customization and reproducibility. Her quasi-showroom speaks to the accessible playfulness of consumption, and this light-hearted humor is driven home by the inclusion of a Dalmatian dog silhouette, blending into the kitset-like installation seamlessly. Avant-garde signifiers, such as a reproduced Brancusi column serve as a fitting counterpoint, high-brow aspiration twisted to match a perfectly arranged living room.



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Consumerism takes on a central role in the way that Lee aspires to a perfection borne out of advertising photography. The exhibition's press release notes the challenge of "finding the balance between one's true desires and realizable good taste," and Lee delicately plays these two terms off of one another. The inclusion of a polka dot painting as part of the same class of objects as furniture suggests a collapse of art into décor, highlighting a sense of homogeneity in both.



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A blueprint of sophistication and good taste gone awry, with closer to right than wrong/ closer to wrong than right, Lee has created a framework in which good taste and inspiration are free-floating, transferable entities, that objects can be exactly like the image you have in your head or that you see in a catalog.

Lee's installation is on view until March 9th.

—T. Gentles