

ARTFORUM

“SOGTFO”

FRANCOIS GHEBALY GALLERY



Kelly Akashi, *Figure oO*, 2015, wood, acrylic latex paint, liquid emulsion, pigmented wax, blown pigmented glass, 8' 1" × 12' × 2'. From "SOGTFO," 2015.

In October 2014, the grassroots organization Hollaback! released a two-minute video of hidden-camera footage in which a curvaceous brunette is catcalled as she walks the streets of New York. Intended as a public-service announcement, the video promptly went viral. Within the art world, discussions in its wake revisited conversations initiated by artists such as Adrian Piper and VALIE EXPORT, whose practices question the conditions under which women are allowed to occupy public space. The same mechanisms of social control that police a woman's physical presence can extend to the virtual realm, that supposedly object-free environment where women are nevertheless ubiquitously objectified, reduced to the sum of their selfies. Women who attempt to exert control over the production of their images online may find it far more difficult to curtail circulation, while those who refuse to provide any image at all are rebuked with taunts like "TOGTFO" ("tits or get the fuck out"), a refrain that demands a woman "prove" her gender, thus participating in her own exploitation.

Artist-curator Charlie White's exhibition title "SOGTFO" winked at the aforementioned meme, with its wince-inducing substitution of "sculpture" as the preferred bounty. If White's stated intent was to confront the "language of immaterial misogyny" with material reality, by applying this syntax to an exclusively female artist roster, he ended up reinforcing the very notions of gender that he had been claiming to confront. While meant to lend the show some tongue-in-cheek swagger, the title framed the exhibition as if the selected artists *did* have something to prove—or worse, as if they were bowing to the mandate issued by their (male) curator.

Thankfully, this brawny five-artist show had no need for such posturing. In the exhibition's opening salvo, Andrea Zittel broke down the first room of the gallery according to hierarchies of geometry, not gender. *Flat Field Work #1*, 2015, is a structure composed of overlapping examples of planar panels, a formal phenomenon that, as the artist explains in her accompanying eight-minute video, *Dynamic Essay About the Panel*, 2014, "has the ability to constitute its own, independent field of reality." Pitted against Zittel's ordered arrangement was another planar panel, Kelly Akashi's *Figure oO*, 2015. Painted gallery white, the hulking rectangular structure (some eight feet high by twelve feet long) reads almost like a temporary wall, albeit one two feet thick, cut through with a lopsided figure eight and splattered with an ejaculate of liquefied light-sensitive silver-halide gelatin.

In the second space, Akashi made another case for circles with *Ring*, 2015, a spool-shaped bronze sculpture tethered to the wall and ceiling. Cast from wax drippings, the exterior surface of the pendant has been smoothed over, while the interior surface remains barnacled and brittle, giving the piece the appearance of an irritated orifice—a resemblance shared by Nevine Mahmoud's *O*, 2015, in which aluminum was cast from a mold of a looped strip of egg-crate foam to recall something between a tire tread and an angry mouth. This urge to remake soft tissues as solid masses carried over into Mahmoud's glazed ceramics: the patchily painted floor sculptures *Basketball*, 2014, and *Beachball*, 2015, clustered beside Kathleen Ryan's *Bacchante*, 2015. The latter consists of a sleek granite pedestal that props up a glorious cascade of concrete grapes, each crafted with a buoyancy that belies their material. This inversion of expectation—quite literally investing forms with a new gravity—executes a subtle and effective subversion of perhaps the most paradoxical effect of objectification: its ability to strip targets of their own weight.

The show's pièce de résistance was, however, Amanda Ross-Ho's *Untitled Sculpture (ONCE U GO BLACK)*, 2015. It stars an oversize mannequin, presented from the waist to just below the knee. A series of seven imbricating thong panties slides down the thighs from the pelvis, mapping out a gradation of grayscale tones, from black to white. Often an emblem of sexual availability, here the thongs are comically neutralized by their sensible knit-jersey construction and stony palette. One hip is cocked, as if for the taking, but the work's absurdity offsets any invitation. It's the kind of sculpture that dares the viewer to call it ballsy.

—Kate Sutton