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Sarah Beck : Öde
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In order for the monument to fulfill its purpose of becoming a media symbol, the silhouette of the sculpture would need to function as a logo. Another pressing factor was the necessity for community input. Focus groups of survivors made suggestions during consultations in which they discussed Irving's miniature clay models, and approved the final proposal. They decided that the monument needed to have a positive, uplifting gesture, to ensure that the viewer would not be overwhelmed by the pain in many of the images.

This decision is validated by the expression of relief that enters the studio for the first time. Reassured by the friendliness of the monument, people slowly move in and soon become absorbed by the stories and craft of the quilt squares. They then discover that many squares are surprisingly positive: most survivors chose to create messages of hope. They called up scores of symbols to express their healing as well as their struggle. Small children scale cliffs and ropes. Eagles battle snakes. Seeds sprout, embryos grow, caterpillars transform, chains are assembled Ode, the irony implicit in her multi-media installation at Third Avenue Gallery became the reality of September 11, 2001. The centrepiece of Ode was a low-cost, environmentally friendly, easily wiped-clean, full-size replica of a military tank. Yet in spite of its immense volume, Beck's sculpture was a benign presence, merely filling the Vancouver gallery wall to wall, floor to ceiling, like a big toy some boy-giant might have left behind in the sandbox.

In the aftermath of 9/11, as previously unthinkable phrases such as "weaponized biological agents" and "homeland security" became the standard lingo of America's New War on terrorism (another new phrase), the amiable intention of Ode seemed less an artful parody of childish consumerist desires than a portent of a future suddenly arrived.

Conceptually, Ode is a pseudo-retail enterprise mimicking mass-marketing tactics that full buyers into believing that consumer products will make their lives happier. Using the IKEA model of print and electronic merchandising to supplement retail sales, Beck produced hundreds of copies of a 32-page full-colour catalogue outlining the Ode vision: "a better everyday life through global militarization." Filled with cheery photographs of smiling children and carefree young adults (tumbling on hay bales, blowing soap bubbles, fondling a kitten), the catalogue text confides that "most of the time well designed weapons are created for a small part of the population - the few who can afford them. From the beginning, Ode has taken a different path. We have decided to side with the many. That means responding to the armament needs of people throughout the world... people who want to improve their situation and create a better everyday life."

Proclaiming that "Ode cares!" the tongue-in-cheek publication shows white, middle-class families busily assembling their own military equipment using a step-by-step instruction guide and an Allen key. "It's so simple, one tool is all you'll need... we've thought of everything so you can focus on your dreams."

The dream in this instance is owning a 30-foot long, authentically modelled 1997 American Ringhokot 305 armoured tank, identical to those used by South African military forces. The fact that it is constructed entirely of white plastic-coated particle board - and is inoperable as a weapon - is glossed over with seductive marketing ploys emphasizing the tank's contemporary styling, optional finishes, and the availability of co-ordinating accessories. Apparently, to paraphrase David Lee Roth, battle-readiness isn't dependent on "whether you will lose, but how good you look."

The Ode website perpetuates the notion that security can be

**Sarah Beck: Ode**

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bought online in do-it-yourself kits. In addition to showroom views of Beck's installation, the American Rifle Association-notch-creating exhibition — "We help you bring your life under control ... at your fingertips — is two tonnes of material that will withstand any rough terrain" — and a 30-second music video entitled Freedom, which features a girl dancing along a beach, flying a kite that soars into the sky. Viewing these images against the backdrop of news reports on terrorist attacks, it's impossible not to contrast their emotional reassurances to the vortex of hysteria that has swept across North America.

Unlike other parts of the world — Chile, Vietnam, Nicaragua, the Sudan, Guatemala, Serbia, Chechnya, to name just a few — where personal and national freedoms have been erased at the point of a gun, our citizenry has generally never felt the need to acquire personal arsenals (the American Rifle Association notwithstanding). Yet, in the new context of world terrorism, Ode's goal of aiding "any resistance movement in its effort to compete globally with easily accessible, affordable, technologically advanced equipment," doesn't translate as Gen-X irony anymore; rather, it sounds the alarm of paranoia.

The art world is not immune to international events and frequently responds by showing concern for social issues. Yet, art as an activity has little or no immediate effect in alleviating suffering or injustice. Instead, art's imagery seeps imperceptibly into the collective psyche, slowly altering attitudes and mores. While Ode's focus is not a commentary on armed conflict — like a quick-dissolving pill promising instant relief for life's ills, Beck's marketing ploy proposes only a palliative for anxiety —, it nevertheless puts a spotlight on the absurdity of perceiving security as a commodity.

Sarah Beck: Ode
Third Avenue Gallery, Vancouver
August 2-31, 2001

Active depuis août dernier et située en plein cœur de la basse-ville de Québec, la nouvelle galerie Rouge s'affirme comme un lieu prometteur de diffusion privée de l'art actuel québécois. C'est dans l'une des trois salles d'exposition qu'est installée la plus récente production d'Isabelle Laverdière, dont l'ensemble du dispositif hétérogène, ouvert et tout à fait cohérent, se manifeste comme un moment charnière duquel surgit la vivacité d'un questionnement sur l'interprétation des domaines socio-politiques de la construction de l'intimité domestique, ici, l'espace référentiel, protégé et intérieur du logis, celui de l'environnement extérieur immédiat du home: la cour, et enfin celui de la consommation, soit la surface suggérée du supermarché ou du libre-service dont les marchandises offertes envahissent toujours déjà l'aménagement de ces espaces privés.

Ce faisant, la diversité des matériaux et procédés, ainsi que des objets que l'artiste sélectionne ou concourt, réalise et met en scène, comme, entre autres, l'utilisation récurrente de tissus produits en industrie, l'accrochage opéré sous le mode de l'étalage commercial et la construction d'un caddie aux dimensions démesurées — le caddie n'est-il pas le symbole par excellence de la consommation déchaînée et de l'illusion du choix ? —, témoignent de ce rapport identitaire, et par conséquent socialement distinctif, qui lie étroitement l'agent social à l'univers de la consommation. Abordé dans cette perspective qui, j'en conviens, ne saurait être la seule avenue d'interprétation, ce corpus me paraît s'inscrire d'emblée du côté des réflexions de l'heure concernant la construction de l'identité, développées tant du côté des arts visuels que de celui des études visuelles, lesquelles interrogent cette culture des images et des objets qui envahit souverainement la formation du soi qui, plus que jamais, est la nôtre. Dit autrement, ce que semble nous proposer la visite de cette configuration composite que constitue M.INTIMITÉ, c'est que la construction du soi, et conséquemment du chez-soi, ici et maintenant, dans cet Occident mondialisé et chaotique, est traversée par le rituel illusoire, alléchant et exutoire de la consommation, auquel nul n'échappe. Partant de là, ces objets avancés révèlent aux autres notre différence.

Voyons donc comment s'énonce, dans cette production visuelle, ce rapport à l'identité se jouant entre le territoire de l'intime, celui du home sweet home et l'espace économique de la consommation ou du great supermarket qui influe sur notre façon mensongère de se dire au monde, en mettant l'accent sur le gonflement des apparences. Organisées frontalement, en deux rangées, le long du mur, la superposition et la juxtaposition, dix-neuf pièces de tissus extensibles, tendues au mur à la façon d'un display — comme on dit dans le vocabulaire de la mise en marché — et couplées en leur extrémité inférieure à des tubes de carton cylindriques, imposent leur présence rythmée par de multiples rayures de couleur imprimées à l'horizontale et à la verticale. Dans ce contexte, les objets arbitraires structurés en ready-made changent de statut, de même que la récupération du procédé commercial de monstration qui les définit, nouvellement, sur le plan sémantique, contribue à leur dimension maintenant polysémique. Il ne s'agit plus de simples pièces de tissus combinées à des tubes de carton, mais plutôt d'objets ayant perdu, par l'opération d'un détournement stratégique, leur fonctionnalité propre et servant l'intentionnalité discursive de l'artiste. En ce sens, ces objets-textiles énigmatiques, jouant entre...