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Talia Chetrit

RENNICK GALLERY

There was nothing outwardly difficult about Talia Chetrit's second New York solo show; eight modestly scaled, soberly framed black-and-white photographs—all but one made this year—ranged evenly around

the walls of a small gallery. The prints themselves look simple, too, or at least pared-down. But in her crisp, elegant shots, Chetrit makes everything count, bringing sculptural concerns to bear on a two-dimensional form and referring to historical precedents even as she launches an inquiry into the future of the image. There's no apparent digital manipulation here, and most compositions could have been arranged in the artist's studio. Props are employed, but these tend to be portable and often make repeat appearances from work to work. What Chetrit

seems to be aiming for is a measured reconsideration of the power and meaning of resonant objects and physical juxtapositions, one that implies the social without necessarily having to state it.

Sometimes Chetrit's props do not merely suggest sculpture but actually *are* sculptures in their own right, though the artist's photographs are never just straightforward documents thereof, and the objects' origins remain unknown. In *Hand/Sculpture*, 2010, for example, a tripartite twist of metal and Plexiglas strips is accompanied by a woman's hand, which snakes up from the back of the pedestal on which the object sits to brush one edge. The distinction between organic and inorganic is immediately obvious but not as visually jarring as it might sound, and the implications of the quiet but insistent feminine



Talia Chetrit, *Hand/Sculpture*, 2010, silver gelatin print, 24 x 20".

"intrusion" are manifold. The same strategy recurs in *Hand/Sculpture (Modular)*, 2011; here, the extremity holds up an irregular loop of thick plastic tubing, the grip this time harder and more suggestive still.

In a forthcoming monograph on the artist, curator Ruba Katrib aligns Chetrit's agenda with an explicitly feminist perspective insofar as it alludes to the systematic objectification of the female body in photographic imagery. Works such as *Handstand*, 2011, would seem to support this view. Here, a woman is shown performing, naked, the titular gymnastic pose in a studio littered with artifacts and materials—an ornate pedestal, a metal rod, a mirrored table, a pane of glass—of the kind that appear in Chetrit's work. But one of these "things" is, of course, not like the others. While consciously adopting a difficult, exposed, and vulnerable position, the gymnast makes visual the artist's desire to turn the whole existing system upside down—or at least to observe it from a radically different perspective.

The unclothed body also appears in *Nude/Grid*, 2011, in which a white plastic lattice covers a pale human back, casting a pattern of shadow that defines its delicate contours. More often though, the human form is represented by other means—by an anthill in *Dirt*, 2011, by a ceiling tile and a cardboard mailer in *Triangle/Tube*, 2011, and more than once by vases. In *Vase/Machine*, 2011, a clear, box-shaped vase with a ribbed surface sits atop metallic corrugated paper. On a purely visual level, the distorted refractions that the shaped glass produces in conjunction with the surface beneath are rather lovely. They recall, as does much of Chetrit's oeuvre, the photographic experiments of Bauhaus pioneers László Moholy-Nagy, Joost Schmidt, and others.

But consider the vessel's anthropomorphic aspects, and remember its long history as an ingredient of the still life, and the seemingly neutral subject takes on an expanded significance. *Drip Vase*, 2011, an inverted image of a pair of vases that seem, in Chetrit's subtly surreal take, to be

oozing from the ceiling, expands the form's possibilities still further. In *Handstand*, a 180-degree spin sends blood rushing to the head.

—Michael Wils