

Jane Simpson

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

The title of British artist Jane Simpson's recent exhibition, "My Inheritance and Other Bloody Tales," might have been cribbed from one of a recent crop of British books recounting sordid sagas of familial dysfunction. But unlike Edward St. Aubyn or Alexander Waugh, who revel in salacious detail, Simpson relates her narratives in more oblique fashion. Her sculptures—if they were paintings, they'd be called still lifes—combine objects fabricated by the artist with items bought at flea markets or on eBay, or culled from her family's possessions. *Turkish Delight*, 2008, for example, is a wall-mounted, cream-colored, lacquered wooden box that contains an arrangement of ceramic pots collected by Simpson's mother, while *Still Life with Prussian Acrobats*, 2005, incorporates an array of carved abstract forms that riff on an antique lamp stand placed among them.

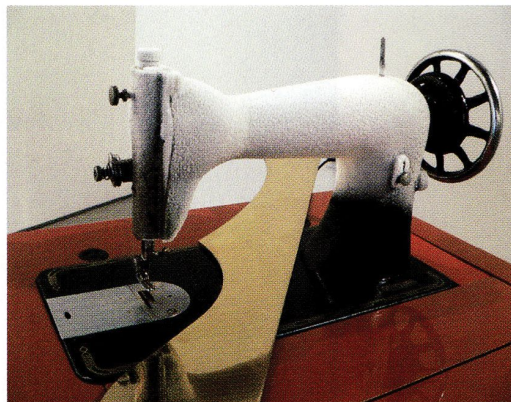
Simpson uses various means, including silicone rubber casting, to create uncanny, neosurreal tableaux. The centerpiece of the show, *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, 2008, revolves around an antique sewing machine resting on a 1930s cabinet (itself standing on a flat sky-blue base) hooked up to a refrigeration unit that coats the device with a layer of frost. The result is a homely (as in Freud's *heimlich*—the word he used in his essay on the uncanny to describe familiar objects) household fixture turned into a fever-dream talisman. Similarly, in *The Dresser*, 2008, a nineteenth-century Welsh dresser is filled with simple vases and other vessels, all rigged with magnets. A feathery layer of iron filings clings to the objects, adding a creepy touch.

In addition to coming by some components of her assemblages by means of a hand-me-down arrangement, there is another, more complex form of ancestry evident in Simpson's work: artistic influence. The stark, muted canvases of Giorgio Morandi are one clear precedent. *Homespun Heraldry*, 2008, and *Winter Moderns*, 2008, which feature arrangements of rubber-dipped and cast silicon objects, respectively, encased in wooden boxes (the latter also includes a French decanter from Simpson's family) additionally conjure the work of contemporary American painter William Bailey. And any time an artist uses boxes, it's difficult not to think of Joseph Cornell.

There was one other art-historical reference in the show: Gering & López is housed in the building on Fifth Avenue, just below Fifty-seventh Street, that was, from 1929 to 1931, home to the first Museum of Modern Art, a fact that does not escape the artist's attention in terms of both broad influence and specific reference. Observing her play on the relationship between sculpture and painting, for example, one might trace, in some of the works, the impact of American painters like Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper, and Arthur Dove, in their plain-spoken approach to color and composition.

Artistic and familial inheritances may be distinguished by the fact that artists choose their aesthetic forebears rather than having them thrust upon them (Harold Bloom's Oedipal notion of struggling against the anxiety of influence must also be borne in mind). But what, precisely, is the effect of incorporating heirlooms into work destined to be sold to strangers? Simpson may be lashing out at family, but she takes a different approach to artists, embracing her aesthetic ancestors rather than treating them as fathers to be killed off. Any doubt about this is dispelled by a pencil-and-pastel collage with soft abstract forms titled, simply, *I ♥ Arthur Dove*, 2008.

—Martha Schwendener



Jane Simpson, *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* (detail), 2008, sewing machine, refrigeration unit, lacquered wood, copper, brass, cotton, 51 x 24 x 18".