

# SMART OBJECTS

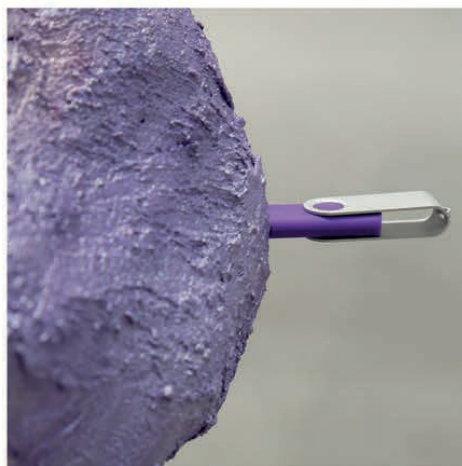
HAL FOSTER ON THE ART OF RACHEL HARRISON





IMAGINE THAT ANDY WARHOL and Eva Hesse had a secret tryst in 1966 and Rachel Harrison was the love child that resulted. With its canny use of both Pop signs and funky materials, her rambunctious sculpture points to such an unlikely lineage. Smartly curated by Elisabeth Sussman and David Joselit, "Rachel Harrison Life Hack," the midcareer survey of her work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, is roughly chronological: It guides us easily from an installation improvised out of cheap paneling, casual photographs, and canned peas in the mid-1990s to a large circle of totemic sculptures gathered for this show, with a few intense series of figure drawings and C-prints along the way. Despite the fact that Harrison is often taken to be a devil-may-care assemblage artist, the exhibition is almost spare, and this relative restraint has two welcome effects: We can learn the language of her work as it developed, and we can consider her image-object hybrids as *sculptures*, which also lets us reflect on the contemporary status of that medium vis-à-vis the other media sampled here. Early on, Harrison compressed the littered space of her initial installations into the tight juxtapositions of her composite objects, and thereby heightened the cultural contradictions that her pointed riffs on postwar art, mass media, and US politics call out.

For Joselit, *remediation* is the key term for this practice, by which he means how Harrison transfers the effects of painting onto the format of sculpture and interrupts the mixed result with photos and videos—in other words, how disparate materials, colors, textures, pictures, and texts combine, conflict, and conspire with one another in her work.<sup>1</sup> This remediation reaches beyond the given forms to the messy spaces and hidden structures that support them: Harrison has used scrap Sheetrock, cardboard containers, and packing crates as (anti)aesthetic material, too. Here, the traditional hierarchy between sculpture and base, knocked over by the Minimalists, is utterly undone, as pallets and boxes are stacked up with other items to shape the sculptural object or simply appear as such in a travesty of plinths and pedestals. Even though Harrison sometimes inscribes the site into her sculpture through installation photos and debris, she also occasionally puts her objects on dollies, which underscores how site specificity is now overwhelmed by site provisionality—how sculpture, like everything else in a world given over to exchange, is on the move, and how brute labor, so rarely acknowledged in the art world, must provide the motive force.

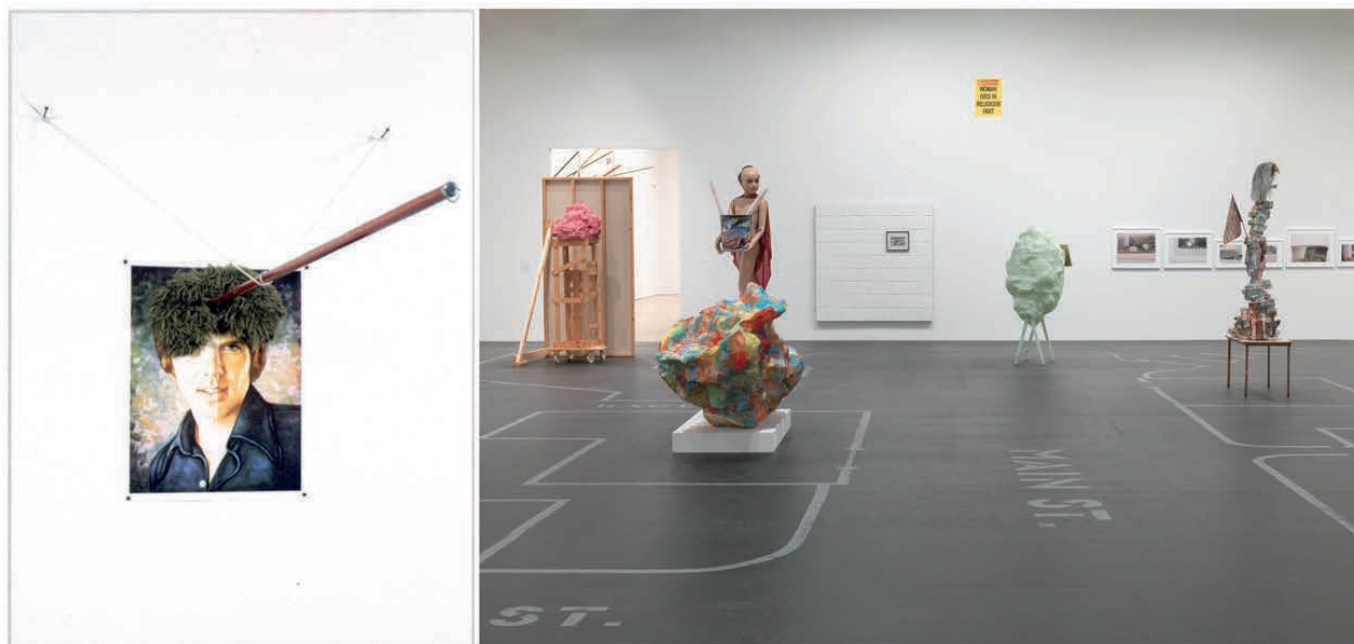


Left: Rachel Harrison, *Bears Ears* (detail), 2017, wood, polystyrene, chicken wire, cardboard, burlap, cement, acrylic, enamel, Nu-Wave drywall cart, soccer ball, USB flash drive with thirty-eight Harun Farocki films, 67 ¼ × 51 ½ × 53 ¾".

Right: Rachel Harrison, *Vampire Wannabes*, 2010, wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, safety vest, Apple AirPort Extreme Base Station, 99 × 35 × 32".

Opposite page: Rachel Harrison, *Al Gore* (detail), 2007, wood, chicken wire, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, Honeywell T87 thermostat, 85 × 34 × 17".





Above, left: **Rachel Harrison, *2 a.m. 2nd Ave.*, 1996**, wood, papier-mâché, acrylic, three broomsticks, five laminated black-and-white photographs of Johnny Carson, Carroll O'Connor, and a priest, 73 × 41 × 29".

Above, center: **Rachel Harrison, *Circle Jerk*, 1989**, metal folding chair, fluorescent light, extension cord, wood, motor, paintbrush, electrical box, wiring, light switch, metallic paint on canvas, dimensions variable.

Above, right: **Rachel Harrison, *John Davidson with Mop*, 1992**, John Davidson poster, mop, cord, 39 1/4 × 35 1/2 × 50".

Right: **Rachel Harrison, *Huffy Howler*, 2004**, wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, Huffy Howler bicycle, handbags, rocks, stones, gravel, brick, one sheepskin, two foxtails, metal pole, wire, ink-jet print, binder clips, 84 × 84 × 30".

Far right: View of "**Rachel Harrison Life Hack**," 2019–20, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging Art.

Opposite page, left: **Rachel Harrison, *Untitled*, ca. 1991**, sock, paper, gesso, acrylic paint, 20 × 6 × 3".

Opposite page, right: **Claes Oldenburg, *Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963**, wood, vinyl, metal, artificial fur, cloth, paper, dimensions variable.







Harrison is the opposite of Richard Serra on the question of site, as she is in another respect: Her go-to materials, cement and polystyrene, are not disclosed as such, as materials in a postindustrial world seldom are, and it is difficult to know whether her sculptures, painted in garish colors, are heavy or light, solid or hollow. Both boxy and blobby, they often make the *informe* funny and the abject everyday, not at all as those states were once hallucinated, horrifically, by Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva. Imagine a Costco stack of Depends, wetted and hardened, then paint-bombed in acid yellows, greens, and purples, or a giant banana split with allover sprinkles left out in a warm rain, then sealed with a roughened resin. (The best description of the work might be the lyrics of “MacArthur Park,” more than once voted the worst song of all time.) The effect is an almost oxymoronic one of rigid fragility or arrested entropy, as though Harrison had updated the science fictions of Robert Smithson, Thomas Pynchon, and J. G. Ballard in the ’60s with the science facts of product glut, junk space, and climate destruction today.

In such a world, distinctions between natural and artificial are long since overrun. Harrison remediates her sculpture not only with other art forms but also across the linked spaces of commodity display and digital information, and it picks up bits and pieces from both realms in the passage. However, to count as sculpture at all, she insists, it must confront us physically in our space. Although *remediation* suggests a smooth transfer between image worlds, her objects seem more stuck than networked (to be fair, Joselit stresses *untranslatability*, too). *Dysfunctionality*, not *interconnectivity*, is the watchword here: As in a scene from a David Cronenberg film like *Videodrome* (1983), a USB flash drive loaded with Harun Farocki films is jammed into the purple blob of a body in *Bears Ears*, 2017, and an Apple AirPort crashes into the



While Harrison's image-object juxtapositions can be abrupt, even brutal, they are also highly calculated, delivered with Flintstonean ingenuity more often than Luddite aggressivity.



pink-and-yellow tower of *Vampire Wannabes*, 2010. Like our bodies, these objects appear resistant on account of their material makeup as well as their proclivity for breakdown. In fact, some sculptures look as though they had passed *through* our bodies, as though they had endured an intestinal acid bath; Harrison imagines consumption, both aesthetic and commercial, in literal terms. Claes Oldenburg is the predecessor to name-check now; his great *Cash Register*, 1961, which also appears semidigested, comes to mind. Harrison collapses product display and art exhibition even more than Oldenburg did in *The Store*, 1961—her use of mannequins signals this conflation too, as it does in the work of her contemporaries Isa Genzken, Thomas Hirschhorn, and John Miller—and she confuses public realm and private space even more than Oldenburg did in *Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963.

The psychoanalyst Ernest Jones declared our first paintings to be the fecal smearings we make as infants; Harrison claims this dubious honor for sculpture. Yet her work is anything but a mess: She wrests construction out of destruction, and while her image-object juxtapositions can be abrupt, even brutal, they are also highly calculated, delivered with Flintstonean ingenuity more often than Luddite aggressivity. Early on, Harrison liked to spell out puns, as in *John Davidson with Mop*, 1992, which shows a '70s poster of the mophead heartthrob with a mop attached to his head, or *Circle Jerk*, 1989, where a fluorescent light punctures a metal chair at the angle of an erection. (This work anticipates by a year the notorious essay "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," in which Anna Chave chastises Dan Flavin and others, also in literal terms, for phallic geometries.) From the concision of the joke, Harrison moved to a compositional mode somewhere between a stalled Rube Goldberg machine and a dream rebus of images and objects, as





With Harrison, references are no more random than compositions: Mostly American, her image appropriations locate us often in age and class and sometimes in gender and desire too.





Opposite page, top: **Andy Warhol, Mrs. McCarthy and Mrs. Brown (Tunafish Disaster), 1963**, silk screen and silver paint on linen, 45 1/4 x 78 3/4".

Opposite page, bottom: **Rachel Harrison, Untitled (Poles for a Dangerous Art World), 1992**, broomsticks, paint roller extension poles, pool cues, billy club, ski pole, chains, ring-pull tabs, Ziploc bags, potting compound, hair extensions, matches, denim, bread, beeswax, Bible, tuna can, vacuum lint, foam, tape, wire, mixed media, 12' x 15'6" x 5'.

Right: **Rachel Harrison, 1:1 (Wonton: John) (detail), 1996**, thirty-eight pictures of Johns, thirty-eight unfired clay and polymer clay wontons, overall 8' 1 1/4" x 13' 11 3/4" x 46".

Right, center: **Rachel Harrison, Untitled, 2012**, colored pencil on paper, 19 x 24".

Right, bottom: **Rachel Harrison, Untitled, 2012**, colored pencil on paper, 19 x 24".

in *Huffy Howler*, 2004, in which a publicity photo of Mel Gibson in *Braveheart* (1995) is clipped to a sheepskin hung lankly on a metal pole that is attached, in turn, to a yellow Huffy Howler bike loaded down with cheap handbags stuffed with rocks (even its front tire is flat). This arrested seesaw is its own proof that most dreams are not about wish fulfillment. As Fredric Jameson once remarked of video art, it suggests a blank Surrealism, with the unconscious updated as a suburban garage or attic piled up with rejected or otherwise crappy stuff. At the extreme in this vein, Harrison evokes an Amazon warehouse where guerilla gremlins have seized the algorithms, or an IKEA store-room where the poor souls represented in the Prinzhorn Collection of "The Artistry of the Mentally Ill" have been let loose to assemble the kits.

With Harrison, references are no more random than compositions: Mostly American, her image appropriations locate us often in age and class and sometimes in gender and desire too. At times, she also deploys the textures of everyday life, such as the paneling in a den, to suggest an economic position or a historical moment. Harrison is especially drawn to social media before the current regime of Facebook and Instagram, such as paparazzi photos and publicity shots that register lost styles of celebrity and old rituals of fandom. *2 a.m. 2nd Ave.*, 1996, a yellow globe set atop a black tripod dotted with photos of Johnny Carson and Carroll O'Connor in tuxedos, looks like a disinterred time capsule or a wayward alien probe from *Lost in Space*. Yet, two decades later, it seems weirdly prophetic: Even if you don't recognize the late-night TV host and the Archie Bunker character, you realize that a cross between an omni-

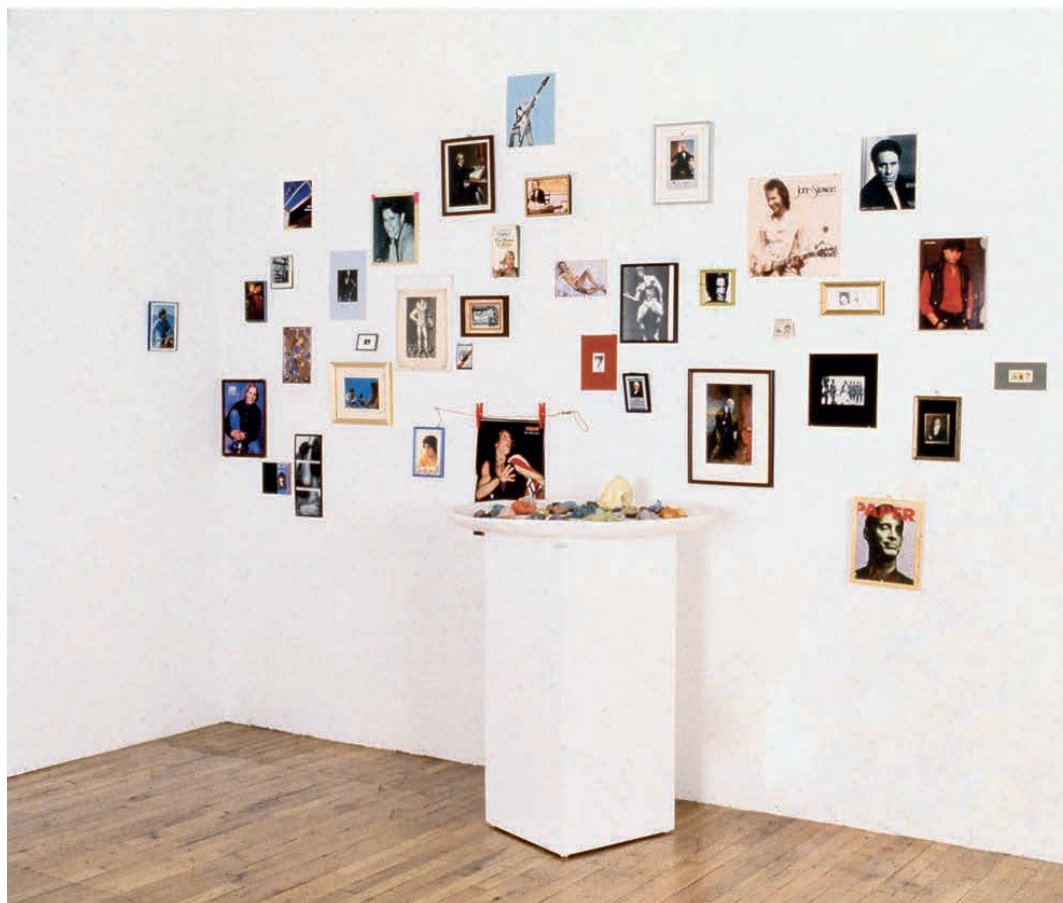


present showman and a bigoted uncle from Queens now occupies the White House. If celebrity sometimes carries over from one era to the next, fandom is often stranded in time. In *1:1 (Wonton: John)*, 1996, Harrison gives us thirty-eight pictures of personages named John on a wall, along with an equal number of ceramic wontons on a pedestal, to consume (though we can't eat either). The majority of these Johns are entertainers, and though some are stars, others are flash-in-the-pan teen idols lost to time. It is like a shrine to pop crushes past, one that the young Albrecht Dürer, in a reproduction of a self-portrait deposed to the floor, gazes on with apparent disapproval. Here, Harrison mimics the attachments of young people as manifest in bedroom pictures; in more recent reflections on stardom, she seems to tap her own investments. In a suite of bravura drawings of Amy Winehouse from 2011–12, Harrison limns the tragic torchlight singer in the idioms of Picasso, de Kooning, and others, as though to hold on to her, manically and melancholically, by repeated imaging alone. The drawings collect and combine styles, a bit like pastiches by Richard Prince and David Salle (not to mention Francis Picabia), but the effect is to vivify Winehouse, not to vivisect her.

In a move mediated by Warhol, Harrison deploys canned vegetables as found signs. In the decade when she was born, many families turned to industrial food (first canned, then frozen) as a testament to technological progress (for the Marxist economist Ernest Mandel, the industrialization of produce was a signal achievement of late capitalism) as well as to their social standing (fresh vegetables pointed to the poverty of farm life). At that time, canned stuff represented a







Above: Rachel Harrison, *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*, 1996–97, thirty olive cans, three framed black-and-white photographs, metal gutter, 21 ½ × 120 × 5 ½".

Left: Rachel Harrison, *1:1 (Wonton: John)*, 1996, thirty-eight pictures of Johns, thirty-eight unfired clay and polymer clay wontons. Installation view, Feature Inc., New York.

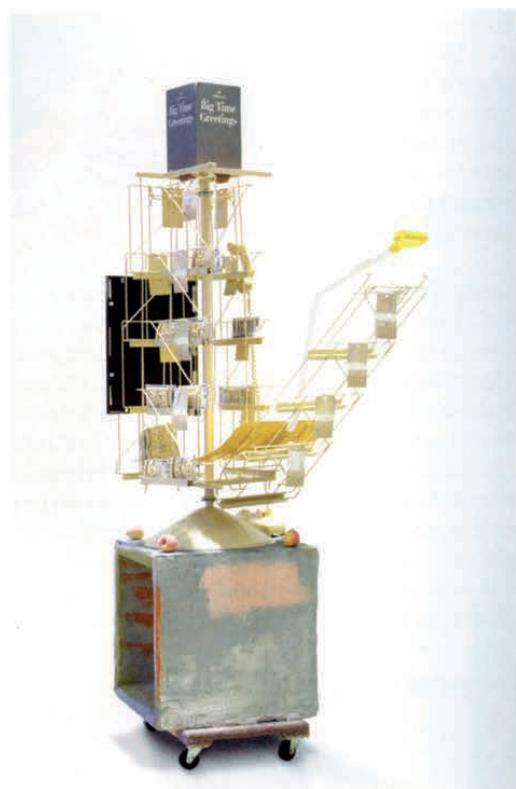
Opposite page, left: Rachel Harrison, *Nice Rack*, 2006, wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, framed ink-jet reproduction of Hans Haacke's 1982 *Ölgemälde, Hommage à Marcel Broodthaers*, hardwood dolly, Hallmark greeting-card rack, ergonomic snow shovel, fake peaches, bejeweled barrettes, rotary telephone, 99 × 63 × 28".

Opposite page, center: Rachel Harrison, *All in the Family*, 2012, wood, polystyrene, chicken wire, cement, acrylic, Hoover vacuum cleaner, 93 × 34 × 34".

Opposite page, right: Rachel Harrison, *Hallway Stanchion Set*, 2019, wood, plastic, cement, acrylic, parachute cord. Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz.



Harrison's work is concerned less with exposing cultural myths than with retelling them, often in a perverse way—perverse in the sense of *père-verse*, a turning away from the patriarchal.



(lower) middle class on the rise; today, many art-world denizens associate it instead with food drives for the urban poor or emergency provisions for the next hurricane. Like Warhol with his *Tuna-fish Disasters*, 1963, Harrison signals a threat with her packages; an early work, *Untitled (Poles for a Dangerous Art World)*, 1992, features substances such as bread, beeswax, tuna, and hair extensions stuck in Ziploc bags and suspended from different sticks, some innocuous, such as old brooms, others less so, such as billy clubs. Everyday life in America is still, is ever more, a matter of not-so-accidental death and disaster.

The cans point to expiration dates in another way as well: Harrison is interested in the shelf life of culture, especially of celebrity culture, which in her reckoning is time-coded to more than fifteen minutes, but not much more. A hundred years ago, Max Ernst updated the adage *Fiat ars, vita perit* (Let there be art, life is fleeting) to *Fiat modes* (Let there be fashion), and fame is another likely substitute. Yet Harrison highlights the vicissitudes of celebrity instead—John Davidson mopped off the stage, Mel Gibson hung up like a pelt, many of the Johns pulled after a single hit song or TV show.<sup>2</sup> The dimming of a star is also surveyed in *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*, 1996–97, a shelf arrayed with thirty cans of olives punctuated by three paparazzi shots of Bo Derek, a sexy beauty



of the '80s, shepherded by her husband, the actor-director John Derek. The work conveys a canned life lived under the heat of the camera and destined to go bad soon; like the Winehouse drawings, the Derek tableau encapsulates an entire miniseries of abuse by men—boyfriends, spouses, fathers, agents, and fans. Whereas Mike Kelley and Cady Noland stage a toxic masculinity in terms of the weird things that boys of all ages make in basements and backyards, Harrison reflects on a distressed femininity in the media world at large: In time, her Bo and Amy might count as worthy updates of Warhol on Marilyn.

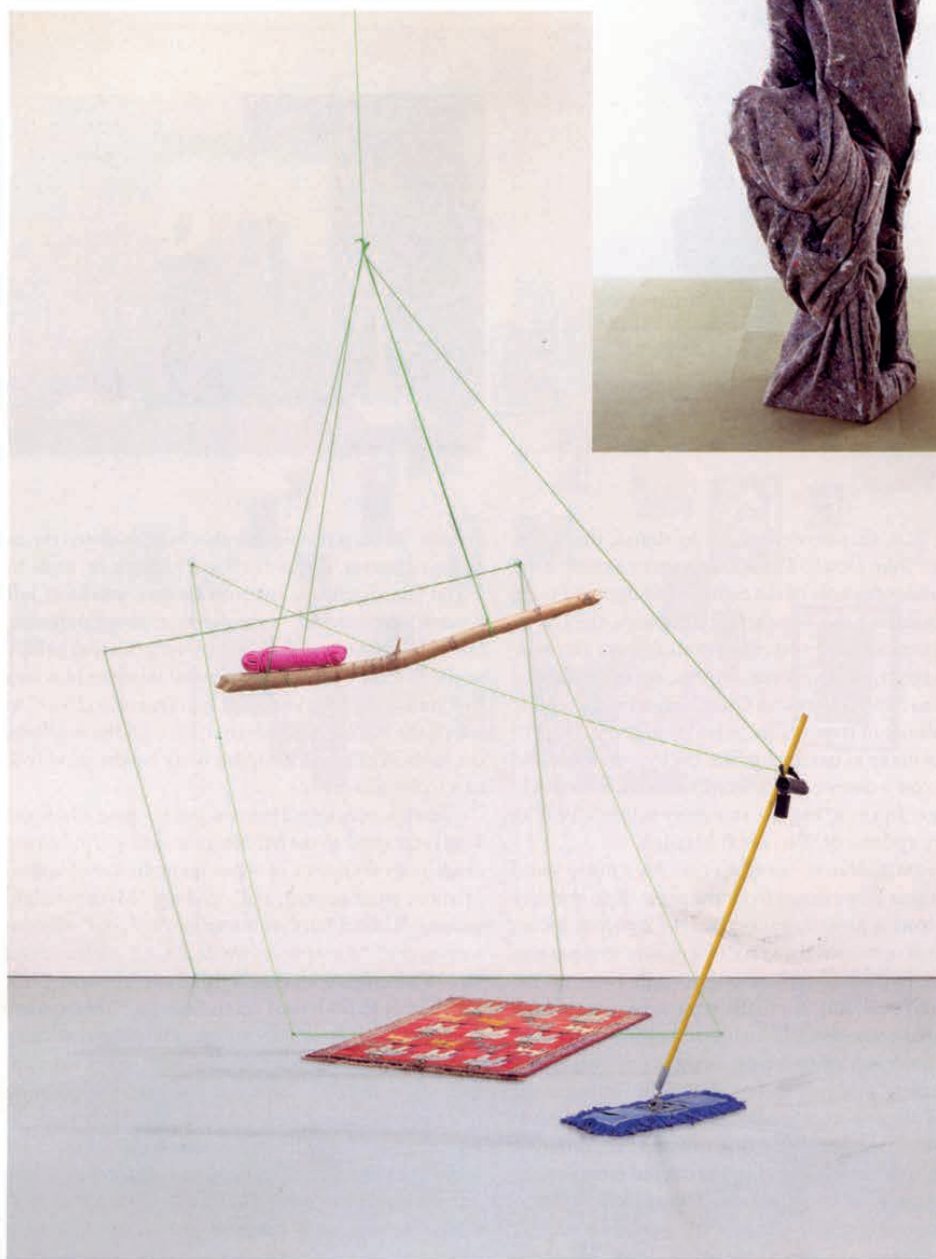
The stars *influence* us (the etymology of the word is light that flows down from the night sky), but they do so from a great distance. In *1:1 (Wonton: John)*, Harrison summons the space of a mostly teen passion that seems close to its love object (right there on the bedroom wall) but is actually remote from it (hidden in a gated home or a VIP lounge somewhere). She uses stanchions in a related way, as signs not only of the detachment of artworks but also of the restriction of desired places—from Studio 54 to whatever the exclusive clubs are today. Harrison calls up very different spaces, too, ones that are still gendered female, such as the spaces of shopping, as in *Nice Rack*, 2006, a greeting-card stand refitted with an old phone and cheap barrettes, and of cleaning, as in *All in the*

*Family*, 2012, a purple vise that clamps down on an orange Hoover. (If the shelf in *Teaching Bo* nods to Haim Steinbach, the vacuum cleaner smirks at Jeff Koons.) To underscore the message about domestic labor, Harrison had the floor of the principal gallery in the Whitney show diagrammed in white in a way that recalls the Lars von Trier film *Dogville* (2003), in which the Nicole Kidman character, on the run from the mob, is put to demeaning work by the good folk of a Colorado town.

To what ends does Harrison put all these allusions? One is tempted to see her sculpture as a performance of ideology critique, a neo-Brechtian theater of appropriation, estrangement, and recoding. “Myth robs language,” Roland Barthes wrote in 1957, so “why not rob myth?” “Art is what we do,” Carl Andre added in 1967, “culture is what is done to us,” so why not use the first to push back on the second?<sup>3</sup> Yet there are problems with these associations. Harrison is actually intrigued by the mythic thinking that persists in popular culture (in 2001, she devoted an entire installation to a rumored apparition of the Virgin Mary in Perth Amboy, New Jersey), and her work is concerned less with exposing cultural myths than with retelling them, often in a perverse way—perverse in the sense of *père-verse*, a turning away from the patriarchal. Like most jokes, some of hers have brunts, and many viewers do



What is in play here is not ideology critique so much as mimetic exacerbation: Harrison takes a bad thing and makes it worse, and then combines it with another bad thing to make it worse still.





find condescension in her art. Certainly there are notes of anger, even violence, but they are culled from the culture at large. Her attitude is like that of a wacky ethnographer whose reports from the field mix analysis and appreciation with an occasional touch of derision. At the same time, Harrison doesn't route the cultural circuits traced in the work through her own biography (as does Tracey Emin, say, and so many others); this is "life hack," not autofiction.

What is in play here is not ideology critique so much as mimetic exacerbation: Harrison takes a bad thing and makes it worse, and then combines it with another bad thing to make it worse still. Historically, this strategy runs back through the Zurich Dadaists, who, as Hugo Ball once wrote, embodied the "dissonances [of the time] to the point of self-disintegration," and on to the young Marx, who urged his followers "to make petrified conditions dance by signing them their own song."<sup>4</sup> Adapted variously by artists like Genzken and Hirschhorn, as well as by writers like George Saunders and Ben Marcus, this means, among other things, to travesty whatever counts as the lingua franca of the moment. Art is not immune from this travesty; in a 2017 press release presented as a burlesque of a roundtable, Harrison has a character named "Judith Beheading Holofernes" say simply, "Make art history scream."<sup>5</sup> Here the primary target is the old typology of sculpture, not only the figure but also the models that displaced it, such as the construction, the readymade, and the found object. Harrison mocks the structural integrity of constructed sculpture: She knocks over a bottle rack in a 2016 piece,

and she takes the piss out of *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, 1920, a proto-Surrealist object by Man Ray, in her *Warren Beatty*, 2007, which consists of moving blankets thrown over an amorphous mass. Harrison gives post-Minimalism more mixed reviews: Though her early painted things like socks look back to Hesse, and her recent installations of suspended cords call up Fred Sandback, both appreciatively, the papered doors of *Mind the Gap*, 1996, poke fun at the Serra props. (Harrison also shifts his associations of material, process, and labor away from the industrial arena long identified with men to the domestic realm still associated with women.) Dutiful nods are made to institutional critique as well: *Nice Rack* cites Hans Haacke, other works remember Michael Asher, and Harrison drags her sculpture through the behind-the-scenes spaces of the art world that Louise Lawler has pictured. But her heart isn't in such analysis: For Harrison, images and discourses cut across and coalesce with one another in ways that can't be easily parsed in critical terms. Sometimes, when she flies her Rauschenberg flag too fervidly, the work does exude a devil-may-care attitude, which allows the viewer to pass by too quickly with a shrug.

Psychoanalytically speaking, Mignon Nixon has argued that feminist art of the '80s focused on questions of desire, whereas abject art of the '90s tapped the energy of the drives; in doing so, the former featured the commodity-image, while the latter favored the part-object.<sup>6</sup> These are separate, even opposed models of artmaking, the first associated with Dada

Opposite page, left: **Rachel Harrison, *FullHD*, 2019**, parachute cord, dust mop, rug, log, rope, Panasonic camcorder, 10'6" × 9'8" × 13'.

Opposite page, center: **Rachel Harrison, *Warren Beatty*, 2007**, wood, chicken wire, polystyrene, moving blankets, 87 × 23 × 28".

Opposite page, right top: **Rachel Harrison, *Travis Gregory* (detail), 2016**, wood, cardboard, cement, burlap, acrylic, Antonin Scalia mouse pad, 106 1/2 × 35 × 22".

Opposite page, right bottom: **Rachel Harrison, *Travis Gregory*, 2016**, wood, cardboard, cement, burlap, acrylic, Antonin Scalia mouse pad, 106 1/2 × 35 × 22".

Right: **View of "Rachel Harrison Life Hack," 2019–20**, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz.





— Harrison's sculpture convokes a chorus, however cacophonous, of many voices: The objects tell tall tales, crack jokes that even they don't get, and argue contradictory points, all at the same time.





Opposite page: View of "Rachel Harrison Life Hack," 2019–20, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

Right: Two stills from Rachel Harrison's *Edmund's Base*, 2002, digital video, color, sound, 9 minutes 12 seconds.



and its followers, the second with Surrealism and its descendants, but Harrison partakes of both (her crossing them is another way of combining Warhol and Hesse). In this respect, she doesn't trash the Dadaist readymade and the Surrealist found object so much as repurpose them. In the process, Harrison also adapts vernacular forms such as everyday containers—small, like baggies, jars, and cans, as well as large, like the pantry shelf in *Teaching Bo*, the tchotchke stand in *Nice Rack*, and the teen shrine in *1:1*—which evoke a range of activities, from shopping and storing to wishing and hoping. Some of her objects go so far as to reimagine the figure, but it returns sea-changed, either as a precarious assemblage, like *Cindy*, 2004, a green stack of rickety tables topped by a blonde wig and set behind drywall, or as an entropic blob, like *Al Gore*, 2007, a lime-and-pink mess of a menhir with a thermostat attached. Such works suggest a subject shot through with the social and discombobulated by the assault, with front, sides, and backs that don't much cohere. Nonetheless, some figures do seem animated, not as human fetishes so much as contemporary totems; it is as if they could speak to us, and to walk among them is a bit like the natural procession through "the forests of symbols" imagined by Baudelaire in "Correspondences," only restaged in an abandoned mall. Although *to travesty* once signified "to dress so as to appear ridiculous" ("transvestite" has long carried this negative connotation too), Harrison aims to reclaim as much as to ridicule. She even intimates that a collective good might be "wrested from commodities in their decline," as Giorgio Agamben once put it, that there may be a glimmer of utopia in our sea of reification.<sup>7</sup> This is another valence of *life hack*.

This work thus reveals a social dimension that runs counter to its nihilistic bent. Historically, artists turned to collage and assemblage—to juxtapositions of disparate images and objects—in order to open up the traditional work of art. Harrison repurposes these old devices in order to include, through such proxies, diverse *subjects*—different perceptions and disparate

perspectives. (Oldenburg once described his *Store* objects as "birth flesh-fragments" torn from the Lower East Side; Harrison extends this range of points of view radically.)<sup>8</sup> This is why her sculpture is often not only funny in effect but also egalitarian in spirit. It convokes a chorus, however cacophonous, of many voices: The objects tell tall tales, crack jokes that even they don't get, and argue contradictory points, all at the same time. The roundtable imagined in her 2017 press release includes artists from the classical Greeks through Caravaggio, Marinetti, and Duchamp to Nam June Paik, Lee Lozano, and Lynda Benglis and on to Kara Walker, Andrea Fraser, and Hito Steyerl. This is art history travestied and made utopic at once, and it points to the conflict at the core of any democracy worth the name, an antagonism that, per Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and other political theorists, democracy requires: We need generative *dissensus*, not *e pluribus unum* kumbaya. Harrison looks to this space of conflict and negotiation despite all the crap and noise around us. Like Winnie in the Beckett play, she talks about happy days even as she stands half-buried in very bad ones.

This brings us to the group of pieces mentioned at the outset—fourteen discrete works, set on tables, pedestals, and dollies, brought together in a circle surrounded by a ring of folding chairs that face outward. *Al Gore* is the central totem here, and among others is a pink figure called *Travis Gregory*, 2016, with an Antonin Scalia mouse pad at his feet. Leaders like Gore and Scalia are patriarchal, to be sure, and in good Dadaist fashion Harrison has taken a whack at that most Père Ubu of contemporary politicians, too—her piñata versions of Trump were a spring 2016 hit. These are pathetic men, "life hacks" in yet another sense, but not all are entirely bad (Gore looks very much like that cake left out in the rain, which, as he has long warned us, only gets warmer by the minute). In fact, if you squint, the circle of figures begins to resemble an assembly of Day-Glo totem poles, a political *ding* on drugs, a funky parliament designed by George Clinton or Sun Ra. Yet the ring of chairs is ambiguous: Do these placeholders pen these figures

Is it both? Is the suggestion that we should turn our backs on them and look to each other for ways forward? In a 2002 video titled *Edmund's Base* (that trope again of sculptural hierarchy that stands in for sociopolitical hierarchy), Harrison quotes the upstart Edmund from *King Lear*:

Edmund the base  
Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:  
Now, gods, stand up for bastards.

Harrison is certainly on the side of bastards, but she also knows that Edmund is a psycho, that bastards can be just bastards, and that some are hell-bent on wrecking state and society alike. □

"Rachel Harrison Life Hack" is on view through January 12.

HAL FOSTER TEACHES AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY. HIS MOST RECENT BOOK IS *CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCULPTURE* (2018), WRITTEN WITH RICHARD SERRA. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

For notes, see page 240.

FOSTER/HARRISON from page 191

#### NOTES

1. See David Joselit, "Rachel Harrison, Untranslatable," in *Rachel Harrison Life Hack*, exh. cat., ed. Elisabeth Sussman and David Joselit (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2019), 251–58.
2. Harrison rebaptizes the Three Graces as "Art, Sex, and Death" in a 2017 press release republished in *Rachel Harrison Life Hack*, 198–99.
3. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 135. Carl Andre, *Cuts: Texts 1959–2004*, ed. James Meyer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 30.
4. Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (1927), trans. Ann Raimes (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 66 (the entry is dated June 12, 1916). Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1844), in *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 47 (translation modified).
5. Harrison, 2017 press release, republished in *Rachel Harrison Life Hack*, 198.
6. Mignon Nixon, "Posing the Phallus," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 99–127.
7. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 50. Also see Fredric Jameson, "Utopia and Reification in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130–148.
8. Claes Oldenburg quoted in *Claes Oldenburg: The Sixties*, exh. cat., ed. Achim Hochdörfer (Munich: Prestel, 2012), 154.