

Significant Vitality in the Work of Giovanna Valli

By John Austin

Giovanna Valli's constructions announce themselves with confidence and exuberance. At the heart of this artist's work is her evident impulse to offer the viewer an experience that is grounded in material reality (hence the strongly felt use of silhouette-like outlines that remind us of objects of cultic value), yet keenly aware of the need for an interplay of immateriality, and a reference to a transcendent reality to co-exist within each work.

There is a sense of heightened significance, of dramatic tension, which courses through these art pieces. These images, overall, while appearing at first to be of humble origin are propelled by a look, which recalls distracted doodles or automatism. Yet they begin to be seen as visual explorations, which lay, bare the needs and desires of the artist to communicate a sense of emergent anxiety in the most efficient manner as possible.

In this exhibition each image has a febrile virtuosity. A transparent surface of plexiglass is juxtaposed to metal wire which serve as demarcation points, ruptures or gaps within her pictorial arenas. They become a metaphor for changing time and technology.

Valli's components invoke the suturing of time and space, the knitting together of a universe which threatens to collapse and implode, bursting at its seams. The artist collages her objects in a way, which heightens the overall feel of each piece, parlaying a tension, which is aroused through the artist's sensitized evocation of vulnerability and tenderness.

The narratives range from anecdotal scenes to more enigmatic and disassociated imagery which seems more discontinuous in terms of a congruent story line than her other works. Dense metal surfaces in *Iron* and *Test Tubes* create a discomfiting feel of compression and turbulence, energetic proclivities that seem to hover over knitting wire mesh embedded in plexiglass.

What is striking in these works is the artist's consummate control of her tremulous lines and the seemingly heightened significance of what one might assume are fetishized surfaces of her objects and the repeated invocation of a feverish repetition which is heralded at first and then abruptly brought down to size.

In his discussion on meaning the French philosopher Henri Bergson makes the essential point that it is put into play when a level of incongruousness and a certain amount of inherent vitality is brought to our attention in unanticipated ways often by pitting opposites together, such as mechanistic artifice (and stringent inevitability of one kind) against natural and/or biologic (inescapability of fluid chance). He writes: "...As we are both in and of it, we cannot help treating [society] as a living being. Any image...suggestive of the notion of a society disguising itself...will be laughable. Now such a notion is formed when we perceive anything inert or stereotyped, or simply readymade, on the surface of living society. There we have rigidity over again, clashing with the inner suppleness of life."

This passage expresses in some fair measure the quotient of vitality that courses through Giovanna Valli's work which deals lightly yet effectively with feelings, perhaps, of loss, separation and passage of time. Within this balance of tensions the artist constructs intimate scenes in which we perceive mindfulness investigating the relationship between the individual and the universe.

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