

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Art Text
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KIM FISHER

CHINA ART OBJECTS GALLERIES, LOS ANGELES
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A prominent Los Angeles painter wrote recently about beauty, assigning it two qualities: like a flower, it is both feminine and useless. In the manner of a rose genetically engineered to win horticultural awards, Kim Fisher's show of paintings and sculpture flattens such categories (utility, femininity, Beauty herself) into its supple, artificial surface. By cross-pollinating painting and haute couture, Fisher unleashes a semi-organic hybrid, a bizarre evolution beyond the natural order of its origins.

Fisher's three large paintings are square fields of rich red, accessorized with delicate borders of tan linen. Submerged within the paintings is a form, also red, swirling from piece to piece until it is fully developed into an icon. This is the symbol associated with André Courrèges, the sixties avant-garde couturier whose minimalist clothes earned him the nick-

name, "the space-age designer." Cued by this science fiction, Fisher has stacked dome-shaped helmets on one side of the room. These head-sized, fiberglass objects, arranged irregularly but neatly, are mostly white, though two are yellow; most have a hole on one side which appears to fit the dimensions of a face, though some have two holes on opposite sides, and a few have no holes at all. Their occasional windows promise sight to imagined helmet models, as well as glimpses of their unfinished interiors. While the helmets make a peculiar spectacle, the monochromatic paintings present a view of familiarity, which is not to say a familiar view.

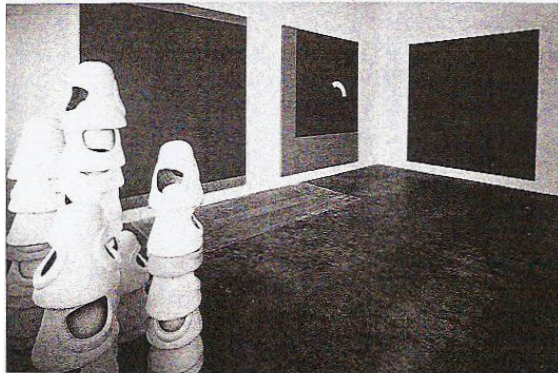
Fisher's movement toward fashion through painting is disorienting to fair Beauty. The reference to Courrèges, a typical modernist bad boy, conjures the commonplace of a masculine hand attiring Beauty—in this case, the hand of minimalism. Fisher's paintings, which echo both Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella, mimic this still-dominant, and arguably masculinist, aesthetic. So much for Beauty's reliance on her own femininity. But what of utility? The wall pieces willingly resign themselves to the uselessness required by Beauty, though the fashionable sculptures position themselves deceptively. Haute couture itself floats curiously between an elitist form of cultural production and the popular necessity for clothes. The sculpture references both of these positions: helmets can indeed save lives, but these are as unwearable as the most esoteric runway creation a woman's body can bear.

Within this miasma, Beauty's head sinks beneath the surface of discrete definitions and, deprived of clarity, begins to hallucinate unknown ontologies. Fisher, through what seems to be partly astute critique and partly fervent adulation, has challenged the terms of Beauty's thoroughly modern identity by making work that is easy to look at and difficult to read. The work ultimately has a function: to hijack modernism and take it on a joyride through *Harper's Bazaar*. How beautiful, though, this useful work looks. Those who are interested in neither the politics of gender nor fashion magazines may find themselves moved and lost on a smooth white surface or in a radiant sea of red. Irregardless of what they say, Beauty still looks good, and after all these years.

MALIK GAINES

(BOTTOM)

KIM FISHER, installation view, China Art Objects, Los Angeles, 1999.



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