



Lizi Sánchez

BEYOND THE PEARL

With works by Louise Lawler

22 June – 28 July 2012

Beyond the Pearl, Lizi Sánchez's first solo show in London, is a response to questions around the purpose of the artist in a 'post post-modern' sphere of artistic production. Are artists mere creators of props, of style or presentation, upon which an idea can be balanced? Or is there still space to celebrate quality of making and engagement with process as much more than merely the means to an end?

Sánchez takes on her relation to these questions via a direct engagement with the work of the artist of context par excellence, Louise Lawler.

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SHARED GIFTS

by Rebecca Geldard

Think of the word 'packaging' and others, such as 'product', 'manufacture', 'market', immediately follow suit. Traditionally, these are words artists have shied away from when describing what they do. In recent times, however, such terms have come to liberally season conversations about art: from the school, to the studio and the biennial conference. Lizi Sánchez appears to positively embrace them. With her exuberant, meticulously observed sculptures and art/fash-mag collages she acknowledges this shift, pointing out the odd and uncomfortable areas of overlap that occur during the collision of very different value systems. Post 'Brit Art', fine art's cultural caché has continued to grow, its stock value driven – by a global market with means – to ludicrous levels during the Noughties boom. Sánchez's sculptures might be described as the super-sized children of this time, now grown up and critical of their heritage. For while many contemporary makers – certainly in London where Sánchez is now based – have since responded cautiously, thriftily to life in a shifting economic landscape, the Peruvian artist appears to have salvaged items and ideas left bobbing in the recent wreckage of excess, and had a party, albeit one closer in mood and tone to the final scenes of 'The Great Gatsby'.

Defiantly decorative and often dramatically scaled, Sánchez's work is born of time-intensive material processes that ape, but essentially contrast with, those of the mass market and the glossy high-end manufacture of boom-time art production. The artist is concerned with the economy of the artwork in terms of its material and contextual wrapping: the artistic devices and external forces that might influence production, reception and comprehension of it. Sánchez's appropriation of iconic forms, motifs and modes of presentation (from the classical sculpture court to Minimalist painting; theatre and retail dioramas), often skirts the line between homage and critique in exploring the complex provenance of our desire for them.

Her recent sculptural practice, the focus of this solo exhibition at Standpoint, is comprised of towers and piles of shiny and colourful forms that resemble gifts or offerings. Their obvious accessibility as objects is all part of the ruse, for essentially we are being presented with the appearances of things that, materially speaking, are often not what they seem. Sánchez's sculptural stratagem is Trojan-like in delivery: the gift is not ours to open, but to admire and wonder at what, if anything, might be inside. The overblown cartoon scaling of these works brings to mind the prop-like potential and double-edged nature of the gift as part of social ritual. One can imagine the

concealment of mobster devices and singing telegrams, equally, the sense of anticipation and expectation on both sides of the gift/art encounter. The idea of secret spaces, rather than treats or dangers, existing within these structures serves to remind that artifice is in itself a form of protection: from the war paint origins of makeup, to the host vessel and its many cultural incarnations. The fact that these sculptures look like things we are unable to unwrap reconnects them with their cultural heritage: processes of borrowing in the art and financial worlds that, over time, become near impossible to plot. Here, style is the substance. Fashion, or the idea of being wonderfully over-dressed in a vogueishly muted world, is ever-present, yet every outlandish aesthetic association is kept in check by the formality of the spectacle: like the curly white paper frills adorning the limbs of a butcher's cuts.

Sánchez meddles with the proportions of stereotypical notions of femaleness and art to acknowledge the collapsible associative distance between *firlefan*, the non-essential, and that perceived as conceptually rigorous or of a higher order. A pyramid of outsized pearlescent balls, for example, is at once reminiscent of ancient architecture or precious gems, as shop-window dressing and 'tchotchkes'. Sanchez expertly mimics the everyday creases and crumples of paper wrapping, via hand-painting sheet metal, to confound sensory response, while candy stripe-painted boxes give rise to the idea of locating Agnes Martin via Paperchase, or Donald Judd in IKEA.

However hands-on the artist's crafting of materials, Sanchez's custodial approach to the aesthetic strategies and structural forms at her disposal situate these works amongst contrasting modes of appropriation. The at points, Hesse-ian suggestion of the Minimal, for example, is cut by the Pop-like, almost Koons-esque nature of the works' scale and display. Louise Lawler is an artist who shares Sanchez's interest in the life of an art object and how it might come to embody a particular cultural perspective, or period of time. Within her presentation at Standpoint, Sanchez incorporates two works from the influential American artist's ongoing photographic series depicting artworks as displayed in museums and collectors' houses. Where Sanchez takes familiar art ingredients and reconfigures them in object form, Lawler frames her encounters with famous artworks in situ, in the manner of a highly invested documentarian. While reflecting upon the nature of art itself and its fate as a public or private object, both artists reveal much about the art world – what it chooses to display, why and how – but also, the personal poetry of the art experience. Through image and assembly they make it possible to conceive of this contextual mix: the artwork as a shopping list of matter and a maker's proposition perpetually reshaped by its surroundings and audience interpretation. It's interesting to think of these different practices as part of the same exhibition, given that (going back to the idea of art as ideological stand-in) works from either artist might at this moment have been called upon by curators to represent an array of other concerns. The work of art, both artists seem to agree, has its own cultural trajectory and, like a tourist subconsciously assuming accents, comes to be known, in a sense, by the company it keeps.