

Nancy Cohen

Kouros Gallery
23 East 73rd St., 10021
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Nancy Cohen's sculptures perpetuate a rich history of found object and assemblage art; however, they are subtle and subversive compared to the work of some of her predecessors like Marcel Duchamp and Edward Kienholz. The found objects she uses are mainly culled from the domestic arena and rather than being totally exposed they are partially hidden underneath taut abacá paper sheaths. The work also has a strong relationship to the more recent development of biomorphic abstraction which is associated with many contemporary women artists such as Phoebe Adams, Petah Coyne, and Mia Westerlund-Roosen.

Silverware, kitchen utensils, and broken glassware are the found materials that Cohen uses predominantly. These materials are manipulated so that oval and circular forms prevail. Loops made of bent silverware serve as the framework for *Chain Mail* and *Constituents* while the natural curves of serving spoons and the roundness of broken wine glasses (both the base with the stem

broken off and the cup part are utilized) make up the form of *Bust*. Grouped together, these round elements are used to build organic forms that resemble protective shields or wombs and other bodily manifestations which reinforce the feminine interest her selection of objects suggests.

The strongest of the ten modest-sized pieces in this exhibition are the most enigmatic ones like *Distention* and *Crash*. Their overall forms cannot be easily identified, so they exude a sense of mystery and intrigue which encourages the viewer to explore their sensuous surfaces and investigate the shrouded objects from which they are made. *Bust*, on the other hand, looks too obviously like its title and lacks the curiosity of the other pieces. The four smallest works, *Snare*, *Fear of Flying*, *Bellows*, and *Crash* were shown on a long table like specimens, unlike the other pieces in the show which hung from the wall or ceiling. Unfortunately, this positioning deadened these lovely works which incorporated wonderful touches of beads, scissors, and buttons. As a whole, however, although some works are stronger than others, strength of form and fragility of means imbue Cohen's sculpture with a presence of gritty elegance that breathes with life.

Rachel Selekman is an artist and writer living in New York City.

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Constituents, 1997. Silverware, handmade paper, and glass. 16" x 20" x 5".
Photo by Bill Orcutt; courtesy of the artist.

