

## Chicago, Illinois

Sometimes sculpture does little more than shadow the human form. The exhibitions of an object or the partitioning of space can make the viewer aware of his or her own figure, if nothing else. And this is no small success.

David Montgomery's gestural reliefs at Carl Hammer Gallery produce a sort of kinetic mimesis. Wrought of battered bottle caps and the remnants of street signs, these easy-to-read outlines are the imprint of robust physicality—shapely, muscled, active. Despite the gee-whiz factor inherent in this clever resuscitation of material, the work possesses the formal

David Montgomery,  
*Miss Vora*, 1991. Sign  
fragments. Courtesy  
Carl Hammer Gallery,  
Chicago.

appeal of pen-and-ink drawings. Though the reliefs may seem a tad too decorative, their unpretentious clarity withstands any charge of intellectual shallowness.

There is a Duncanesque abandon in the motion of *Miss Vora* (1991), and the placement of the lettered sign fragments (an S in calf, an O in the solar plexus) strengthens the composition, emphasizing each body part. In *Blue Keel* (1992) crumbled metal gives a feeling of fabric, as well as forward and lateral movement in the twisting torso. The component pieces of *Untitled* (1992) are layered more abstractly, assuming importance as color values rather than as intimations of past incarnations. On the other hand, *Reflections* (1993)—in which Coca-Cola



and Orange Crush caps form a bikini-clad torso in a pinup pose—comes off as signage itself, rather than as an art object made of old signs.

"Installations of Gender" at I Space (the Chicago gallery of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) was meant to address that ever-prickly issue, but the works on view succeeded more in inhabiting space creatively than in defining or challenging the limitations of identity.

Mandy Morrison's *In Her Garden* (1994) comprised a swath of pink carpet, a petal pattern in pink on the walls, a kind of calligraphic pram with a baby doll face down and an oversized fabric ice cream cone on the floor. This dead, disconsolate territory (wedged in a corner of the gallery, like a nursery under the eaves) was as disagreeable to behold as a fetus in formaldehyde.

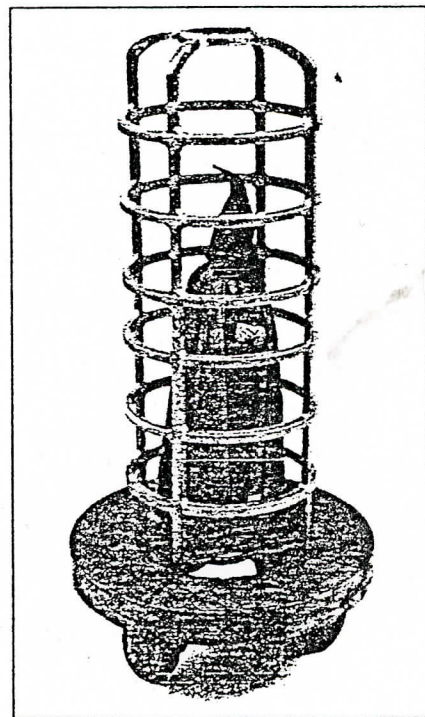
Placed in the open room, Cynthia Morgan's *Arral* (1994) was a mazelike constellation of disparate elements. Three child-sized white organza dresses hung from wire hangers shoulder high, with a single leg of fabric anchored to the floor by cricket-filled jars. Sugar-coated baby bottle nipples embedded in florets of white frosting were strung across metal music stands. This environment of overwhelming purity hung sweetness and light out to dry.

Christina Nordholm's *The Sirens of Lynn Hill* (1994) (Lynn Hill being a sheer rock face out West) was a festive tent of purple netting straight from Camelot.

Centered inside was a huge, shallow copper bowl filled with water and strewn with lorus pods and butterflies (like the crickets, listless on this visit). Surrounded by six spiraling cones and a circle of dried leaves on the floor, the basin trembled slightly at times, vibrating to music (Enya, operatic voices, percussion) playing within its base. As one stepped inside (inhaling a sweet, vegetal fragrance there), one listened on ear-phones to two women comparing vulnerabilities, relationships and "frequent pleasures" (kissing, breathing).

"The Ritual Vessel," at Perimeter Gallery, was an unabashed celebration of handcrafted containers. The show included a number of artifacts from early cultures of the Americas (Mogollon, Nazca, Chavin, Chimu, Maya, Caddo, Xochipala), a bronze urn of the Koryo Dynasty, Korea (c. 1100) and a Cypriot terra-cotta vase (c. 1600-1500 B.C.). Contemporary pieces included Ruth Duckworth's simple cycladic cylinder, sliced by a plane; Tom Joyce's bronze, *Random Folded Bowl* (1993), splayed like Giacometti's *Woman with Her Throat Cut*; Norma Minkowitz's *Detached Passage* (1985), a fiber basket spun like a trap; and Mary Walker's *Healing the Rift* (1993), a cross between a clamshell and a bird's nest in which nestled balls marked "Touch," "Taste," "Smell" and "Thought." Although an attempt was made to signal some elemental link between vessels past and present, individuality and variety were what made the presentation worth seeing.

—Thomas Connors

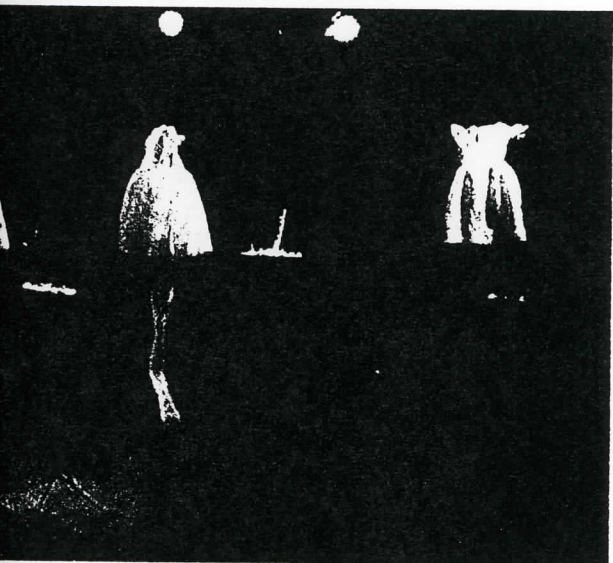




Cynthia Morgan, Mandy Morrison, Christina Nordholm

I Space  
230 W. Superior St., 312/587-9976

Tucked away at the back of I Space, "Installations of Gender" managed to overcome the gallery's limited room and unvocative ambiance, and the constraints of creating environments in a shared space. The use of "gender" in the show's title raised visions of polemics to come, but on this score happily turned out to be misleading. These works—by Cynthia Morgan, Mandy Morrison, and Christina Nordholm, all graduating MFA students at the University of Illinois—were ripe with sensuous pleasures—often beautiful, sometimes delicate, more seductive than shrill. Morrison's video, *A Muse*, suffered the most from feminist theoretical cliché, examining the voyeuristic control of the gaze through the voice/lens of its male narrator/cameraman. In a way, Morrison's video is a back-handed measure of progress: Once, explicit sexual language, defiant nakedness, and naming the female body was a radical gesture. Now, such statements (at one point, the female narrator tells the story of being awakened by a man on the street yelling, "I want to be a white woman with a vaginal") seem more exhausted than empowering.



Cynthia Morgan

*Aural*, 1994, cotton organza, music stands, latex nipples, live crickets, vanilla frosting, honey, sugar. Photo by James Prinz.

The remaining works were characterized by an absence of posturing, and with it, an absence of the body. Morrison's installation *In Her Garden* paired a toga-like dress of knotted cloth with a plow-cum-stroller, on which a "baby," swaddled in a crocheted romper with a flower appliqué, lay face down. Set against a Pepto-Bismol-pink painted cloud, Morrison's deflated protagonist seemed to abdicate her "natural" fecundity.

In *Aural*, Cynthia Morgan suspended a trio of tiny white cotton dresses from the ceiling. From their hems trailed white organza funnels, anchored to the floor with jars of live crickets. Positioned near each dress was a music stand, bearing honey- and sugar-coated latex nipples nestled in blossoms of vanilla frosting. The chirping of the crickets, combined with the heady scent of honey and the ghostlike, holy-communion aura of the dresses, created an ethereal, yet wry, evocation of innocence and sexualized rites of passage to maturity.

Nordholm eschewed body signifiers altogether in *The Sirens of Lynn Hill*. Within a circular tent of indigo netting, live butterflies lit around a large copper dish surrounded by dead leaves and strewn with lotus pods. Strains of music—Enya, Diana Ross—and barely discernible voices wafted from invisible speakers. Two headphones descended from the top of the tent, into which were piped excerpts of two women in a conversation that ranged in topic from men to sex to creativity. *The Sirens of Lynn Hill* combined pagan shrine with coffee klatch, creating a new-age temple for female self-nurturing.

Augmenting these tableaux were three additional objects by Morgan, the most revelatory of which was the ingenious *Nickname*, a heating pad rolled into a muff,

covered in white rabbit-fur, and studded with eight red latex nipples. Delightfully wicked, *Nickname* conflates human and animal drives with the same vicious wit as Alan Rath's *Hound*, creating a fetish of both infantile nourishment and sexual gratification.

The shared strength of "Installations of Gender" was its acute sense of feminine mystery and ritual, an understated *knowing* of the variety of female experience rather than a loud declaration of territory. More importantly, it offered a glimpse of real potential, spurring a longing to see these three artists in sites more conducive to their individual visions. Virginia Woolf says it best: Give these women rooms of their own.

Kristen Brooke Schleifer