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Katrina Moorhead: a pretty girl that this man does not love her
Inman Gallery

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Katrina Moorhead calls into question preconceived notions of authorship, identity, loss, beauty and desire, reframing ordinary objects and compelling her audience to form alternative interpretations. Though many of the works in *a pretty girl that this man does not love her* appear slick and cerebral at first, Moorhead imbues them with elements of romanticized pathos and, through this unexpected superimposition, attempts to create a sort of “conceptual beauty.”

The Issue of the Nineties, a reproduced page from Dave Hickey’s 1994 *Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, is hung in the North Gallery. Delicately illuminated in pencil and pastel watercolor, the artist laminates textual content and formal composition. Indeed, the collapse of the two here is particularly poignant considering the discussion occurring in the body of Hickey’s text. In very simplified terms, he argues in favor of the importance of beauty—the agency of a *priori* visual pleasure—before conceptual content.

While the meticulous attention lavished upon the text may suggest a preoccupation with visual pleasure, its appearance is coolly minimal, seeming to delight more in the precision of serif fonts and muted tones than in overt, exuberant beauty. It is noteworthy that deprived of its ideological content this piece would also lack formal content, leaving behind nothing to call “beautiful.” Through the creation of an ambivalent relationship between content and form, Moorhead provides us with a method to begin to question Hickey’s assertion of the primacy of beauty.

Working in a similar but more personal mode is *Donald Judd Box Used As A Shelf For An Adidas Box*. A replica of an existing piece, it claims legitimacy through a contract signed by Moorhead and the original artist, Robert Montgomery, executed in exchange “for him breaking her heart sometime in January 1998.” The piece quietly asserts its history through a framed contract hanging nearby. Although the sculpture is painstakingly crafted by hand—from the faux-brushed aluminum finish of the Judd replica down to the pencil rendering of the printed UPC label on the shoebox—the document’s content is the most arresting element of the piece. Through it, Moorhead also proclaims herself “the pretty girl that this man did not love.” Though the work is

visually cool and conceptual due to its minimalist origins, Moorhead re-authors it with sincere emotion. The artist productively embodies disappointment and thwarted desire in her reproduction, thereby creating a kind of beauty out of that which was never directly concerned with being beautiful.



Katrina Moorhead, *Donald Judd Box Used As A Shelf For An Adidas Box*, 2006MDF, oil paint, mat board, vinyl, cardboard, gouache, paper, pencil, document 30 x 67 x 10 inches

Two disco balls spray-painted a dull silver and hung above a bed of white synthetic grass comprise *numb, stars (no longer shout)*. Oddly, by conceptually castrating the disco balls—by depriving them of their original function—they become forcefully sexual. Moorhead douses their blinding light, revealing an element of their nature usually veiled by a shiny exterior. Perhaps alluding to the treachery of beauty and its ability to disguise the true character of things and befuddle rationality, as the title suggests, beauty can shout, deafening us to an object’s whispered subtext.

Using the same meticulous pencil and muted tonality as *The Issue*, Moorhead drafts *AstroAstrodome* and a jumble of forms entitled *Lost Lake*. Ideologically if not formally linked to these images is the sculptural work *On or About December 1981* and its accompanying excerpts: carefully crafted basswood reproductions of the doors and sideview mirror of a DeLorean. Collectively they recall the promise and ultimate failure of a luxury automobile (which was supposed to bring peace and economic relief to Belfast), the now defunct “Eighth Wonder of the World” and a mysterious lake. Through the careful combination of object and image, the attraction of these works does not reside in Moorhead’s attentive hand but in the abstract—in the reclamation of loss.

Condensers of nostalgia, Moorhead’s objects compel us to recall things as they were, as they never will be again and, perhaps, as they should have been. Tracing absence, they allow us to plumb the depths of loss and test the limits of lack. It is in such moments that Moorhead challenges us to find beauty not simply in the visually pleasurable but also in the synthesis of emotion and intellect.