



BARTLEBY REVIEW

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I will not be cooking Ellis Sam

Scott Kemp

'Major Appliance'

Index Gallery

1305 Powell St

Through November 6

There are the bones of an animal at the heart of this soup. I stare into a simple bowl of Tonkotsu “pork bone” ramen.

The noodles bore me. The broth tastes complex but mostly sweet. A slice of pork intervenes: it is acting up, an outstanding reminder that the lake, which keeps it afloat, was once bound to it as bone. The meat provides a point of reference—something to chew on whilst pondering a poster on the restaurant’s wall illustrating how bone becomes broth over a three day process. During my meal my eyes look for more than what is in the bowl. I hope to sink my teeth into a design beyond the pleasure of taste.

“Food” does not simply go into the stomach. At Index, Scott Kemp exhibited an installation composed entirely of objects that would support the theme of “fridge”. Recomposed in synthetic materials, a white door handle, translucent plastic panel that might sit atop of a vegetable crisper and white slim rod pulled from a shelf with the framework of a grill all sit comfortably amidst the tones of “gallery”. These precedents have been rewritten beyond the tactile pleasures of their design. Some of these structures seem to have sprouted legs in order to close back in on themselves, or end up flattened against a wall. It is endearing to see, in the face of utility, each object feign a new design. You could not reconstruct a fridge out of the contents in this exhibition, nor could you find a replacement for a broken fixture. The artist has playfully positioned these artificial objects in a game of camouflage by screwing them, attaching or placing them against the architecture of the gallery where at every turn they humbly blend in and also extend it.

Many of the objects are repeated in both of the gallery’s rooms with slight nuances attributable to each version. It is as if each room is two family portraits where each member occupies a different spot in the photo. A theory is not needed for this familial picture nor is one required for an appliance. One does not need instructions to take action with a fridge—we fill it up.

The artworks in *Major Appliance* are completely vacant of service: their surfaces are as mute as the surface it mimics. For the most part, a dialogue with a fridge is as dynamic as its veneer. Only an actual fridge may raise cause for alarm, which is more like a soliloquy about death than a conversation. I listen for the wavering signature of its hum followed by a moment when I grip the handle to check beyond its façade and am greeted with a foul smell of food whose passing is more traumatic than the loss of my relationship with this austere machine. Spoil can be a site to be seen, such as fermented pig bones in a bowl of ramen, but one that only becomes so with context.

It is safe to say that the fridge in the art gallery has been unplugged but the ensuing task of confronting perishable goods has been usurped by objects that have barred this outcome, they represent diversions of the context that they come from. As diversions, their aesthetic leads back to the same context—one that I can see when I look over to my fridge whose door is shut, and picture the entirety of Kemp’s installation stored on one of its shelves. But unlike the food, these objects will not spoil, but are able to keep cool alongside the idea of how sweet of an object a fridge is.

Ellis Sam