

BLOUIN modern painters

NEW YORK | Anthea Hamilton

SculptureCenter | September 20, 2015 - January 4, 2016

By Dana Kopel — January 2016



As its title, *Lichen, Libido! Chastity!* implies, **Anthea Hamilton**'s solo exhibition stages encounters between purity and promiscuity, nature and culture — uniting them through formal techniques and, more pointedly, through an exploration of contemporary art's assimilative tendencies.

In the large ground-floor gallery, Hamilton has covered most of the usually white walls with brick-patterned vinyl that mimics **SculptureCenter**'s existing walls as obvious pastiche. The "bricks" are flattened, imagistic, inexact replicas of both the original and each other. Extending this architectural motif, the exhibition also includes a brick-patterned suit hanging from the ceiling in one corner of the main gallery. The most confrontational spatial intervention, however, is a massive sculpted butt set into one of the faux brick walls. Inspired by **Gaetano Pesce**'s 1972 design for a Manhattan skyscraper doorway, which was, unsurprisingly, never realized, Hamilton's installation doesn't lead to anywhere; exclusively decorative, the ass is largely drained of its subversive power.

On display elsewhere are a series of stand-ins: Boot-shaped sculptures represent shoes, as well as fashion and disco culture, while the lichen and cauliflower blooming from *Natural Livin' Boot* characterize an idea of nature collapsed into culture, its presumed opposite. This is how the art object functions: Physical objects produce meaning by referring to events and concepts beyond their material reach, a process Hamilton makes comically literal. Sometimes, as with the three glass rice cakes perched on a wooden board against one wall, the referents are insouciantly unclear.

The exhibition contains multiple references to fashion, among them several cloth works draped from wall hooks and a pair of pants (printed with a boot) displayed on a clothes hanger. A trio of stainless-steel and rubber chastity belts, hung by chains from the ceiling, do not appear particularly chaste. Instead, they allude to transgressive sex itself — and its co-optation by broader culture. The sculpture *Cigarette Pipes*, installed in the courtyard, likewise suggests the exhaustion of subversive force: Constructed of PVC pipes accented with orange vinyl to make them look like oversize cigarettes, the work is both a formal and a conceptual joke. Against the standardizing ubiquity of the brick walls, Hamilton's sculptural works play with the means through which other genres, and their alternative or radical energy, are absorbed by the normalizing structure of contemporary art.