



XBASE

How I Got Over

April 22th – May 14th, 2011

Simone Aziga

At times aggressive, exclusive, essentializing and deconstructionist, the history of feminist art is not something to fuck with. It will always be problematic to use imagery that explicitly references the visceral female body because of its strong associations with the legacy of second-wave feminism and feminist art practice. Simone Aziga's work, with its use of frilly pinks, piercing needles and flowing fabric resembling fleshy tissue, takes from this legacy. What I am hung up on, perhaps to my detriment, is that I assume contemporary feminist artists must also be angry so as to align themselves with this feminist history and practice. Then again, anger as a tool used to get over contemporary challenges in the third-wave (and beyond) is probably just as outdated as corsets and finishing schools. I don't want to say that feminist artists should reinforce the stereotype of the angry or hysterical woman, but I do want to say that there are still plenty of issues to be angry about.

The social and political conditions in North America have changed drastically since the Suffragette movement in the late 19th century. We are now in an environment that shifts between considerations of gender equality and specificity; where women have won the battles for the right to vote, for access to safe abortion and birth control and for the freedom to negotiate between having a family and having a career. However, women still get paid less for the same job, craft is still devalued as 'women's work,' and women artists are still under-represented. Regardless, there seems to be some space that has revealed itself as having an objective distance from the aggressive ideals of the more historical movements. There is respite for relaxation and objectivity on the matter of feminized art and feminized space. Instead of continuing to be reactionary, maybe we have moved to a condition of irony.

After getting over first-wave gender-essentialization, Simone de Beauvoir's gender-becoming, and Judith Butler's gender-performance, maybe it's time to pick up the pieces and work with the stereotypes that have persisted parallel to these shifting theories. We still recognize pretty-in-pink as feminine, hold disgust for the abject female body, and celebrate the more-woman-than-woman drag queen and suburban pop culture fag.¹ Aziga takes materials that are in line with these consistencies and then shows them to themselves and to their public. Her

¹ Think reality shows *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*, sitcom *Modern Family*, Tim Gunn on *Project Runway*, reality show, Jay Manuel and J Alexander on *America's Next Top Model*, talk show *Steven and Chris*.

installation, *How I Got Over*, is pink, girly, decadent, flirty and soft; but it doesn't own any of these traits. Just as the form of the installation references the sewing pattern of a skirt, but is functionless, so are the stereotyped cues that reference a legacy of femininity that can now be considered outdated. Aziga's visual tools - beads, thread, embroidery, crinoline, fabric, needles - do not adhere to a current reality but point to one that has been historically constructed for us (women) through institutions like the fashion industry. As fashion is inherently functionless, perhaps the gendered reality it has constructed has also been rendered functionless. Aziga's work is satisfyingly ludicrous and bit obscene if only because it presents ideals that have been fought against for so long by feminist artists who were looking to reconstruct a more realistic feminine identity. It's an indulgence to experience this installation of fabric, beads and fancy feminine packaging because it takes us down a nostalgic path. It's time to repurpose.

An inversion is played out through Aziga's purposeful use of materials that are readily recognized as stereotypically feminine. By appropriating the language that is given, one can then work within that system in order to build a critique. This is identified by Julia Kristeva as a tried and true tactic, specifically constructed as a battle between mind (masculine) and the body (feminine). In placing herself into the symbolic order, which privileges the Father/rational thought, a woman can adopt a provisional identity within that structure by which she can invert it. The inherent danger with this placement into the symbolic order, and taking on male understanding, is that this privileged male role is reinforced. Aziga's materials and the playful up-the-skirt gaze of the installation evoke a humorous reaction in the viewer, which by Kristeva's ideas could mean that this work is solidifying a devaluation of what is considered feminine. On the other side, this humour is instead created out of a much more contemporary ironic stand point, by which young women today find it ludicrous to believe in the binary stereotypes that these pretty pink materials once represented.

- Ginger Scott