

The L Magazine

ART

August 17, 2011

In the Membrane: Layered Sculptures in Greenpoint

by [Benjamin Sutton](#)

Until the early days of Modern art, successful layering meant concealing the fact that there were other materials underneath an artwork's outermost surface, offering up a unified outer shell that denied the complexities of its underpinnings. To reveal a piece's material inner workings necessarily detracted from the purity of its craftsmanship and undermined the illusion of realism. But layers formal and figurative are part of contemporary art's self-aware toolbox of concealment, suggestion and theatricality, simultaneously frustrating and focusing viewers' vision, as when Julie Mehretu superimposes a dozen systems of abstract markings, or Francis Alÿs hangs a Cézanne painting sheathed in bubble-wrap.

Less dramatic, but similarly inventive and intriguing types of layering are featured in a three-person exhibition at Greenpoint's [Yes Gallery](#), *In Layers* (through August 29). Most intriguing are [Thomas Bevan's](#) knot-like, fabric-wrapped tubes and [Margie Neuhaus's](#) molecular-looking collages and sculptures fashioned from vellum, vinyl, wire, thread and rubber. In paintings and drawings by [Soo Im Lee](#), outlines of human figures are obscured by a pointillist fog of tiny letters written with watercolor paints. Some of these pieces' illegible word clouds evoke swarms of bees, others fuzzy blankets, but the implication that we find both comfort and frustration in excessive communication is well-worn.

Bevan and Neuhaus's pieces are more mysterious, mixing textures and tones playfully with very different results. Both use man-made materials—neon plastics in Neuhaus's case, second-hand clothing and fabric scraps in Bevan's pieces—to create indefinably organic forms. Neuhaus acknowledges her wall reliefs and collages' resemblances to cells, organs and infinitesimal chemical reactions with titles like "Synapse" and "Cluster" (both 2006). But her show-stealing sculpture "Receptor II" (2005), hanging from the ceiling at the back of the gallery, combines bright nylon, shiny electrical wiring and, most cheekily, a telescoping tail made of Chinese finger traps. Its elongated form, mesh skin and yellow-orange-purple palette evoke some prehistoric jellyfish dressed for an 80s aerobics video. Its colors and outer textures shift jarringly over its torquing, twisting length in a manner similar to Bevan's abstract knots.

The looped and ballooning coils of Bevan's "Object Without Meaning, To Be Handled" series evoke bloated snakes and tropical vines, while their unpredictable juxtapositions of found fabrics—one piece features brown-green camo, a pastel-hued quilt and dark, rhinestone-speckled red satin—focus attention on texture and tone. There's a lack of preciousness to these rag-wrapped tubes hung on hooks, suspended from the ceiling and sitting on the gallery floor that reminds of Shinique Smith, another second-hand clothing artist. That roughness marks a nice contrast to Neuhaus's incredibly delicate and complex constructions. Both, though, keep viewers' interest by concealing more than they reveal.

(Images Courtesy: Margie Neuhaus, Thomas Bevan and Yes Gallery)