

ARTFORUM

March 10, 2015

Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Gives \$200,000 for Joan Jonas's US Pavilion Project

The MIT List Visual Arts Center today announced it's received a gift of \$200,000 from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. The gift will support Joan Jonas's presentation for the US Pavilion at the Fifty-sixth Venice Biennale, "They Come to Us Without a Word." The List—which has been tasked with raising funds for the project—has brought in \$1.5 million to date.



Paul Ha, director of the MIT List Visual Arts Center and commissioner and cocurator of the US Pavilion at the Fifty-sixth Venice Biennale, stated, "On behalf of the List, Joan Jonas, and everyone involved in this project, I extend our great appreciation to the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation for its incredible generosity and support."

Added Ha, "We're very excited to present Joan Jonas's latest work in Venice this May, and the foundation's gift will play an important role in bringing her vision for the US pavilion to life."

More details on Jonas's installation can be found [here](#).

Thea Djordjadze

MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

“The next instant, do I make it?” asked Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector in her 1973 novel, *Água Viva*. “Or does it make itself?” Her rumination might well be a recurrent thought within Thea Djordjadze’s practice; the artist’s works seem to appear by some improbable marriage of haphazardry and divination. Take, for example, *Untitled*, 2012, in which a wall-mounted wooden box is clad in a sheath of IKEA-grade white faux fur, puckered by industrial staples. The fit is just short of perfect, such that a seductive cleavage runs down the box’s torso. Or *She didn’t have friends, children, sex, religion, marriage, success, a salary or a fear of death. She worked*, 2012, a cumbersome-looking forest-green foam mattress sawed to an imperfect geometry, nesting in a steel armature and cupped at one corner by a flaking wedge of plaster, just so. Both are now on view (through January 4) in the Berlin-based artist’s exhibition at MIT List Visual Arts Center—the former perched near the gallery entryway and the latter, in a larger feat, tucked into an elephantine wood-and-steel display case that sits against the main gallery’s back wall.

Five vitrines, painted white and poised on black flared legs, hug the walls here, effectively dominating the space. Produced specifically for this exhibition and scaled to respond to the gallery’s large, centrally situated window, these structures were born of the artist’s research on another series of vitrines, built by Georgian anthropologist Alexander Javakhishvili and painter Avto Varazi in the late 1950s to house archaeological artifacts from the collection of the Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery in Djordjadze’s native Tbilisi. The display cases are populated with spare arrangements of the artist’s earlier works, largely untitled, from 2008–13. A collection of glass vases, each brusquely

painted a chalky pastel hue, is neatly staged in the corner of one vitrine, and a vanity mirror—*cum*—toilet seat constructed from Styrofoam, plaster, and clay (*Untitled*, 2008) sits in another. Steel constructions resembling lifted fragments of Corbusier furniture—the artist’s “imaginary furniture” for the bedroom of Mexican artist María del Carmen Mondragón Valseca—bend and curve around some of these assemblages, buoyant in their liberation from the context of structural support but constrained anew by the shallow walls of their museological containers.

The vitrines are in keeping with the artist’s long-term preoccupation with objects that slip between scaffold and sculpture, unburdened by any categorical distinction between the two. Her prosaic materials—from linoleum to plaster to foam—evoke both the hidden stuff of interior design (imagine a Design Within Reach storeroom gutted and its entrails retooled) and the substrata of traditional media (an exhibition text reminds us that the primary element of linoleum is linseed oil). But though her efforts are often interpreted as subversions of the conventions and ideologies of museum display and exhibition design, this aspect of the work is ultimately tangential to the haptic—and libidinal—qualities of what is simply there.

While the logic of Djordjadze’s past gallery-spanning installations—at, say, Documenta 13 or Malmö Konsthall (both 2012)—has been more akin to that of a parkour course, requiring a viewer’s considered navigation of irksome spaces and thus in some ways prioritizing the body, here emphasis is placed squarely on detached observation. The works exhibited are largely tethered to the perimeter of the white cube, even as they resist the timelessness ascribed to such modern spaces (Djordjadze’s works are visibly caught up in a process of decay). This direct employ of the aesthetics of the gallery and its propensity to delimit and overdetermine is curious, particularly given the iterative nature of the artist’s exhibition history, in which components of past artworks are constantly recombined and destabilized (indeed, as they are here). It’s as if Djordjadze is seeking to finally territorialize some greater chaos within her work, or to selectively envision its elements, to produce taxonomies of her elegant and idiomatic phrasings.

—Annie Godfrey Larmon