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Three Domestic Materials Recontextualized

by Benjamin Sutton | 02/01/2012 7:00 AM | No Comments

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Brooklyn-based artists [Tamara Gayer](#), [Stephen Sollins](#) and [Heeseop Yoon](#) create familiar images with unconventional materials, and vice versa, in their respective [solo shows](#) at [Smack Mellon](#) (through March 4). Each of their discrete and formally resonant exhibitions frequently verges on abstraction despite the recognizable forms in Gayer and Yoon's works, and the intensely evocative material Sollins manipulates.

Gayer's multicolored pattern of geometric vinyl shapes in 24 of the gallery's windows facing Plymouth and Washington streets, "[The Final Contraction](#)" (2012), performs a kind of urban-architectural layering by combining the parallel and perpendicular lines of the street grid with the skyline seen from Dumbo. This superimposition of the city's horizontal and vertical matrices appears purely abstract from inside the gallery but from the street, with the city reflected in the brightly patterned windows, Gayer's installation suddenly comes into focus. Its dynamic diagonal stripes of vinyl in primary tones evoke urban futurism of the 1970s and fictional cityscapes like [The Wizard of Oz's Emerald City](#). It imagines a fantasy metropolis of straight lines and pure color.

Yoon's 24 feet tall and 60 feet long installation "[Still Life #11](#)" also uses striping and layering to create patterns that approach abstraction, but her subjects are much smaller than Gayer's. The enormous still life assembled from thousands of strips of black masking tape stretches across the wall, up to the ceiling and even spills onto the floor. The objects Yoon portrays come from disparate places—second-hand stores, factories and storage units in Germany, the U.S. and her native Korea—but are bound together by thickly tangled strands of wires, shoelaces, clothing, string and electrical devices. The whole international jumble of objects could be a sample from the plastic flotsam in the [North Pacific Gyre](#). The objects are at once specific and generic, but often tinged with nostalgia—in one corner a framed Japanese print of a tree sits alongside a clunky old walkman. Thickly layered tape and overlapping objects make the piece's perspective unstable; getting very close to the work helps clarify certain objects, but makes the rest all the more like a towering tape spiderweb. It's a compellingly nightmarish view of hoarding magnified to an epic scale.

Sollins's collages likewise tap into nostalgia, but do so through a curious hybrid practice that manages to combine Minimalism's emphasis on material and the folk art of quilting. His exhibition of collages, [Piecework](#), features five patterned pieces between five and seven-and-a-half feet tall made of used envelopes. Some are cut and assembled into sparse circular patterns, others form bright squares or gridded quadrangles, looking like homemade [Victor Vasarely](#) optical illusions. Bits of handwritten and printed addresses appear in places, but for the most part Sollins foregrounds the weird elegance of the patterns that line envelopes and the surprising range of colors in which they come. Like Gayer with vinyl and Yoon with tape, Sollins recontextualizes a material often associated with domestic uses. In doing so he delivers the subtlest and most intriguing of these three exhibitions' visual experiments.