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Opinion
Agathe Snow's Sassy Angst

By Janet Goleas

“Hi, I’m Rachel,” hums a sporty blonde in Agathe Snow’s “Total Attitude Workout Video,” one of the works featured in her current exhibit “Terrestrial Forms” at the Fireplace Project in Springs. Sit back and relax, you’ll find yourself glued to the monitor as Ms. Snow takes the audience through a hysterical series of self-help guidance.

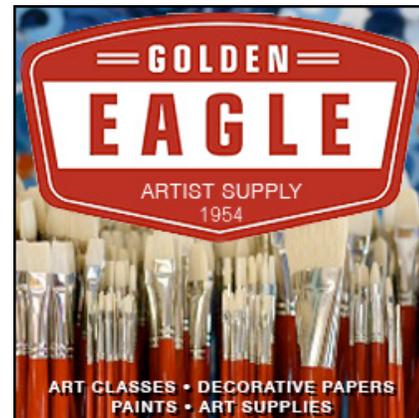


Immense wreaths dangling bling, bangles, and shiny presents have been fashioned by Agathe Snow in the exhibit “Terrestrial Forms” at the Fireplace Project in Springs.

The blonde goes on: “If your lover caught you with another,” she nods confidently, “follow my act.” The camera shifts to a troupe of gals in skimpy workout gear who dance to the 1982 rendition by Taco, the Dutch recording artist, of the pop song “Puttin’ on the Ritz” by Irving Berlin. The dancers, who look like escapees from a Jane Fonda workout tape, are perky and buff. What they lack in stage presence they make up for in cheekiness and, like perfect Fred Astaire starlets, the dancers cock their hips, waggle their arms, or throw back their heads as they enact Ms. Snow’s tips for self-improvement and getting out of a jam with the least collateral damage.

Should you, for instance, find yourself abruptly transported back to, let’s say, Woodstock, Ms. Snow has defined five easy steps designed to help you cope. Her advice ranges from the flatly pragmatic to the absolutely hilarious. “Figure out where you are.” “Groove.” A few other categories in the video include “How to behave when meeting Jesus,” or “Getting into an exclusive nightclub.”

Lest you missed the point, Ms. Snow is sassy. Part of her oeuvre floats on this life like a raft filled with one-liners, tchotchkes, and compulsive hoarding. The other



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part (and this is the part that has placed her in an international arena, which includes exhibits at the Guggenheim Berlin, New York's Whitney Museum of American Art and the New Museum, London's Saatchi Gallery, and the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton) zigzags through oblique observations on aesthetic hedonism, evolution, and cultural survivalism. Her work, too fluid and pluralistic to be neatly categorized, is constantly mutating and thoroughly modern.

While Ms. Snow's art lacks the cynicism sometimes associated with her compatriots, her work is fueled by the same cultural zeitgeist. Excessive, playful, and decidedly low-tech, in her show at the Fireplace Project the artist has assembled four immense wreaths festooned with found objects. Dangling from the ceiling like gigantic charm bracelets, the hoops are variously trimmed with bangles, bling, plastic ferns, shiny presents, hard hats, party favors, baubles, and glitter balls, each one bearing a sort of extemporaneous mise-en-scene.

The elements, recycled from a 2008 installation at Long Island City's Sculpture Center, revolve around Ms. Snow's desire to start a conversation with, as the artist puts it, "the boys of my generation," notably fellow artists Terrence Koh and Banks Violette. Indeed, the wreaths ricochet between hearts and flowers and plastic battleships and Nerf guns. All tongue-in-cheek references aside, the boy-girl thing is implicit here.

As flamboyant and animated as the wreaths are, Ms. Snow's wall assemblages, also on exhibit, are more deadpan. Like Russian Constructivism meets Marimekko, the popular textile design firm, Ms. Snow has carved slabs of Peg-Board into crude daisies, splatters and rudimentary shapes, layering the elements into irregular rectangles. The works sport titles borrowed from Janis Joplin songs such as "Get It While You Can" and "Summertime." Like the late crooner, there is a distinct air of melancholy here. The assemblages are poignant, and not without a touch of discernible angst.

Earlier this year, Ms. Snow was commissioned to create a site-specific installation for the New Museum. The sculpture, "Master Bait Me," consisted of a floating column of blue handballs that had been magically magnetized and seemed to hover among soaring vertical bars. Surrounded by an all-over collage of tabloid clippings, newspapers, celebrities, and boisterous ads, the obsessive assemblage landed somewhere between the elegance of pure chaos and a nod to cultural excess, exploitation, and the exalted marble art towers that have begun to disintegrate as we cruise into the post aesthetics of the 21st century.

Don't miss this intriguing show, which is on view through Monday.

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