



A NEON CHASTITY BELT GLOWS IN NEWARK!

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In the pantheon of female artists who ably engage the viewer in the feminist dialectic like Judy Chicago, whose famous Dinner Party invites us to the table where sheroes throughout history break their phantom bread, or Carolee Schneemann whose work deals with visual customs, restrictions, and the woman's body in relationship to society's mores, or E.V. Day who renders the vagina a sharp toothy dangerous mouth, holding a pearl covetously in the center of its tongue; an alluring/alarming projection of the male psyche, there is the delightful, pastel and powerful Zoe Buckman, who pounces on the viewer with inexorable feminine observations'. It is not just the pronouncement of intertwining the masculine truculent voice metaphorically channeled through boxing gloves — encased in creamy satin, softly wrapping the pugilists gloves and the whiteness of purity together, which makes her work rich and incandescent in its visceral will to achieve the strength and fight of women, but to display that either one or many are powerful; unafraid to be netted together in unity. By the same token, this metaphor conveys the often beaten down quality that women face each day.

Based on Keats 1819 poem "Ode to Melancholy" Buckman's solo exhibition *Her Soft Hand* delivers the message of jarring elements; rough leather boxing gloves interacting with the softness of a wedding dress; the symbol of stainlessness and light, hope and virginity. The viewer examines the gynecological chair with foreboding as we get close to its full implications; exposure and pain psychically and sometimes physically. A slight bit of discomfort prevails as a pile of speculums are tossed into a confusing heap nearby.

A neon chastity belt says look at me! Embellishing on its power-- all lit up in white light, seemingly bigger than mundane life, a restrained, enforced imprisonment of sexuality; fetching a dramatic glow and radiating its powerful force through control and obedient abstinence. *Co-curator Jasmine Wahi gives further details on this survey.* "Chastity Belt is supposed to be very harsh, almost a clinical counterpoint in conversation with *The Oxford* (2016), which is the antique gynecological chair which Zoe reupholstered in vintage lingerie. The chair is accompanied with a sound piece that meshes together Zoe at the boxing gym and Zoe giving birth to her daughter. The chair/sound is re-purposing an actual antique medical devise, while the neon is a constructed representation of an antique device as a means of exploring how much has or has not changed."



As Jasmine Wahli & Rebecca Jampol co-founders and curators of Project for an Empty Space explain, “‘*Her Soft Hand*’ navigates the complexities of traditional ‘femininity’ and female empowerment. Within this dynamic, Buckman questions paradoxes with the prescribed characteristics of femininity that continue to be espoused in Western society. For example: women are gentle, yet they are also hysterical; women are nurturing, yet weak; women are chaste, yet seductive. Buckman explores these ideas that are often at odds with each other. Her objects reflect a grossly generalized patriarchal narrative that perpetuates the idea that women are simply a discordant binary of characteristics. Her ‘prettying’ of gender-specific medical objects and imagery, speaks to this complicated narrative around the female nature. These works speak to the idea that in this societal scenario, women are given very little agency or voice in shaping a true picture of who or what women are (the answer being that there is no standard for who, what, how, when, or why women are as a collective group).”

As an aside which has no relationship to this very fine piece of work, I find myself wishing that one day, maybe, there will be a feminist artist who unravels another aspect of the male/female relationship; who shows us, quite frankly, the underbelly of the other end of things; an artist who presses women who are looking for the best and biggest ticket male to be their caretaker. Just look at Melania Trump and the many women who join her. It is so obvious and hardly explored. Women are that too...We perpetuate part of this all too familiar paradigm, when we should clear away the wreckage of the vestiges of our historic dependence on men, and examine our motives. Shall we be true partners, lovers and friends to them or dependents? While many, if not most of us are that, too many are not. I dare feminists to chase that rabid dog and reveal its hungry teeth.

The show is part of Gateway's new feminist incubator space called “GRABBACK” where women artists with a political voice in their artistic practice are given a platform to exhibit special projects and programs.