

Deconstructing the bride



Kelly Sherman's "Brides, horizontal" positions two brides foot to foot. Sherman's "Success & Happiness" exhibit is at the Barbara Krakow Gallery.

June brides may want to steer clear of Kelly Sherman's show "Success & Happiness" at Barbara Krakow Gallery. It features a thoughtful deconstruction of the iconography and packaging of the modern bride. That princess-for-a-day role can be challenging enough to live up to. Seeing this exhibit could trigger a bridal identity crisis.

Sherman is no iconoclast. She takes a gentle, open-ended approach, concerned with wishes and longings and how we project them. One of the bodies of work that won her the Institute of Contemporary Art's 2006 James and Audrey Foster Prize was a series of wish lists she found on the Internet. Here, she investigates how those projections can be co-opted by cunning marketing.

Although Sherman is a conceptual artist, "Success & Happiness" has a wonderful formal quality that was missing from her ICA show, which featured lists and diagrams.

For "Brides, horizontal" she has twice

blown up a page from a bridal magazine and positioned the brides horizontally, foot to foot. They don't form a mirror - one bride faces up, the other down - but rather constitute one long, twisting stretch of bride. The suite of woodcuts "Brides 1-5" joins white and gray silhouettes of brides at the skirt hem. They verge on complete abstraction, yet edge toward the recognizable. The gray duplicate suggests a shadow or doppelgänger - a bride's unspoken wishes.

In another series, the artist tears sheets from bridal magazines and paints over the bride in white enamel. The silhouette becomes a screen for our projections, and Sherman creates a pleasing tension between figure and ground.

There's one series unrelated to weddings: photographs in which, wearing a black cocktail dress, Sherman lies on a variety of sofas, her own and several in furniture stores. They have titles such as "Willow Sofa in Snow," and many sofas feature prominent labels full of ad copy trumpet-

ing, for instance, "a deep, sink-in hospitality."

These are not as disturbingly effective, but as with the brides, the sofa images examine what we want for ourselves and how that is shaped by what we are being sold. None of Sherman's work is a simple critique of advertising. Nor is she calling us out for our naked longing for deep, sink-in hospitality. This work prompts us to shed the trappings of sales and stories and return to the elusive essence of desire as something that reveals us, and keeps us moving forward.

Kelly Sherman
Success & Happiness

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through July 3rd.
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