

LONDON

Alice Channer

THE APPROACH

On a window ledge at the Approach sat a pair of drinking glasses, one a bit larger than the other, touching each other. They might have been left by a couple of patrons of the downstairs pub who'd wandered upstairs to the gallery, except they looked quite clean and dry. A glance at the gallery checklist showed nothing made of glasses, but I thought I'd better ask: Yes, despite lacking a title, date, and list of materials—which I thought every artwork had to have these days—this was Alice Channer's work, if not, perhaps, a *work*.

As a viewer, you've got to be willing to sweat such details if you want to appreciate Channer's art—but then, for those who appreciate them, the details (and the little puzzlements they entail) are where the pleasure comes in. The same, of course, could be said for those who appreciate a well-tailored suit; the connoisseurship is its own reward. That association is one that Channer would hardly reject: Clothing and personal adornment are constant references in her work. In this show, sculptures made of draped printed fabric were hung from steel brackets on the ceiling, and bronze casts of bangle bracelets were attached to the wall. The three large works on paper were each called *Seersucker* (all works 2009), while a couple of smaller drawings seemed to depict patterned scarves, folded over. And the show was titled "Worn-Work."

Writing recently about Barbara Hepworth's sculpture garden in Cornwall, Channer describes seeing photographs of Hepworth in which "it is as if she is actually 'wearing' her work. She is inside it, working from an interior perspective and locating herself as an artist

there." By contrast, Channer's own sculpture does not make one immediately think of the artist herself as inhabiting the artworks; rather, she seems to be dressing the architecture. The nearly white *Seersucker* drawings, sometimes two-layered, with their faint vertical pencil lines and softly wrinkled surfaces (created simply by exposing the paper to water) call attention to the walls to which they are directly affixed by hiding them as much as they draw the gaze to themselves through their subtle sensuality and luminosity. The bangle piece, *A Body, Yours or Mine*—in which some of the circles have been somewhat flattened, squeezed out of their perfect shape, while others have been broken open—seems to offer the wall as something to be worn by allowing the viewer to imagine her own wrist placed through one of the rings; but by the same token the wall would thereby be wearing the person. The hanging fabric pieces, *I Cannot Tell the Difference Between One Thing and Another* and *(Sleeve)*, play with a similar reversibility: These works might be highly distilled approaches to the problem Matisse posed in the sculpture *Two Negresses*, 1908, whose "almost symmetrical arrangement" is described by Lawrence Gowing as "balanc[ing] complementary views, so that from whichever side we look we relate front and back, like aspects of a single figure."

Channer is one of many artists who have proposed a soft or fragile version of Minimalism, but despite the references to fashion, hers is not, like some other artists', a polemically girly take on a putatively masculine period style. She is just as choosy about hardware as Robert Ryman or Donald Judd, and her aesthetic is just as clean-lined and precise as theirs. But more essential is that she shares with the Minimalists what they shared with Matisse: a desire for clarification, as the latter put it, "for the purpose of organization, to put order into my feelings." The value of such order, of course, is dependent on the intensity of those feelings. In Channer's work, the two seem finely matched.

—Barry Schwabsky



View of "Alice Channer," 2009.