

Larry Weyand, Essay on the work of Xenia Laffely

Bask in the enveloping lesbian works that surround you.

I am drawn to the idea of failure. A failure to achieve, the idea of failure through the lens of queerness, failure of textiles gaining full traction and respect in the art world. Failure can seem utterly scary to most, avoided at all costs. Yet the works by Xenia Laffely currently on display at Eastern Edge Gallery welcomes the unexpectedness of failure though astonishing snippets of skin, truncated body parts, odd portraits, and lesbianism, highlighting through cloth and metal the minute outcomes of embracing tender yet grotesque moments of fissure.

Xenia's works are uncanny, fascinating, delicate, strange, repulsive, approachable, touchable, tentative, sensual, stark, detailed. There is no way, really, to sit still amongst them as they continuously move you. You will feel swept away by the narratives put forward by Xenia as you let yourself feel engulfed by the fabrics, the stitching, the shimmery metal, the textures. Xenia starts the process of producing these works by creating strange, photo realistic, intangible digital paintings. She translates them into physical works either by printing them onto textiles using dye sublimation techniques or by printing them on hard metallic surfaces. She then appliqué the dyed fabrics and draws with threads, quilting the large works with a long arm quilting machine as well as her precise and familiar

Swiss domestic sewing machine. Her metal works are adorned with dollar store nail polish, blending expensive processes with cheap kitsch. Xenia has an extensive background first in art history, then in fashion design, then in women's studies where she learned the fundamental techniques pertaining to fibres and textiles as they intersect with gender, sexuality and art. When she noticed that her graduating show in fashion school encompassed mainly domestic textile works, she figured she needed to develop her art practice through this strong, powerful lens. She is fascinated by the tactility of textiles, the immediacy felt when surrounded by the presence of fibre works. This has led her to form a particular research interest in domestic spaces, home-based textiles and how the idea of queerness and lesbianism can challenge the places we occupy. The idea that domesticity and proper household etiquette are upheld by the textiles that surround us, that using these same craft techniques within our art practices overthrows these pre-conceived notions long established by the patriarchy, highlighting how the patriarchy has failed. The intimacy is revealed slowly, through the tender stillness of the translated digital paintings. The grandeur of the work is simultaneously enticing while evoking strong feelings of inwardness, of quiet.

The scale of the textile works is invasive. The protruding quilted bubbles in the textiles feel like they're coming to get the viewer, that the grotesque yet fabulous boil-like protrusions stemming from the fabric will crawl onto your own skin and envelop you softly. The flesh is embodied, evoking a feeling of sexiness through distorted surfaces. Verging on the edge of trypophobia,

the deeply disconcerting spots on the truncated body parts are, upon further inspection, soft, velvety, delicious, seductive. Don't you just want to poke and pop them?

There is a sense of teenagerhood nostalgia as the works are subtly embellished with strategically selected jewelry and stickers-like imagery of the 1990's. Described by Xenia as being "Le\$bean" meets "le dollar store", this body of work harkens back to films such as Jennifer's Body and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, evoking tangible ideas of 90's and early 00's sexual discovery intermingled with carnage of the flesh, freakish extravagance and personal narratives of love, coming out and the awkward body.

And so, I invite you, once again, to bask in the work that surround you, gleaning from the dichotomies of Xenia's work. Understanding the notion that failure brings perceptiveness, brings you deeper into the textiles which surrounds you, critiques and challenges long established ideologies which have dictated how we perceive the idea of intimacy, connectiveness and humanity.