



View of "Nancy Shaver," 2016.
Photo: Adam Reich.

Nancy Shaver

DEREK ELLER GALLERY

Though not billed as a group exhibition, "Dress the Form" contained multitudes, featuring contributions from nearly thirty individual artists alongside numerous collaborative and found efforts. In an exuberantly busy installation inspired in part by the catholic formalism of Henry, her antique shop in Hudson, New York, coordinating artist Nancy Shaver endeavored to further collapse the differences between professional and amateur, conceptual and formal, and—especially—functional and decorative. Shaver intended that the show's objects be considered for their immediately apparent qualities rather than for any attending obscure backstories, and the result was a refreshingly unburdened collection around which ideas of work, value, and the visual swirled and eddied like flakes in a snow globe. A more-is-more strategy always risks exhausting the viewer, but here the exercise of curatorial intelligence kept things feeling fresh.

Building up to the main body of the show via one of her own sculptures in the gallery's reception area and Dawn Cerny's silk-screened and hand-drawn wallpaper in an interstitial hallway, Shaver also contextualized her project with a flurry of framed quotations. These included lines from Duchamp (TASTE CAN'T HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT ART CAN BE) and Henri Matisse (IT'S A BAD MISTAKE TO GIVE A PEJORATIVE SENSE TO THE WORD "DECORATIVE") alongside the artist's own straightforward self-introduction (FROM HENRY I HAVE LEARNED HOW TO USE MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF COLOR, SHAPE, AND TEXTURE, AS WELL AS HOW TO MAKE THE SINGULAR REVEAL ITSELF AMID A QUANTITY OF DISPARATE OBJECTS). All these statements were indubitably on point, but the gesture's didacticism, though mild, still felt out of place in a gallery.

Derek Eller's main space featured Shaver's *Quilt*, 2016, a wall-filling agglomeration of drawings, paintings, photographs, and collages that was fronted by a clutch of sculptures and found objects. The most memorable of these, if only for their relative dominance and consistency, were works by Shaver for which she upholstered and assembled small wooden blocks to suggest improvisations on a children's construction toy, a baroque Rubik's cube, or an unusually homespun game of Tetris. Three sculptures by Beka Goedde had a similar appeal. Cast in aluminum and decorated with enamel, chalk, acrylic, and silver leaf, these cheerful multicolored arrangements also deal in a handmade not-quite-geometry. Elsewhere, a stack of porcelain bowls by Heather-Anne Halpert echoed buckets and boxes from Henry. There was also a painted shell, a small table, a plastic dinosaur . . .

The arrangement of wall-based works appeared haphazard at first, but there were similarities and repetitions here too that just about prevented the whole thing from collapsing under its own weight. Again, Shaver's solo works enjoyed the lion's share of the real estate; many were takes on the block sculptures, in which variously colored and patterned dress fabrics are pulled taut over clusters of small, chunky stretchers—think early Yinka Shonibare. Intimately related were Adriana Farmiga's charming watercolors of the same decked-out blocks, while standouts by other artists included a woodblock print by Annette Wehrhahn that diagrams, in deadpan style, the ins and outs of interpersonal communication, and a set of gently experimental abstractions by Joyce Robins that ease glazed and painted clay into a variety of unexpected formats, from flat panels to pockmarked balls. Finally, Shaver's project proposed a uniquely relaxed way of looking: Just dive in.

—Michael Wilson