

ALL THAT SPARKLES

SAM MOGELONSKY

MARCH 27 - APRIL 20, 2013

RECEPTION: MARCH 28, 6PM - 9PM



the red head gallery | Suite 115, 401 Richmond Street West, Toronto, ON, M5V 3A8
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SHINING LIGHT ON ADORNMENT

A RESPONSE BY SARAH E.K. SMITH

Seen from a distance, the sculptural works created by Sam Mogelonsky in “All that Sparkles” draw the eye, reflecting changing light and colour in their biomorphic forms. While these surface qualities entice viewers to approach for a closer look, upon inspection the decadence of these works is revealed as a façade.

Their composition relies on the unlikely choice of sequins, a banal item used in costumed clothing and crafting. Sequins are integral to the construction of works like *Target Practice* (2012), a sculpture with an undulating, volumous shape that emerges from the gallery wall, its surface covered with scale-like sequins in a pattern of vibrantly coloured concentric circles.

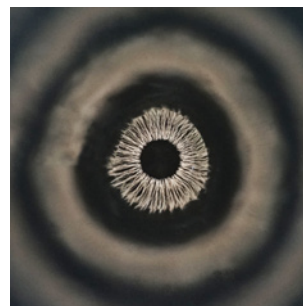
The nature of these mass-produced sequins seems at odds with their privileged location within the white walls of the

gallery. However, it is through the use of these disks, employed in great numbers to fully cover the surface of these sculptures that Mogelonsky mobilizes embellishment to speak to more ominous notions of excess.

The exaggerated nature of the surface decoration of the sculptures is reinforced by the excessive labour required by these projects, each created by the meticulous process of hand pinning disk to surface. Thus, the sculptures simultaneously reflect the aesthetic of mass-production and the hand-made, challenging the viewer’s assumptions of the nature of artistic labour.

In this way, the pieces seem to encapsulate Charles Bernheimer’s definition of decadence as a term that “conveys quite a complex set of conflicted feelings envy[and] also a suggestion of moral censorship.” This critique is more clearly demonstrated in two sculptural works that reveal their interior, *Pin Spiral I* (2012) and *Pin Spiral II* (2013). The former is a wall-mounted work, created from a small document tube adorned with muted white sequins. Horizontally displayed, each side exposes an interior core filled with a jumble of closely packed sewing pins, almost occluding a direct view through to the other side of the tube.

Pin Spiral II is a larger work clearly inspired by this first incarnation. Vertically mounted in a metal stand on the floor, the placement of this larger



cardboard cylinder draws visitors to peer within. The interior reveals a similarly studded core of sharp points and protrusions.

Both sculptures echo the more tactile and embellished elements of the sequined works in their play with light and shadow, enhanced by an interior lined with mirrored paper, reflecting light from the gallery off of the metallic pins. Here, in juxtaposing the flashy, ornamental nature of the sequins with the pointed labour and prick of the sewing pin Mogelonsky plays with definitions of embellishment and ostentation, all the while alluding to the dual nature of pleasure and pain.

The artist engages in a more abstract exploration of these themes and materials in a series of five photographs produced in 2013. These are all digital prints on Alu-Dibond, a method of production that presents the white tones of the image as a burnished semi-reflective aluminum surface, abstracting the subject. Simultaneously, the reflective nature of the aluminum emphasizes the artist’s exploration of adornment seen in the other sculptural works in the show. Each image was created by photographing a view through the sculptures *Pin Spiral I* and

II. However, these works do not serve to document the sculptures or the specific site of their location, instead they play with its interior, transforming the representation of the sewing pins, revealing the sculpture as a means to guide our vision. *White Light* and *Black Light* are the most revealing of their origins, while *Double Vision*, *Fireworks* and *Rings* provide further abstract explorations of line and shadow.

In all, the works in “All that Sparkles” reflect something far more serious than the superficial nature their embellished surface implies, making clear the title’s link to the saying “All that glitters is not gold.” In this case what is revealed is the construction of decadence, namely its ambivalence, as this notion is, “...inhabited by a doubleness that puts fundamental moral and social values in question.” Mogelonsky toys with adornment to the point of excess – pushing the viewer to wonder whether sequins dazzle or blind, but ensuring throughout that the works entice the audience closer.

¹ Charles Bernheimer, “Unknowing Decadence,” in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, eds. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 50.

² Bernheimer, 51.



Sam Mogelonsky is an emerging Toronto-based artist. She holds a BFAH from Queen's University and an MFA from Central Saint Martin's College of Art, London, UK. She has participated in international residencies, including the Florence Trust Studio Residency Program, London, UK, the Château de la Napoule Art Foundation Residency in Mandelieu de la Napoule, France and A.I.R. Casa Marles in Llorenc de Penedes, Spain. She has exhibited in Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Portugal, with exhibitions in artist-run, commercial and publicly funded galleries. Her work is held in Canadian and international collections. For more information please visit sammogelonsky.com

Sarah E.K. Smith is a Toronto-based art historian, whose practice includes writing, curating and teaching. She is a PhD Candidate (ABD) in the Department of Art at Queen's University and a sessional instructor at Ontario College of Art and Design University. Her research scope encompasses modern and contemporary visual and material culture, with specific interest in the relationship between culture, economics and globalization. For more information please visit sarahesksmith.com.



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