

Martha Bush

Summer Retrospective



REVOLUTION
SUMMER
ART SPACE

August 1 — 24, 1997

Letter from the Director

As Revolution Summer dissipates into the August sun, it gives me great pleasure to bring you the greatness that is Martha Bush.

Thank you,

Mark Allen

Martha Bush Makes it Big

**Martha
Bush
makes
small
stuff.**

Or she
used to,
anyway.

Her works are
poignantly anti-
heroic in scale and
in their seeming
obsession with
the quotidian,
the mundane.

They often have a cartoony surrealist element; one imagines the *Rubberhand* stretching out to amazing lengths, wrapping around corners and then snapping back with a crisp cartoon sound effect.

Bush's amusing performance photographs are no mere documents--second-hand still remnants of time-bound works. They are instead staged spectacles which involve performance as a tool, a medium solely for creating the works themselves--the photos. Bush likens the relative unimportance of a viewer actually *viewing the performance* itself to watching a sculptor weld. Such viewing might, perhaps, be revealing about process, but the work itself is the work.

A reluctant Godzilla, Bush skates down Greenpoint Avenue in Brooklyn on a pair of Tonka-trucks-*cum*-roller-skates. Her towering presence in the photo, dominating the toy trucks and the surrounding streetscape, is tempered by her unsteadiness on those wheels and her very apparent vulnerability. Wearing her bass drum as a surrogate head, Bush becomes a marching drum majorette banging out her cadence, simultaneously producing the requisite marching rhythm and deafening herself in the process. An exercise in futility, disintegration, dysfunction.

Bush capitalizes on the formal rhymes she finds (and creates) between her small objects and "real" scale, life-size things. A miniature Verrazano Bridge spans the entire open mouth of a disposable coffee cup, its main planking made from—what else?—a coffee stir stick. A perfectly believable, beautifully crafted miniature model fire escape from a New York building serves no purpose other than to create interesting patterns of light and shadow against the wall. It can clearly sustain no weight in an emergency. Its futility bespeaks a lack of faith

in the institutions that “protect” us. And, in fact, a New York City fire escape *does* become mere decoration after a time, a terrace suitable for plants and hibachis. One forgets the fire escape’s intended originary purpose as it becomes part of one’s everyday landscape.

Bush is remarkably attuned to matters of place, and her works sensitively respond to and evoke the specifics of their locale. The New York City fire escape, the Verrazano bridge spanning a take-out coffee cup, and the photo of Bush careening down Greenpoint Avenue are all indebted to the location of their manufacture. Equally adept is a series of works Bush made in Buenos Aires using saltine crackers, a staple of the Argentinean diet. One small sculpture rhymes the smoothly rippled surface of a cracker with a lumpy and stained mattress in a tiny bedframe; another the cracker’s serrated edges with those of a postage stamp. These works seem at once definitive and tentative, sure of themselves and their place and, at the same time, endangered, uncomfortable, unstable.

In fact, this is the case with all of Bush’s works. Their savvy and I-don’t-need-to-be-big-to-be-present *presence* is always mitigated by an uneasiness or vulnerability, a less-than-permanence. This tension is augmented and enlivened by the disjunctive scale shifts Bush so confidently performs, her sense of the proximity of the everyday and the absurd, as well as a wry, clever craftsmanship.

It’s this tension that makes them so compelling, so unforgettable.

Martha Bush makes small stuff big.

Exhibition Checklist

Verrazano

paper cup, stir stick, wire

5"x3 1/4" diameter

1997

Fire Escape

cardboard, paint, light

14 1/2"x 3" x 5/8"

Rubberhand

rubberband

6 1/2" x 1/4" x 1/16"

1997

Pool

wired glass, paper clip, staples, paint

2 1/4"x 9 1/2" x 5 1/4"

1997

Untitled

(on Greenpoint Avenue)

1996

Untitled

(For Revolution Summer)

1997

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