

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Biographical Marks: Q+A with Amanda Ross-Ho

by [paul soto](#) 07/25/12

Amanda Ross-Ho's current show at L.A. MOCA's Pacific Design Center (PDC), "TEENY TINY WOMAN" [through Sept. 23], reinterprets the retrospective. Presented with the opportunity to survey her practice, the L.A.-based artist has chosen to reconfigure motifs from her practice, and display them in mutated forms on 17 large-scale Sheetrock panels made to represent, to scale, the perimeter of her downtown studio.

On one panel, advertisements for Windex feature terrified ghost-shaped spills about to be wiped, pinned near an unfinished-looking painting of concentric circles on unprimed canvas; on another panel, a pixelated photograph of a Cabbage Patch doll's arm bears gold bracelets in chiaroscuro, mounted next to an oil rendering of a draftsman's triangle.



Photo credit: Robert Wedemeyer

At the center of the gallery's second floor stands a gigantic replica of a photographic enlarger. Featuring slick aluminum and steel surfaces, fine attention to detail, and high production values, *OMEGA* (2012) ominously dwarfs the viewer's body.

Ross-Ho walked *A.i.A.* through the show last week, filling us in on her works' reconfigurations and how they represent her current studio practice.

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PAUL SOTO The architectural scheme here evokes the one you used for the California Biennial in 2008. Could you tell me how that installation is modified here, in material presentation and in effect?

AMANDA ROSS-HO The entire show recalls my project of four years ago, when I excavated the walls of my studio and imported them into the Orange County Museum of Art. Here at the PDC, Sheetrock walls have been built to the scale of my studio, and then brought back to my studio to accumulate signs of activity. This is a specific gesture of repetition that, for me, critiques the idea of authenticity—presenting the space I have been working in as formal data. The exhibition reiterates something I have been working on at a smaller scale for a long time, which is this idea of conflating or collapsing the authentic and the performed. This installation sets the stage for the survey, and simultaneously considers the survey as a form in itself.

SOTO You have been collecting specific gestures over the years—such as dyeing and hanging up preparators' gloves—and referring to them as data, a term with an empirical air. How is that data translated onto the wall panels?

ROSS-HO In my "Untitled Still Life" works (2007–), a series of framed Sheetrock collages that I have been making for several years, the gestures you see are borrowed from gestures that have happened organically in the studio over the years, though everything is invented. I appropriate the patina that accumulates in the studio on their surfaces—for example, a scrawl of pencil or the placement of a photograph. For this exhibition, the surfaces of the supporting walls themselves are created through a combination of gestures, the residue of the original production of the work you see in the show. So the internal logic established in the "Untitled Still Life" is translated here into a full architectural scale—through drips of Carlo Rossi wine down some of these panels, for example, which I have used to dye those gloves. There is an intentional hyperbole or theater to it that you can hopefully access through close observation.

SOTO The exhibition is a repetition, then—of individual gestures, but also of your studio space—in new configurations. How does this alter these gestures, and how does it alter your studio practice?

ROSS-HO I am interested in repeating gestures that initially contain the energy of intuition and immediacy. This reiterates my interest in the loop. I wanted to create a series of loops within not only the forms but also the circumstance and context of the

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exhibition. Orchestrating an architectural exchange from site to studio and back to site was one grand, somewhat theatrical way to do this—a dramatic reenactment. I wonder what happens when that repetition occurs. Does it get deactivated? Does the potency get lost?

SOTO The potency of the so-called intuitive artistic gesture?

ROSS-HO Yes. What happens when you take those gestures apart and repeat them over and over in a theatrical setting, as a performance? You remove the immediacy, but can the gesture still exist as a form, and can an intentional version have as much gravity, energy or expressivity as the original? It is a form and approach that I'm interested in promoting that is related to operating with heightened levels of attention. It has to do with investigating the anatomy and lifecycle of creative production. When you metabolize gestures through this type of production, the energy that those gestures contain begins to undulate, it appears and disappears and reappears, as those gestures are repeated in different contexts.

SOTO I wonder if that disappearance and reappearance relates at all to your motif of the ghost. It was present in the abnormally large fiberglass candy dish sculpture, *Great Grandparent* (2010), you showed at the Pomona College Museum of Art in 2010. Here it is again as a small ceramic on the floor as a component of *Untitled Still Life 17/17 at 100%* (2012). These are very cartoonish, Pop translations of that idea—the figure of a bed sheet with two eyes cut out is iconic in mainstream culture. But also, you are presenting residues of your painted textile pieces here, as paint impressions or imprints made directly on the Sheetrock panels, but not the pieces themselves. Those seem to also embody the materiality of disappearance.

ROSS-HO Ghosting, or the ghost as an idea, came about while I was already thinking about the evolution of a form as it goes through countless cultural recapitulations—when it is translated, in other words. Specifically, I became interested in the classic icon of a ghost, made from a bed sheet with two eyes cut from it. As a cultural form it is several times removed from the idea of being, and by extension that lack of being transformed into a popular and recognizable rendering. This depiction of absence, and the physicality of that presence, is a result of being pushed through several iterations and losses over the generations. Missing soul translated into domestic approximation, which translated into cartoon, which then translated into this ceramic dish that I found and reconfigured as the centerpiece of the Pomona show. To me, the idea of absence, the depicted sheet ghost, and the dish are all versions of negative space that manifests in physical form. This idea of nested opposition has been an important factor for me.

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SOTO What do you mean by nested opposition, in this context?

ROSS-HO The relationships between negative and positive, presence and absence. Built-in dialectics. In the case of the dish, that it is representing absence while also literally containing an absence in itself by existing as a vessel or container. It's the idea of being able to access something through the periphery, or through the lack of it.

SOTO Being able to access the idea of something through its shadow image?

ROSS-HO Or the idea of accessing it through the absence, the trace, the leftover. This is what I am doing with the impressions, or residues of the cut canvas textile paintings. But those are also about inverting an audience's reception of a work. Most of the impressions are of works produced but not shown yet. The impressions act as a forecast, but they are similar to forms from past work, so they function as residue of former pieces. I'm scrambling the sequence of a work's life in the world.

SOTO The diptych of paintings mounted on Sheetrock, *UNTITLED ONE AND UNTITLED TWO* (2012), are replicas of bright paintings in primary colors that you made when you were four years old. What was it like to go over these marks that you made as a child, here on a much larger scale?

ROSS-HO These further evolve ideas established in the textile paintings, which have always been about translation. The originals are as early and primal as anything can get, and represent one of my first intentional productions of formal space. So to reiterate a mark that I made myself 33 years ago, in large scale, results in a sort of monument.

It was very intense to go back over those marks. I had a weird moment with these pieces, which happened when I was rendering the mark, or at least that was my intention—to coldly render it—when I started to abandon the logic I had established and tip into performing the mark. There I was, slipping towards performance rather than executing the rendering. And here, as opposed to working with a found image, it's a translation of something of my own making. That was a new gesture for the work—to go back over marks that were *mine*, biographically.

SOTO These pieces take your practice to its logical extreme by accessing your childhood.

ROSS-HO Yes, and they really consider scale in a different way, suggesting that the

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practice is about this bigger life's work, not just my current adult practice. My practice is an organic totality and has deep roots: that's the ecology of one's life's work. I think that even though I use physical scale extensively, the real way these works and this exhibition talk about scale is in terms of time.