

Art in America

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REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORK

Michelle Lopez at Deitch Projects

In Michelle Lopez's "Adventures in the Skin Trade," leather pods were arrayed on an expanse of dunes, with sand transforming the main room of Deitch's Grand Street gallery into a preternatural landscape. In the background, New Age-y music tinkled and droned. Light cast from above, partly from skylights bringing changing diurnal effects into the space, created a daybreak mood; it seemed a place where life was about to be born.

Lopez's enigmatic brown nodules nestling on breastlike mounds ranged from 8 to 27 ½ inches in diameter. The forms themselves were tantalizingly obscure, bringing to mind, simultaneously, seashells, brains, overstuffed furniture and small animals in fetal position. They sported a variety of wrappings: tender, creamy suede; a russet deerskin begging to be stroked; a sleek, chocolate ponyskin; and coarser, more porous textures. Some had ribbed sections or folded-over labia, but all were composed with impeccable craft, skin elegantly fitted over fiberglass armatures in collaboration with the Milan fashion house Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, where these works were first exhibited last summer.

In keeping with the leather theme, an adjacent room featured wall works focusing on the same shapes. Three free-hanging sheepskin parchments with rustically uneven bottom edges showed off Lopez's drawing skills. Scarablike forms were depicted in schematic strokes of red chalk against an

other background. Small works on paper featured Iris prints apparently related to individual leather pieces in the other room. However, here they looked quite different, with dusky rainbow hues. The forms appeared to have hard carapaces; a layer of pen-and-ink strokes added over them created something that resembled a coat of soft porcupine quills. Finally, wall works measuring about 34 by 26 inches with softly rounded corners featured Iris prints on leather mounted on canvas stretchers. Here the shape appeared in still another guise, now resembling a strange amalgam of shiny children's toys rendered in the lush, faded colors of a 1950s magazine.

As if to signal that a visitor

was about to embark on a one-of-a-kind journey, at the entrance to the sandy landscape stood one of Lopez's leather-wrapped cars, *Woodsonner*, a 10-foot-long topless sports convertible, thin skin spilling over edges and crevices, creating tiny peaks and ridges that made the chassis appear to be fashioned from wet clay. Labial protrusions and bulbous appendages heightened its fantastical appearance.

Lopez takes Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup into a leathery territory that has within it a narrative, almost cinematic, thrust, in an approach that includes a highly refined sense of craft. One looks forward to seeing where her Surrealist impulse will lead.

-Carey Lovelace

Michelle Lopez: Installation view of "Adventures in the Skin Trade," 2001; at Deitch Projects.

