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Theory of a Family

GINGER WOLFE-SUAREZ
FEB 05 - FEB 13
SILVERMAN GALLERY

by Elyse Mallouk

Ginger Wolfe-Suarez's exhibition "Theory of a Family," on view at Silverman Gallery, is about movement and being stuck; about taut vibrations between static forms; about seeing light and heavy shoes. The objects in this show require each other; they are like words that can be pieced together in different combinations, to different ends. Each viewer undertakes the task of ordering the forms, attempting to decipher and translate their metaphors. No one construction is ever final—the relationships remain in flux.

A long, jointed beam, jammed up against a rock on the floor, reaches toward the ceiling and leans on the wall. It's an impractically tall walking stick, a leg bent at the knee, a stilt without a partner. One of its four faces is coated with the same kind of multicolored glitter that crusts grade-school valentines; the other three sides are left unfinished. The piece, *Untitled (here)* (2010), has five parts: the glitter stick; a rock; a pair of sneakers cast in concrete; a mirror cut into a trapezoid, wedged in the corner; and you. When you stand facing the glitter, across from the heavy cross-trainers, your own shoes become visible in the mirror. These shoes are specific; they are the ones you wore all day, the ones you will walk out the gallery door with, then take home and kick off. But they are also abstracted, detached from the rest of your body and all your peculiarities by the angled cut of the mirror. Throughout the show, associations between sculptural bodies are made to relate to the tight yet gaping spaces between people—sneakers that don't belong to you are made to relate to shoes that do.

The relationships between works are left tenuous; they are never spelled out, only suggested. There is a measured play between restraint and release: three parts bare pine, one part glitter—but never so formulaic. Surprising formal relationships bind the pieces together despite the yardstick distances that separate them. They are held apart by plenty of air, but they still manage to bleed into one another. *Separate/Rigid* (2010) is composed of two blocky bed-forms made of plywood board that sit on the floor on either side of the door; neon pink light seeps out from behind them, spilling onto the walls. Black boxes of bodily scale perch ominously above them, just under the ceiling. On the opposite wall, a light-box photograph leaks white light at its edges, parroting the neon pink.



Untitled (here), 2010; wood, glitter, rock, cast concrete shoes, cut mirror. Courtesy of the Artist and Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.

For we are connected by a thick tough rope which I sewed at our heels before you lived here. [1]

Wolfe-Suarez wrote these words, and they are read aloud by members of her family, recorded as an audio track and played on wireless headphones. They are part of the piece ... *build your own mountain...* (2010), an installation composed of the audio and a photograph taken by the artist's father in the 1970s.

The image is a landscape lit from behind, filled with green light and grey shadow. The shapes push and pull within the picture plane; its flat face leans into the room. The words in the earphones interrupt and coat the crisp, backlit image: they hang "in the air like a reservoir of glistening sugar," and wrap around the other forms and photographs. [2]

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"Theory of a Family," 2010; installation view. Courtesy of the Artist and Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.

If you turn around while you listen, the sound trickles into the gallery, informing the way the edges in the rest of the room read. The sound sweeps up into the ceiling opposite and is absorbed by the giant black boxes suspended in the corner. Walk too far, and the sound starts to skip as its signal pulls apart; the words are technically tethered to the photograph. The audio is transcribed in a small yellow, four-page booklet that viewers can take home and read while they sit in their own spaces, looking at their own forms and photographs.

The exhibition maneuvers within the grammar of minimalist sculpture. Its precisely placed forms create an awareness of one's own perception of space, of one's body and the architecture around it. Minimalism is frequently understood as a symbolic reduction in service of sharpened attention and sensitivity—each curve and angle can be seen as a medium that affects the way a person moves through space.

Unlike minimalist works, however, the pieces in "Theory of a Family" refuse to be solely self-referential; they aren't afraid of sentiment. The sparseness of the forms' arrangement causes them to appear minimal, but the representations themselves hint at a more internal, personal perception of space and time. Wolfe-Suarez's work performs what she calls "a symbolic abundance through absence." [3] The simplicity of the objects leaves them open to projection, even though they already contain the artist's stories. These forms are not blank slates, but that does not prevent them from being filled and refilled by each new viewer who enters the space.

"THEORY OF A FAMILY" IS ON VIEW AT [SILVERMAN GALLERY](#) THROUGH MARCH 13, 2010.

NOTES:

[1] A transcription of the audio component from the installation *...build your own mountain...* at Silverman Gallery, San Francisco, February 2010.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ginger Wolfe-Suarez, from the artist talk at Silverman Gallery on February 20, 2010.