

## **Press Release**

February 8, 1997

### **Renée Levi**

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Artist: Renée Levi (born 1960)  
Dates: February 27 - April 12, 1997  
**Opening: Thursday, February 27, 6 - 8 PM**  
**Artist's Talk: Saturday, March 1, 3 PM**  
Gallery hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM

For further information or to set up an appointment with the artist call Carin Kuoni at (212) 925-2035.

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One of the most interesting sculptors to come out of Switzerland in the last few years, Renée Levi has blurred the distinction between form and matter. Not unlike Bruce Nauman with his negative spaces underneath chairs, or Robert Smithson with his "non-sites"—yet visually very different—Levi deflates the volumes of cardboard boxes or shopping bags, flattening them completely. She then glues the boxes or bags together with industrial masking tape, creating large sheets of paper or cardboard that cover segments of the gallery walls. Strangely emptied, the ex-containers hang like hunting trophies from the walls. Their original shape is suggested through the creases that remain recognizable underneath the layers of monochrome acrylic paint. De-contextualized, transmuted into an almost abstract art, these new objects still evoke familiar and sentimental, even homey associations.

Renée Levi has for many years played with the question of materiality versus surface. In 1996, she showed her "Red Cubes" at New York's Crosby Street Project. The cubes were enormous objects that looked imposing and weighty. Instead of being cast in cement, as suggested by their surfaces, however, they were bloated foam objects: The faulty, industrial leftovers of foam mattresses, they had never been cut into sheets because of their material imperfections. Filling most of the Crosby Street space, they implied a mass that had little to do with their actual airy foam structure. The artist had carefully painted them an artificial pinkish red, laying a film of paint over every crease and hole, thereby further disguising them.

For her exhibition at the Swiss Institute, Renée Levi will present several large-scale objects, wall pieces as well as freestanding sculptures. The wall pieces consist of many bands of paper, each 1 yard wide, hung one next to other. Each band is a different shade of orange, ranging from pale orange to salmon pink, magenta to yellowish and a rich, dark orange. Each band is been painted the same color on both sides, one of which has in addition been varnished. Together, their color orchestration is so brilliant that they alter the way visitors perceive the gallery space. Often hanging off the floor ever so slightly, they are neither walls nor paintings but weightless material presences.

In the center of the gallery, Levi will exhibit four free-standing pieces, among them "Orange Standing." It is a scroll of roofing felt, slightly taller than human-size, standing upright and curled into itself. The spiral invites investigation by the viewer: At once hollow and impenetrable, half opening yet too small to enter, it teases the viewer with ideas about inside and outside, interior space that is suggested but cannot be experienced, denying physical verification of the theoretical construct. Again, both surfaces of the felt have been painted; each scroll with different shades of yellow.

In 1983, Jackie Winsor created "Open Cube," a large wall piece consisting of what might have been the six sides of a cube, broken open and displayed flat on the wall. The parallels of this work and others by a postminimal American generation and

Renée Levi's work are striking. Sol Lewitt's white cubes—the physical manifestations of mathematical configurations—evoke Levi's flattened boxes. And Carl Andre's metal floor pieces—that the viewer is supposed to walk on—delineate strange ambiguous areas, at once inviting and forbidding, that are offset from the rest of the gallery spaces in which they are exhibited.

Levi's work can be situated between a Minimalist aesthetic and post-minimal issues. Like Minimal Art, her sculptures focus on perception. While paint is carefully and very systematically applied to the surfaces of her industrial materials, it is never used to divide the surface or visually break it up into different parts of a composition. At the same time, the artist accepts in an almost dadaistic spirit the references to everyday life. The clearly visible boxes that are often at the beginning of her work are one such example. But Levi has also gone further and created large surfaces of paper out of small sheets of giftwrap that weren't painted at all. In these works, the patterns of the giftwrap meet at each seam, creating nebulous almost-fields of dots or other simple patterns.

Levi's work has been associated with German artist Karin Sander's play between architecture and sculpture. But Levi's position is less metaphysical, much more tongue-in-cheek and humorous, revealing a dadaist sense of humor. That said, Levi's pieces are glorious, sensuous and almost baroque pieces, funny and in a very subversive way monumental. Perhaps another artist whose work is more relevant to Levi's is Mary Heilmann, whose subversive use of a constructivist vocabulary links her to the Swiss sculptor.

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A graduate of the Engineer's School of Basel, Renée Levi moved on to study visual arts at the Art School in Zurich. In between, she briefly worked with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. Levi has participated in numerous group shows in Switzerland, among them "Karo Dame" at the Kunsthau Aarau in 1995, and has had one person

exhibits at Galerie Mark Müller, Zurich; Crosby Street Project, New York; Filiale Basel, and others. Her one person exhibition at the Aargauer Kunsthaus will open in April 1997. She has been awarded grants from the Vordemberge-Gildewart Foundation, the Basler Kunstverein, the Aargauer Förderungsstipendium, and has just received the prestigious Manor Prize. Levi spent a year at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. She has been commissioned to create several public art installations in Switzerland, at public housing projects in Niederholzboden/Riehen and Wettstein, Basel, and at City Hall of Liestal as well as the Dreirosen School in Basel.

**Renée Levi will give a gallery talk on Saturday, March 1, at 3 PM.**

For further information, or to set up an interview with the artist,  
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