



Rachel Harrison, Three of Cups, 2008. Courtesy Greene Naftali, New York. Photo André Morin

title	<b>Lily van der Stokker and guest: Rachel Harrison</b>
episode	<b>Plug In #44</b>
duration	<b>from 4 October 2008</b>
guest curator	<b>Lily van der Stokker</b>
in cooperation with	<b>Lily van der Stokker and Rachel Harrison</b>
text by	<b>Christiane Berndes</b>
photographer	<b>André Morin</b>

This presentation is the fifth in a series, which began in April 2006, and was developed in and for this room. The Van Abbemuseum asked visual artist Lily van der Stokker to design a wallpaper especially for the museum, which it then bought. Van der Stokker was then invited to develop an exhibition programme in the room, which, together with her advice, helps the museum select new works for its collection. Rachel Harrison is the fourth guest that Van der Stokker has invited to confront the coloured and chequered wallpaper.

Rachel Harrison (New York, 1966) creates sculptures and installations that contain fragments of the visual

language of 20th century art movements such as minimal art, pop art, cubism and dada – to name but a few. This is not limited to art-historical movements – various artistic disciplines are also confronted with one another in surprising ways. Sculpture mutates into painting, three dimensional becomes two dimensional, and objects such as sockets, crates, and construction and packaging material become part of the artwork, while the artwork itself changes into an object, a self-referential exhibition display. Any attempt to analyse and penetrate the game is tantamount to running the risk of slipping through the net and disappearing into a distant void, only to confess with a wry smile that the work has outsmarted you.

Take Harrison's sculptures in Plug In #44. The seemingly makeshift construction of one or more uneven blocks or surfaces that combine to form an elongated, angular pillar flirts with the rigid visual language of minimal art. When the viewer looks closely at the expressive texture and bright, monochrome colour, the three dimensional object disintegrates into four two dimensional surfaces that are suggestive of the monochrome paintings of Yves Klein, for example. This association, however, is

## Lily van der Stokker and guest: Rachel Harrison

immediately reversed again by the objects that are attributed to each work. These attributes, consisting of a telephone, a ski, a plastic lemon and a toy gun, in turn create a curious interchange between foreground and background and appear to reduce the sculpture to an exhibition display. In this way, Harrison plays a subversive game with visual codes and provides a humorous commentary on the taboos of modernism.

If we concentrate on the individual sculptures, the discrepancies become greater still. What is the blue abstract shape with the red telephone from the 1980s, the Cold War era with a hotline between Washington and Moscow? The title appears to refer to the Bell Company, nicknamed 'Ma Bell' and named after Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone. In 1984 an important antitrust law made it impossible for the company to retain its monopoly on the American telephone market. Up until that point, everyone had a telephone such as this, but after 1984, both the telephone and the name soon became antique. Harrison thus refers to the branding of corporations that supply basic services and to complexity and contradiction of free market capitalism that supposedly creates fair markets but that is ultimately corrupt. But then there is also the reference to a famous Beatles song...

What are the plastic lemon and hammer doing on the pink stand? The act of aggression whereby the hammer smashes the lemon, rendering it a battered and twisted fruit, oozing sour juices, is made impossible here due to the fact that it involves a work of art that acts merely as a 'proposition'. In addition, the artificial yellow object that passes itself off as a lemon is nothing more than a representation of the real thing. The lemon and the hammer belong to two different worlds, drawn together into the world of art. The lemon is fake, a copy, an impostor. The hammer is real. Perhaps it was left behind by mistake after the presentation was set up and the threatening relationship between the lemon and the hammer is merely the coincidental result of the viewer's imagination?

Whenever we realise that every apparent 'coincidence' has been meticulously staged by Harrison, we begin to understand that complex relationships between visual language, reality and representation, imaginary or otherwise, have been exposed. By moving between the

sculptures, we become part of this world and the game between object and representation, form and symbol, subject and object, which exchange roles.

Lily van der Stokker also plays with coding systems, structures and hierarchies in her work. One example is the relationship between art and decoration. She feels that the latter is often seen as second-rate. 'But in that respect it is also supportive. Decoration aims to frame, to encircle, as well as being flattening, filling and extravagant. And decoration can also defile the dominance of the white exhibition spaces', says Van der Stokker. Her wallpaper is artwork and decoration, foreground and background, autonomous and supportive. Is it a two dimensional work or a three dimensional installation?

Both Harrison and Van der Stokker investigate how they, as female artists, can secure a sovereign position for themselves. Both deconstruct hierarchies and toy with foreground and background, art and decoration. Clever, humorous, intelligent, amusing. But just how innocent is their work?

### Art works

#### Rachel Harrison

*Distinction*, 2008\*

*Three of Cups*, 2008\*

*One Ton Prop*, 2008\*

*Hammer and Lemon*, 2008\*

*Stump Speech*, 2008\*

*Ma Bell*, 2008\*

#### Lily van der Stokker

*In the embellishment*, 2006

\*On loan