Amanda Ross-Ho

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, USA

'Somebody Stop Me', Amanda Ross-Ho's title for her first New York solo show, has the platitude
minus ring of a bumper sticker or the type
of all-caps outburst that the American comic strip
character Cathy might make just before a frenzied
spending spree at a shoe shop. (Punch-line:
'On second thought, don't!') Applied to a body
of work as deliberate as Ross-Ho's, it might
seem disingenuous; few artists would bother to
notice, let alone highlight, the precise aesthetic
relationship between, say, the swooping form of a
r1ach curve and the curvace sprawl of the
word 'Life' on a piece of rhinestone jewelry.
In One source 2a Mock Milestones (Perforated
Samplers) (all works 2010), these items (the latter
represented by an enlarged photocopy of an
eBay advertisement, rather than the real thing)
are tucked at careful right angles on a pegboard
along with a few sundry items. Hardly the act of
an artist who's not in full control.

But there's just it. Ross-Ho's affection for such
casual affinities borders on the pathological. Her
best unions seem inevitabilities Bedroom Bandit,
a riot of sympathetic colours and textures,
features a 1980s poster of Van Halen frontman
David Lee Roth (in tropical-coloured war paint and
feathered headress), looking crazy and
cosy as he pokes out from under a quilt sewn
by Ross-Ho's Aunt Gini. Both objects co-existed
in the artist's bedroom for some time before she
brought them together, just so.

The works in 'Somebody Stop Me' demonstrate
the breadth of Ross-Ho's practice
- macramé paintings, inkjet prints of her
studio walls, arrangements of found objects
and personal items, and enlarged sculptures
of everyday stuff - yet each work contains a
key, or at least a hint, to interpreting others.
Having a bit of background helps with the main
oblique works: an odd, rectangular sculpture
with a pair of column-shaped oculi in its centre
turned out to be a foam-core scale model of the
Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery space (Heirloomed
Model with Scale Natural Likester [Preserving
Memories is What We Do, Best!]). It endured
a series of unfortunate events in the artist's
studio - first, cat pee, and then a freak rainstorm.
Ross-Ho gold-plated it, creating a degraded
monument to the process of mounting a show.

Similarly, Onesource ..., with its balanced,
X-Y grid of ephemera, preserves a slice of the
artist's professional and personal life (among
the items included is a humorous, personalized
postcard from her cat's veterinarian: 'Jorge, it's
time to schedule your next visit'). It's also an
example of Ross-Ho's best-known visual trope:
eroset pegboards made by meticulously drill-
ing holes in sheetrock, a laborious act of craft
masquerading as shop-bought prefab. Such
modesty and obliteration seem fundamental to
Ross-Ho's art; several works involved invisibility,
ghosts and negative spaces. Heirloomed features
a tattered found cartoon of one ghost painting
a portrait of another with a jar of invisible ink.
Across the gallery, a double self-portrait called
Invisible Ink shows the artist shrouded except
for two black, ghost-like holes torn around her
eyes, presenting a serendipitous link to the oculi
of Heirloomed Model ...

Serendipity. There's another notion trending
when platitude: the happy accident, the
lucky find. Ross-Ho incorporated a variety of
second-hand materials, including single ear-
rings purchased in bulk from eBay. In a recent
interview with fellow University of Southern
California alumnus Olde Lussier, Ross-Ho said
she loved online sales platforms like eBay and
Craiglist because they 'attempt to unite fustive,
unwanted garbage with loving homes. The
total uselessness is exhilarating.' Arranged in
constellations and added as decorative touches
here and there, the earnings seemed like lucky
little refugees rescued from a vast scrapheap,
an example of what makes Ross-Ho's work self-
consciously tribe and tribe.

Anne Wehr