



If you were unfamiliar with Susan Collis' work and walked into Lora Reynolds Gallery to see what happened to be there, you might think that you had missed the show. On the wall appear a few nails and screws, four staples that once held a sheet of paper (since ripped from the wall), and a few scattered bits of well-used lumber on the floor. The few graphite drawings might entice you to take a second look; if that leads you to the gallery list, you could be surprised by what you find. The staples are hallmarked platinum, and the strange arrangement of pins and screws are a mix of gold, silver and precious gemstones. More gems dot the lumber, one plank of which is coated with a pigment of lapis lazuli.

So it goes, the second exhibition of Collis' work at Lora Reynolds Gallery, means to question our perception of what items are precious. Collis' work plays off two generally accepted ideas. The first is the notion that certain metals and stones are worth a considerable amount of money, and the second is that many of those willing to pay a hefty sum for a small diamond won't hesitate to protest against a painting priced at the same grandiose amount.

With installations such as *Over and Above* (2011), Collis takes these precious materials and creates a common and almost undesirable form. The collection of gold, diamonds and rubies become forgettable objects, the sorts of things left behind in a move. Without the gallery's description of the work, most visitors would pass by without a second glance.

Besides challenging generally accepted notions of the worth and beauty of these precious materials, these installations appear in stark contrast to Collis' other displayed works. Collis' other sculptures and drawings are grander, even as they continue to play with viewers' expectations of material and form. *Staying Power* (2011) looks like a crumpled and discarded piece of paper resting atop a marble pedestal at first glance. Really the pedestal is nothing more than a stack of white paper, while the crumpled gray ball is composed of palladium (a metal classified in the same group as platinum).

*Anything really* (2011), a framed work in the center of the gallery, is also not as it initially appears. While it may seem a painstakingly cross-hatched graphite drawing, a closer look reveals that the frame is filled with alternating bits of 0.9mm pencil lead. Opposite *Anything really* is a trio composed of *Think twice*, *My undoing*, and *Make a mends* (all 2010), each comprised of monochromatic backgrounds and swooping white lines that jump from the paper. These lines have the strength and depth of paint but are nothing more than the negative space in between the graphite markings.

By creating intriguing objects with the commonest of materials, Collis asks viewers to identify what, specifically, makes an artwork valuable. Collis emphasizes craft, not material or subject; in doing so she offers a justification for art's worth. So it goes' collection of engaging yet simple works and intentionally banal objects made of the most luxurious of materials presents an interesting dilemma. Buyers must choose between Collis' platinum staples or a graphite drawing, and it seems that the drawing usually wins. When I visited the gallery at the end of May, a simple white frame filled with pencil lead had already sold while the installations made of precious gems were still up for grabs. Collis reminds viewers that art is pleasing and interesting in surprising ways; its worth has less to do with money and more to do with the time one may spend with it.

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