

Lucie Stahl
PRESS



Review: PITS, Queer Thoughts, 2014
By Michelle Grabner

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QUEER THOUGHTS



Lucie Stahl, *Shroom Cloud Hands (Purple)*, 2014, polyurethane, acrylic, 10 1/2 × 6 × 3 1/2".

Lucie Stahl's exhibition at the venerated apartment gallery Queer Thoughts in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood was a fitting last project before the gallery relocates to downtown Manhattan. Known for featuring work that embraces the shape-shifting properties associated with the concept of "postidentity," Queer Thoughts reaffirmed its agenda with a corporeally charged installation punctuated by several cast-polyurethane molds of hands and faces and three of Stahl's characteristic polymer-coated ink-jet prints of body parts submerged in gel. Stahl ferreted into the private domain of the third-floor walk-up apartment, installing work on its kitchen walls, thus underscoring a link between postidentity hybridization and the breaking down of the distinction between public and private spaces. The tensions produced by contradictions between living space and diminutive gallery, and between visitors to the show and friends of Queer Thoughts, were exploited by the artist to capitalize on gestures of indeterminacy in her work.

The show's title, "Pits," was not explained in the exhibition's didactic; however, one can understand it as a direct material reference. In her studio practice, Stahl mixes a reactive polymer compound with water-based acrylic, which gives the transparent plastic a tint of color. This watery addition also puts in motion a volatile chemical reaction, and the polymer medium becomes suffused with tiny air bubbles as it sets, resulting in semitransparent impressions of body parts with pitted surfaces. The casts of inexact three-dimensional hands and faces encased in the material are thus rendered not precious and glass-like but hard and sudsy-looking. In a two-second looping video on the gallery website, two buckets of animated viscera, here dyed red, demonstrate the alchemical reaction of Stahl's plastic medium, a bubbly goop antithetical to our usual experience of plastic as uniform and static.

Set within the small, brightly lit main gallery where Stahl's plastic appendages dotted the walls was a homely walk-in closet with an old vinyl floor. Stahl had covered the closet's interior with scanner-generated imagery depicting colossal fingertips pressed into translucent gel, similar to those that hung demurely on the walls in the kitchen. A milky plastic hand was mounted to appear as if reaching out from the fleshy closet wall. Titled *Hand Jobs (Spirits)* (all works 2014), it held a wine bottle and a burning white tapered candle that illuminated the tiny room. Here there was only enough space for one viewer, who was forced to close the door in order to approach the wraithlike hand. Once the door was closed, a one-way glass embedded into the cutaway closet door became visible, revealing the glaring white gallery outside the

closet. From the exterior of the closet, this element of the installation, *Woman In Womirror T*, appeared as a mirrored inset, with a face in glassy relief mounted at its center.

Attracted to the transformative properties of liquid and gelatinous states, Stahl has found a solution to the problem of capturing the visual impact of material transmutations. In her work, liquid, mucoid, and solid states are scanned and printed; body parts are mold-casted with mercurial compounds. These porous associations were equally at play in the wall text Stahl generated for "Pits": "Tracking down a strange, loose narrative of the acutely violent aspects of power and resource distribution, informed by a female factor that runs like a bloody current pulling loose debris in from the shores of a male dominated landscape, shouting is the only way to be heard over the roar of yourself. *Woman in Womirror.*" Stahl's ambiguous body imagery injects powerful feminist political implications into the postidentity stratagem. Yet it is her beguilingly unstable, alchemical approaches to artmaking that provide the most compelling challenge to identity norms.

—*Michelle Grabner*