

GALLERY HOPPING

Suffer For Your Art

Theresa Byrnes doesn't take the easy way out

BY JOE BENDIK

Sometimes I run across an artist who is so multi-faceted, involved in so many different aspects of art and is so intense about the thought process (and execution) that it takes me a long time to write about that artist. In this case, I'm talking about Theresa Byrnes. She's a painter, performance artist, author and provocateur. Byrnes is from Australia but has lived in New York City since 2000. She recently opened a gallery/project space named Suffer. This venue is a throwback to the times when art meant something more than commerce.

There is a passionate sense of purpose to Byrnes that is rarely seen these days. She currently has a solo exhibition titled *Dirty Glamour* that speaks on many levels; the overall theme is that beauty is defined not by glitz and bling, but by how nature eventually decays everything and how that sense of impermanence is where the beauty lies. As she states, "True beauty is not shiny, packaged, new, modified, augmented but the graceful death of matter."

There are two types of work being shown: mixed media on wood and works on paper derived from her "The Measure of Man" performance (more on this later). Both exhibit a complexity and a rawness that is completely stunning. After the events of 9/11, Byrnes came to the conclusion that making paintings archival, something that lasts throughout the ages, is now ludicrous. Anything can disappear forever, without warning.

Her mixed media on wood exemplifies this philosophy. In her piece "I Hate Roses and the Sea Ate Me," based on a weathered, banged-up stack of old plywood that she found in her neighborhood, Byrnes said that she had a conversation with the wood and carefully collaborated with it. Byrnes started by lightly sanding off some of the cracked paint and sealed it with layers of Estapol, used for clear wood finishes. Byrnes then painted it matte black. After drying, she added a printed fabric, continued with splattered black gloss enamel, then let it dry. Finally, Byrnes applied flicked epoxy resin. All



A mixed-media work on a found board in the *Dirty Glamour* exhibit at Suffer.

bravery. This past Christmas Eve, Byrnes staged a guerrilla performance piece. Referencing da Vinci's "Anatomy" series of drawings, the artist was mounted—nearly nude and spread-eagle—on a vertical circular board on the back of a truck driven through the streets of the Lower East Side. The board turned her 360 degrees for a half hour. From the cavities of the mounted costume, black ink poured over her body and hair, creating abstract images on paper placed at the bottom of the structure. These paintings provide a new definition of the term "action painting." One can feel the effort, agony and beauty of the process by merely viewing it; I recommend checking out the online footage of the performance at theresabyrnes.com.

There is much more to Theresa Byrnes' story. Pick up a copy of her autobiography *The*

Divine Mistake to get the full picture. ☞

Dirty Glamour

Through March 6, Suffer, 616 E. 9th St. (betw. Ave. C & Ave. B), theresabyrnes.com.

of this works so well because she never overwhelms the source material with her complex, yet unobtrusive contributions.

Byrnes' "The Measure of Man" performance paintings are an achievement in innovation, deep thought and sheer

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