

# THE SAATCHI GALLERY

## DAILY MAGAZINE

### MORGAN FALCONER ON JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER AT ELIZABETH DEE, NEW YORK

A couple of weeks before Josephine Meckseper opened her latest solo show at Elizabeth Dee (on May 1st, International Workers Day, significantly), the *New York Times* ran an exposé showing how the US State Department had quietly coached and cajoled a group of largely retired military personnel with the purpose of stuffing cable news channels with voices favourable to the White House on issues such as the Iraq war and conditions in Guantanamo Bay. If one had put aside suspicions that the world might not be as it seems, and might actually be a phantasm concocted by CEOs and five star Generals, one maybe had to be suspicious once again.

Josephine Meckseper certainly is. Her latest outing has a very grave and chiliastic air. Its centrepiece is 'Ten High' (all works 2008), a stage set-cum-catwalk-cum-shop display comprising a large, glossy black base and an arrangement of symbolically loaded objects: three mannequins (one attired in an armed services' veterans shirt); a smashed mirror; a bottle of whiskey; cigarettes and ash-tray; a bible; a Zimmer frame and cane and various other oddments. Bible-belt morality is up for sale. Two smaller, but similarly conceived installations - each comprising objects placed on a round, rotating glass shelf, tiered like a cake stands - make similar points. One, entitled 'Bankrupt', comprises a miniature State of Liberty plastered with feathers (tarred and feathered), a disco ball plopped in a martini glass, a feather duster and an American flag (and a few other oddments).

The influence of Haim Steinbach has always seemed to loom behind Meckseper's installations, and this outing is no different. I was also reminded of some of Banks Violette's work, since Meckseper's palette here shares his love of stylised darkness: it occupies a grey scale running through black, silver and white, and the walls of the gallery are painted with black and white stars and stripes which are angled down in shooting diagonals. And I was reminded too of Jack Goldstein, and particularly of James Rosenquist, in his great early days, when he freely, fetishistically linked food and cars and planes and bombs. This was most apparent in Meckseper's '0% Down', a video which marries footage from various car commercials by rendering them all in black and white (a device which does much to equalise their tone): it seeks to remind us of the fantasies of speed and violence that are regularly put before us in the hopes that we'll sprint to our nearest car dealer (and drive home slowly and safely). Meckseper also picked up on these themes in 'Untitled (Mustang)', a plastic wrapped, apparently unused canvas carrying photos of a custom painted Ford Mustang; and in 'H3T', an unprimed canvas holding a heavily patriotic advertisement for a Hummer, and a man's stars and stripes tie.

One is hugely grateful for the likes of Meckseper, after eyeing galleries full of insipid abstract painting; grateful for the fearsome power of her presentations; grateful that someone still suspects we're being had (even if we're maybe not). One has only two doubts: about the true freshness and contemporaneity of her work (her inspirers, like Steinbach and Lichtenstein, seem all too present); and about its power as political commentary: there is almost an irony in Meckseper opening her show on May 1st, since there is a gulf of tone between her intellectual satire and the patriotism of America's working class (for whom the flag is an icon that must not be sullied). But while we continue to be amazed at what the class of politicians and businessmen are capable of, we'll continue to need artists like Meckseper to complain.

*Morgan Falconer*

Josephine Meckseper  
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'0% Down'



Installation view



Installation view



All images are courtesy of Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York. Photo credit: Tom Powel Imaging, New York.

Morgan Falconer is a journalist and critic. After an age spent immersed in 1920s New York as a graduate student, the result now props up his computer, and today he writes about contemporary art and culture for a variety of publications including *Art Review* and *Modern Painters*.



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