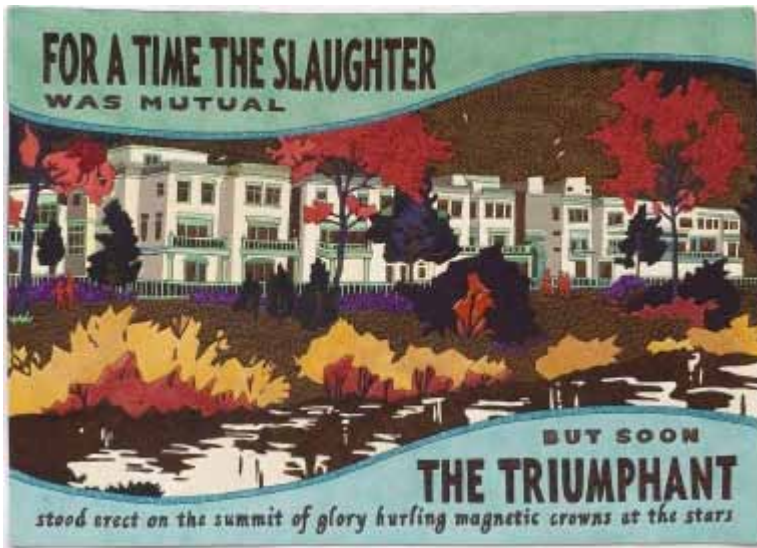


frieze

Carol Jackson

GALLERY 400, CHICAGO, USA



The history of gutting in Chicago is given form in the work of Carol Jackson's art. It's a dense history, simultaneously gorged and evacuated of meaning: flayed skins and the slaughterhouse's golden age in the nineteenth-century; the introduction of neo-classical architecture at the White City (read: bloodless, pallid city); sweeping urban renewal projects that erased semblances of folk life, replaced with machines for modern living; the hollowing out of the landscape by the proliferation of advertisements. It seems the by-product of progress is a wasted identity. Jackson's sculptural wall pieces capture this complex quality completely; to claim Jackson's art for Chicago is to say that the gutting process has made life here manageable, even desirable.

Jackson produces thick sheets of leather, embossed with decorative motifs and adorned with architectural facades and playful, moody phrases constructed in leather relief, painted with shiny enamel and glitter. Despite the confusion of sources and materials, they read immediately as advertisements, facilitated by direct compositional elements such as strong text/image pairings and the readymade vernacular of signage, from the Coca-Cola script to the quintessential Americana of road signs. Yet Jackson translates the deictic immediacy of a neon arrow into a rhetoric of melancholic reflection: 'Alas alas alas the time for separation had come amid much weeping & lamentation out of measure', reads one characteristic work. The effect is of signposts along a funeral parade route: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and nostalgia.

Paired with the text, Jackson's best work is displayed in the form of architectural edifices in leather relief: the Modernist glass and steel structure; the brick-laid condominium development; the commercial office tower—all with roots in Chicago and all built-to-erase in the name of better living. Fashioned by Jackson, they dazzlingly memorialize the pursuit of well-ordered living. A Modernist structure in *Graceful Words* (2004) is tempered by the phrase, 'A skillfully told tale will alter fate', yoking the Modernist utopian enterprise with the ambitions of antiquity.

The works attest to the success of destruction as a foundational structure. Leather is an important element of Jackson's work, serving as both her writing pad and building material. Layers of labour living in the hide mix and spiral into a nightmare of associative pathways. The leather simultaneously invokes both the romance and rape of the American West, a stark quilt of butchered bodies and tract housing. The skins, even after being stamped, stitched, and painted by Jackson, resist their new form, edges curling forward to remember the lost body's form.

Jason Foumberg