

## Reviews: New York

### Jane Benson

#### Black & White

"May he who loves not others love himself," utters a slighted admirer in one version of the tale of Narcissus, and the plea is answered by Nemesis, or righteous anger. For the works in this show, "The Chronicles of Narcissism" (all 2006), Jane Benson combined elements of the Greek myth with those of such tales as *The Ugly Duckling*, mixing humor and pathos in her otherworldly

sculptures and installations examining narcissism.

Benson's use of materials showed an impressive economy of means: objects amass layers of significance through their literal as well as their metaphoric senses. In *Plucked and Fucked (Naked Song Thrush)*, a featherless, taxidermied sparrow is stranded atop a pedestal made

of stacked, ragged glass fragments. At play here is the notion of the ivory tower—a secluded place whose inhabitant becomes immersed in his or her own brand of escapism. In *Flaming Vanity*,

fragments of mirrors under a wood platform shoot out like flames beneath a pyre. According to myth, Narcissus burns with love for himself, claiming that nothing but death will set him free.

In the show's centerpiece, a plucked swan balances on one claw of its right foot behind a mirror, both resting on a dilapidated wood platform. The bird's lack of feathers and its inability to view its reflection emphasize its vulnerability as well as its innocence. Given the bird's less than graceful appearance, this state is perhaps preferable. The piece raises questions not only about how we identify ourselves but also about the subjectivity of that process: how do we interpret what the mirror reflects?

Benson also presented a series of globes and antique maps covered with pieces of mirror, addressing how globalization affects identity. Another series here, "Bitches," consisted of smoking jackets and scarves made of fabric sculpted to fall in graceful, feathery tatters that bordered on disintegration—an appropriate metaphor for the ephemerality of appearances. —Sandra Ban



Jane Benson, *Naked Swan*, 2006, Plexiglas, taxidermied swan, lights, two-way mirror, aluminum, and silicon, 43½" x 24½" x 74". Black & White.