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# NEW | ART

EXAMINER





wisconsin

**Margery Amdur**

John Michael Kohler Center  
for the Arts  
608 New York Ave.  
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Female desire, women's work, obsessive activity, and the notion of generativity are all at the root of Margery Amdur's production. The time, processes, and thought involved in making the work all remain evident in the finished pieces. This show, curated by Lisa Tamaris Becker, consists of large, discrete objects and an installation. The objects mimic items commonly associated with femininity—giant purses, tassels, chandeliers, and embroidered tapestries. Though presented at magnified scale and composed of neutral, "non-art" materials like plastic screening, electrical wiring, and clear plastic tubing, these heavily gender-specific objects are more than the sum of their appearances. Together they evoke the textile crafts, a traditionally feminine genre of activity long denigrated within, but now being embraced by, the

canons of art history.

Amdur's installation *Of Silver Threads and Ephemeral Passages* is so over-the-top in its excess of detail and repetition of pattern that it takes on characteristics of kitsch drama. Her cascades of screen and netting, delicate flickering lights, and shadowy, cavernous spaces are romantic, slightly hysterical, and overblown. They represent the spaces of soap opera: faux luxurious, titillatingly heartbreaking, and larded with indicators of social status and gender. She gives her viewer layered Baroque ruffles of scrunched-up fabric screen, the shadowy imprints of silkscreened lace patterns, and the pearlescent gleam of concealed lights, all in a fashionably limited palette of shiny silver.

The whole *mise-en-scène* suggests the boudoir before the seduction. This theatricality is amplified through Amdur's use of lighting effects and video projections, providing an eerie ambience precisely like that of dreams and high drama. The biomorphic shadows cast by her flickering lights are both haunting and comic. They speak of Plato's Cave and Casper the Friendly Ghost in the same breath, simultaneously occupying the spaces of aesthetics and popular culture.

Amdur's objects echo the theatricality of her installation work.

Viewing habits are thwarted by her manipulations of scale; meanings are exploded or diminished, orders of appearance are reversed, objects are turned inside out, interiors displace exteriors, and skeletons are given priority over skin. *Chandelier* is a Medusa-like snare of tubes and wiring. While its general outlines are chandelier-like, this identification is undermined by the details that comprise the form: there is too much matter, a nightmare of obsessive over-detailing that deteriorates into indeterminacy. Again, the materials Amdur employs mirror this condition of flux between states: they are all transparent or reflective, as capable of forming definite objects as they are of appearing indefinite.

Dreams are not always full of meaning or significance; they are more often than not absurd juxtapositions of fact and fancy, and odd associations. Amdur's open-ended processes—pleating, folding, wrapping—also result in unlikely juxtapositions, and manifest ambiguity. She produces objects that are eternally in flux, constantly escaping definition and generously encouraging an endless flow of association in the minds of fascinated viewers.

*Kathleen Whitney is a New Mexican sculptor and critic.*

**Slop Art**

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Art objects are commodities like countless other consumer goods. Yet the culture industry presents, markets, and distributes its goods in quite a different manner than industries pushing things of a more mundane variety. The artists' collective Slop Art is out to change that by transforming the rarified atmosphere of the art gallery into the egalitarian zone of your local Wal-Mart.

Slop Art impresarios Brian Reeves and Adriane Herman stock their *Supermarket* through a call for submissions, presenting an array of work to fit every budget. The duo of artist-curators seems to favor work that deals with pop culture and throwaway consumer goods, either in its themes or its materials. Nonetheless, the art objects are essentially props for *Supermarket*, a performance and installation piece that includes over 40 artworks displayed like consumer goods in a grocery store, and performers in the role of check-out clerks. Concerned with subverting—or at least circumventing—the machinations of the art world, Slop Art conflates curatorial choices with retail marketing techniques. The exhibition catalogue takes the shape of a weekly store circular titled *Wall-Art*, which is printed on cheap, glossy newsprint and features images, descriptive snippets, and prices for each object. In the store/gallery, shelves and pegboard-like displays mix with sculpture pedestals and conventionally hung two-dimensional work. Packaged compact discs, floppy



**Margery Amdur**  
*Of Silver Threads and Ephemeral Passages*  
(detail), 2000. Mixed media,  
dimensions variable. Courtesy  
of John Michael Kohler Center  
for the Arts.