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Review: 'The Story of O(OO)' at David Lewis Gallery

by Ken Johnson
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An installation view of "The Story of O(OO)" at David Lewis Gallery. Credit Adam Reich/David Lewis

The title of this provocatively puzzling exhibition refers to the erotic French novel "The Story of O," by Pauline Réage, and to a recent movement in philosophy called Object Oriented Ontology, or OOO. (Backers of OOO put real things rather than perceptions or mental representations at the center of the study of existence.) Here, works by six artists are arranged on and around a diagram on the floor resembling a hopscotch court. It's from a chart devised by Graham Harman, one of OOO's leading proponents, that has to do with how we know reality.

Jeffrey Joyal's assemblage "The Day Is My Enemy" features a crab holding a glowing wire in its claws, perched atop a small, old wooden barrel. Jared Madere's untitled sculpture centers on a bewigged figure in a dress whose head and extremities are made of slender tree branches. In Lucy Dodd's "Mantis," a pointy industrial lighting fixture resembling the head of a giant insect looks down on a small sculpture of praying hands. Alex Mackin Dolan's "Herschel's Secret" is a cardboard man carrying a container resembling a videotape box with the title "Necronomicon" – presumably a reference to H. P. Lovecraft's fictional magic manual – dimly visible through its plastic wrapper.

One of two older works in the show, Lynn Randolph's "Transfusions" (1995) depicts a woman on a laboratory table with bats drinking blood from her neck under the gaze of the vampire from the film "Nosferatu." (That painting and others by Ms. Randolph illustrated the book "Modest Witness" by Donna Haraway, author of the influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto.") The other older work, Paul Laffoley's painting "Homage to Black Star of Perfection" (1965), shows a radiating design that resembles a compass rose.

Exactly what all this adds up to is hard to say, but it certainly provides rich fodder for philosophical reflection on art and objecthood.

David Lewis Gallery

88 Eldridge Street, near Grand Street, Lower East Side

Through June 28

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