The Story of O(OO)
David Lewis
by Tobi Haslett
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Strapped, whipped, and yanked along, this show is a bridled beast, and like its namesake—Anne Desclos’s 1954 S-M novel The Story of O—it gasps with exquisite agony. Jared Madere’s untitled installation is a battered monument to binding and constraint: Branches are stuffed into a hippie dress and topped with a wig, making a psychotic mannequin, a wretched anthropomorphism of fabric and bark. Behind it (her?), Madere has strung up what looks like sagging sails, streaked with blue and patched with cracked mirrors, a picture both glittering and strangely soft—but the whole thing is bolted to the floor with metal cables, and voilà: We’re slapped back into Desclos’s chamber of bruises and leashes.

Pretty homologies spring up all around. Lynn Randolph’s Transfusions, 1995, also writhes within the tangles of bondage and sexualized submission. The painting is wittily crass, as it depicts a white woman—perfect measurements, chest thrust up in a cartoon of ecstasy and possession—preyed upon by bats, an IV drip, and a fanged, claw-shaking Nosferatu. Lucy Dodd’s metal sculpture Mantis, 2015, glances at it from across the room, its power cord snaking on the floor like a dropped whip.

But the floor itself is what locks the pieces in a final grid of domination and surrender. It’s stamped with a diagram from philosopher Graham Harman’s book The Quadruple Object, 2011, a key text in the field of object-oriented ontology (OOO)—the exhibition’s other namesake. Harman has made a career of leveling human consciousness, pounding subjects into objects: but the branches, cables, cords, and wires dribbling over his rigid chart whisper a different story, that of a consciousness both throttled and free, laughing through the beating.

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