

Anthea Hamilton

IBID PROJECTS

“Figaro” is a jeweler’s term for a weave of chain in which every fourth link is heavier than the others. It is also the title of a tall, thin sculpture (all works 2006) by young London artist Anthea Hamilton, consisting of four elements. A small heart-shaped locket dangles on a figaro-patterned chain; this necklace hangs from a long curved twig. The twig is held in place by a small wad of clay attaching it to a chair leg. At the bottom, the fourth part, a metal clamp, functions like a mighty foot to visually connect the whole construction to the floor. Bottom-heavy and gradually tapering from the thick, functional clamp on the ground to the tiny, poetic heart suspended in midair, fragile *Figaro* is delicately balanced, perpetually on the verge of toppling over. Its fall would be buffered, however, by the expanse of small white porcelain tiles covering the gallery floor and parts of the walls.

With its gentle bend and the cheap jewel forever proffered at the top, *Figaro* suggests a small, quivering suitor, tentatively offering a banal love token. It is a distinctly romantic work, and somehow figurative despite bearing no literal resemblance to the body. It might suggest a frail human figure, but also an emaciated sapling or a piece of junk. Barely stable in its construction, it occupies the floor confidently. Similarly, Hamilton’s airy, dramatic hanging sculpture *Untitled (Odile)* balances almost by miracle. Dangling from the ceiling like a giant Edie Sedgwick earring, it too reaches the floor, in this case weightlessly, on a length of coiled rope. Combining elastic, thin, curved elements and four horizontal bars, the work’s emphasis is on the six billiard balls thickly tied to the parallel rods, which look like notes floating on a musical staff. *Odile* would not appear out of place in a gymnasium, looking, as it does, like a piece of specialized sports equipment—perhaps a training device for a featherlight acrobat.

Hamilton’s art reflects an interest in weight and counterweight, the unexpected combination of materials, and the human body. Staging the gallery as a tiled bathroom—or perhaps a morgue—the artist enhances our intimate bodily proximity with her highly detailed art. Hamilton’s skewed figuration, mixing genders as well as human and mechanical elements, is reminiscent of Surrealism; her use of mannequins, collage, and found objects reinforces this kinship. Explicitly figurative works such as *Man*, built in three distinct parts—cutout wooden legs beneath a rolled-up poster forming a perfectly cylindrical torso with a mannequin’s head propped at the top—seem the result of a game of Exquisite Corpse, played in three dimensions.

This is the first solo exhibition by recent Royal College of Art graduate Hamilton, and sometimes her sculptures suggest that she has not yet shed her student skin altogether. *Untitled (Dance)* occupies space very self-consciously, with flat objects and relief sculptures clinging shyly to the wall. However, in Hamilton’s bolder works, her themes—music, the gendered body in fragments, an unprecedented mix of found and formed materials, as well as purely sculptural investigations into texture and equilibrium—result in an uncommonly delicate picture of late modernism.

—Gilda Williams