

# Chicago

**New works by: Lara Lepionka,  
Jennifer Talbot, Christine Tarkowski,  
Anne Wilson**

*Gallery 400, University of Illinois at  
Chicago*

*14 February - 11 March*

by Kathryn Rosenfeld

This show indicates that almost three decades after the feminist art movement, women artists are still grappling with what it means to be a Woman Artist. As I wandered from Anne Wilson's conceptualist-inflected textiles, through Christine Tarkowski's and Lara Lepionka's social commentaries to Jennifer Talbot's video installation, it was difficult to tell whether I was in 1968, 1973, or 1993.

The minimalism of Sol LeWitt meets the

feminism of Eleanor Aasin in Wilson's *A Chronicle of Days*. The 100 white metal frames of Wilson's white grid contain swaths of white damask tablecloth, upon each of which she's used human hair to embroider abrasion- or stain-evoking patches. The cloth represents the equally time-honored conceptualist strategy of marking the passage of days with repetitive activity: a small key to the grid announces each square's production date. Some of the embroideries are concentrated blobs, some are speckled like proliferating fungal spores, while others are frenetic and spidery, suggesting the stain of a leaky pan more than that of an organic or bodily substance. Imbued, as needlework, with the weight of the historically feminine, the stains complain dutifully against the sterile, angular (masculine) grid.

Second-wave feminist art history similarly encounters Lepionka's conscientious deconstructions of the dining industry. As in Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, Lepionka uses table settings as tools of corrective pedagogy. Napkins, dishes and placeware are embroidered/hitched with quotes from the artist's collaborators: food service workers who indict us with stories of redness and sticky taping. While this preachy tone is partially mitigated by Lepionka's disclosure in her artist's statement of her own artist-waiter status, her contribution to the perpetual attempt at art-activism fusion adds little.

Talbot's video installation, *Cherry Picker*, quenches the thirst for indelicacy and viscera left by the other works, rolling out a red-on-white carpet of mashed, decomposing fruit matter (produced by Talbot and a collaborator in a performance at the opening). The strongest piece in the show, Talbot's work nonetheless hovers between Corlee Schreemann and the recurrent yet endlessly, well, fruitful topic of the masochism of over-consumption. A projected video depicts the artist gobbling huge amounts of cherries while harnessed to a table with a specially constructed bondage device (also exhibited) that lives somewhere between a mental ward and an S & M dungeon. While analogous in impulse, Talbot's investigation of the vicissitudes of manners and eating for purposes Lepionka's in depth and sophistication.

Constructed of silk-screened tenting

material, Takowski's *Cabin* is a dimensional approximation of Unsubomber Theodore Kaczynski's home. On the gallery wall, a digitally manipulated photo proposes the installation of the piece on an urban rooftop. The work may have seemed more fully realized had someone actually inhabited the domicile in this manner, but the ambiguity produced by the combination of the mute house and the indefinite photo is a welcome fail to the didacticism, and the giriness, that otherwise pervades the exhibition.

While they mostly do so intelligently, the artists in this show seem convinced that remaining in direct conversation with their foremothers is the best, or at least safest, way to be a Woman Artist now. On the other hand, faced, like everything else, with its own inevitable millennial paralysis, art—feminist and otherwise—is bound to cast a longing glance back to find out what it should do next.

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#### **Anne Wilson**

*A Chronicle of Days*

Detail. Found cloth, hair thread. Photo: Stephen Picken.

