Meinzer. “Double Vision,” Impulse Magazine, 14 May 2025.

IMPULSE

Double Vision

REVIEW | MAY 14 |WRITTEN BY MEINZER

In the latest New York installment of curatorial project LUmkA, four artists stage works that attempt to disrupt the consumer capitalist gaze. LUmkA’s nomadic operation allows for site specificity to play heavily in the curation of the show. LUmkA director Cortney Connolly already had selected the artists and a curatorial theme when she found 158 Rivington St, an abandoned wood paneled storefront with an unfinished basement, for the show’s location. The exterior of the storefront is blockaded by construction barriers; navigating to the front door to ring the bell subverts the expectation of the traditional gallery space. A site-specific installation in a non-art designated interior is a somewhat rare occurrence in New York’s current scene, and among these occurrences, it is even rarer that the show collaborates with the architecture of the space as opposed to merely adhering itself on top of it. While this may seem like a minor distinction, the curatorial relationship with the space is immediately noticeable upon entering The Theatre.

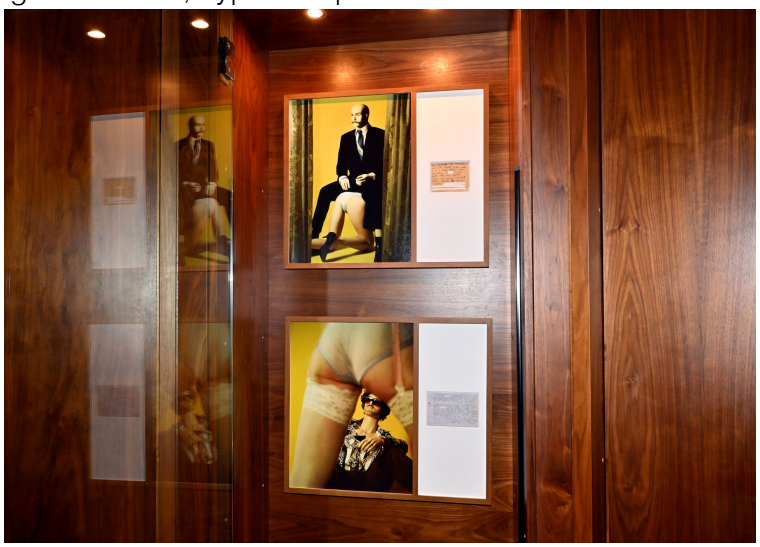
The curators have made precise but restrained interventions in the space with the installation of The Theatre. On the left side of a white-tiled hallway, a product display case presents Anna Ting Möller’s works, Untitled (Bone I) (2022), Untitled (Bone II) (2022), and Untitled (Bone III) (2022). Emerald green velvet lines the case, and nestled in the folds of the lustrous fabric are large ceramic bones wrapped in dried kombucha skin. Connolly relayed that the bones are the

imagined remains of a dragon from a popular Chinese children's myth. The leathery skin sutured and tailored around the ceramic bones is immediately recognizable as Möller's signature medium, kombucha mother—a proxy mother the artist received from her host in China while on a trip to locate her birth mother. Since receiving the kombucha mother, the artist has nurtured the living culture and incorporated it into her practice.

The display case produces a double image, destabilizing the viewer and simultaneously drawing them nearer. The glass and green velvet are framing devices that transpose the bones into a language of luxury goods. Simultaneously, the contents of the case take on an archeological tone more closely related to a museum display case. The glass and velvet, no longer flirtatious, become protective, barring access to the object and making it less accessible to the viewer. The question of access, however, only heightens the pull of desire that plays out in the object-viewer relation. In both readings of the presentation, Möller's uncanny objects, set in familiar modes of presentation, enact the consumer/voyeur game of desire.

The sterile hallway opens up to a narrow storefront with dark wood panelling; the performance of The Theatre reaches its almost overwhelming climax as Marianna Rothen's fully immersive set expands into every crevice of the small space. Rothen's work is a picture-in-a picture-in-a picture—world-building in its highest form. Originating from her blonde alter-ego,Lady, born from the trauma of a childhood modelling career, the world manifests in video, photography, and installation works. In every scene, Rothen is the only live model. She replaces male

characters with mannequins: Ken, Sonny Boy, The Italian, Brian, among others. The male gaze is then turned on its head, still visible but now prohibited by the mute and inanimate male figurine. Rothen recaptures autonomy in her work, an important ability when an artist chooses to use personal traumatic experiences as their material. Rothen's film Mail Order plays on a monitor framed by red gingham drapes, parodying a certain all-american fantasy imbued in Rothen's work. Opposite the film, the gingham motif continues: Cock-a-doodle-do stages a boys' club vignette. Mail Order and Cock-a-doodle-doo are inspired by Rothen's youth, but Making It Real draws on personal experience to an even greater extent. A series of diptychs, Rothen pairs staged photos of The Lady and her male mannequins with excerpts from her childhood diary. While some details have been blocked out, the viewer assumes the voyeuristic male gaze, inching closer to read the artist's private details. Rothen's intervention in the space is an image-obsessed, hypnotic spin-out.



The Theatre continues in the private backrooms of the space: past Möller's etchings on stretched kombucha, Luca Rekosh displays Dede (2025), a 2-channel video ensconced in unfinished wood, suspended in the narrow stairwell leading down to the basement. It is an oddly placed piece, a work that requires prolonged looking staged in a place of movement. Conversely, the artist's own surrealist stairway, Soup (So Up) (2025)—an image produced between childhood memories of his Romanian village and his personal dreamspace—leads to nowhere. Soup (So Up) is rustic, almost unfinished-looking, but its dimensions fit the confines of the space perfectly. In dialogue with Möller, Rekosh's work plays with the imaginative and uncanny.

Miles Scharff's Even if something did you would never really know (2025) is something between a machine and an organism. The radio-based sculpture performs seemingly at random; the work picks up on electromagnetic currents, amplifying a presence unknown to the spectator. The mechanisms of the piece are engaging; while the design favors function over form, its symmetric steel skeleton and delicately woven copper wire are industrial yet refined. Unlike Rothen's work upstairs, Scharff's work is completely unaware—or at least unconcerned—with the viewer.

In her curatorial essay, Connolly calls on the works to snap audiences out of "the 'consume, work, starve, consume' sequence" which she asserts obstructs an authentic mode of being.

LUmkA

Calling on Antonin Artaud's 1938 manifesto "The Theatre of Cruelty," the works presented in The Theatre use the uncanny, surreal, and the shocking to momentarily deprogram the consumer capitalist mindset and locate a truer sense of self.[1] Almost 90 years after The Theatre of Cruelty was published, sensationalism has been co-opted by marketing tactics which increasingly rely on spectacle for sales. Artworks are material objects, and they are almost always for sale. Art still carries complex meaning, but the art market has a funny etiquette of masquerading its presence, as if it threatens the art object's authenticity.

The Theatre is certainly arresting—the seductive quality of the works function as a mechanism for social intervention. Curatorially, the site-specific space nudges the viewer out of the typical white-cube choreography. But when the audience is conditioned to associate sensationalism with a consumer's object-viewer relationship, is this enough to short-circuit the consumer-capitalist mode? The surrealists rejected Artaud on the basis that the theater was too bourgeois. Could the same not be true of visual art? Perhaps we should examine the model of standardized artwork pricing presented in Adrian Piper's "A Proposal For Pricing Works of Art."[2]

The Theatre is on view at LUmkA from May 3 through May 30, 2025.

The exhibition was curated in collaboration with Nicoleta Krenteras and Mila Rae Mancuso.

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[1] Antonin Artaud, "The Theatre of Cruelty" in The Theatre and its Double (Grove Press: 1958), 89–132, https://www.alchemists.com/fb/theatre_its_double.pdf.

[2] Adrian Piper, "A Proposal for Pricing Works of Art," The Fox 2, no. 2 (1975): 48–50, https://www.ubu.com/media/text/fox/Fox2.pdf.