

Elizabeth Orr: Spirits in Rotations



Truth to material is a modernist cliché. As it goes, each substance has a set of innate properties to be celebrated; transforming or obscuring them is a sin. Glass is transparency, wood is nature, steel is triumph, etc. Elizabeth Orr softly refutes this dictum, suggesting that truth lies not in a material's depth, but somewhere between the interplay of its surfaces. Her glass is tinted, her wood stained, her aluminum roughly hewn into notched forms. The basic unit of *Spirits in Rotations* is a wall-bound sculpture comprised of seemingly mass-produced, fetishized hardware. The permutation, however, is beholden to some unavailable logic, as if a CNC machine erred wonderfully—slats are arrayed across irregular forms, tinted glass panels are fastened at odd angles, aluminum is scoured in an unpredictable pattern. Offsetting the drab tones of globalized minimalism are pops of color where wood has been dyed with natural juices, a nod to an adhocist ethos, or perhaps a latent critique of pandemic-age faux home-steading.

In a room full of glass, the mind turns easily to the slick curves and electric glow of the gadgets that fill our world. Yet Orr's surfaces recall a time when glass was decidedly less prosaic, when it reshaped the urban landscape, revealing that which was, until the 1920's, transpiring behind a brick wall. It is this confluence of public and private space that we now navigate daily, as we interact with the world through hastily arranged plexiglass barriers. Much like James Stewart in *Rear Window*, we are all viewers with impunity, gathering clues from a point of remove, even as we must turn up the volume on our mask-laden gesticulations.

In this context, Elizabeth Orr liberates glass from its pragmatic function. Rather than looking *through*, we look *at*. This glass doesn't propose a detached mystery, nor does it demand a caricatured display of emotional articulation. Its true meaning lies not in its depths, but rather, in its sandwiching of aspected layers. This is work that points directly at the geopolitical facticity of its making, and so it is unsurprising that Orr herself considers automation, environmental collapse, and population growth as the harbingers of a new perceptual mode. Something nebulous yet all-pervasive is "turning to mesmerizing, turning predictable, familiar, turning stuck." In the quiet permanence of these surfaces, there is no honesty or dishonesty, just material life. *Spirits in Rotations* is a burlesque frozen in time—a world without tension, without mediation, without the big reveal.

—Nolan Boomer