

One in the eye for tradition



Needlework, but not as we know it: One of Whitney Lee's 21 small rugs

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Stitch Or Swallow

★★★★☆

Something is stirring in the arts-and-craft movement, and you can bet your best cross stitch that your grandmother wouldn't like it. A step beyond the women who sit and knit on the Circle Line is a group of eight US artists – currently exhibiting at Here – which has taken the traditional art of needlecraft and injected it with a dose of sexual politics and kitsch.

Whitney Lee's 360 Spin (2004) is arguably the most arresting. A 'contact sheet' of 21 small rugs is best viewed at a distance, where it becomes clear that a woman is stripping and posing for a camera. Working from Playboy photographs, Lee's rugs make the obvious comment about the objectification of women but are most effective as a brilliantly executed undoing of an inherently dull medium.

Continuing the rug theme, Allyson Mitchell's Spread (2004) uses the tactile appliqué fake fur to show a woman in a provocative pose. Rikki Endsley is equally confrontational, but perhaps less original, with her embroidered women posed and labelled starkly as Bimbo and Hussy.

Thankfully, there's some subtle subversion, too, with Dana Carlson's almost pretty embroidery and beadwork of a snake, scorpion and Lily, the Bobcat. Breanne Trammell is the most cutesy, with her prints of ponies, stars and hearts on a floral pillowcase in a kitsch mix. It's refreshing stuff overall, with tongue remaining firmly in the collective cheek.

Lacie Wood

Until Feb 18, Here Gallery, 108 Stokes Croft, Stokes Croft, Bristol, Tue to Sat 12.30pm to 6.30pm, free. Tel: 0117 942 2222.
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