

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW



Rob Wynne: *Perfect Danger*, 2008, pigment print on canvas with embroidery, 36 by 30 inches; at Locks.

PHILADELPHIA ROB WYNNE LOCKS

Rob Wynne is not afraid of beauty and its seductive shimmer, albeit beauty of a somewhat tongue-in-cheek sort, spiked with a shot of self-awareness. In his latest solo show, his first in the spacious second floor of the multi-level Locks Gallery, Wynne had room to flex and did so with gusto.

Wynne turned that space into a shining fantasia of rococo curiosities in a wide array of materials and formats (all works 2008), often combining the beautiful and the repellent—for example crafting a fly out of gorgeous iridescent ceramic. He toys with scale, blowing up small things to many times their actual size, like the flies that also patterned the black and white wallpaper Wynne created for the gallery's bathroom, and the clear glass teardrops that appeared throughout the show. A long trestle table supported, at either end, attractive handmade books contain-

ing the artist's own texts, as well as a 5-inch-diameter blown-glass eye, there as if to read the volumes. Also on the table was a 10-inch pair of elegant if also macabre silvery glass feet, a slender luster-glazed ceramic branch, a golden ceramic egg and a delicate bowl of spun glass titled *Nest*.

One wall displayed a group of small images of a butterfly, an octopus and a snowflake in gleaming glass beads sewn onto vellum—nature made fabulous. The opposite wall was hung with clear, weeping glass drops and large framed colored prints of a jeweled rose on pink satin overlaid with texts that read, for instance, *To Be Like You Is My Desire*, or the forlorn *I Walk Everyday in Search of You*, their surfaces sparkling with both glitter and sentimentality. Two printed canvases of 18th-century porcelain figurines featured embroidered text.

One read "perfect danger"; on the other one, the word "faux" suggested the levels of deception and unreliability at work in the exhibition: canvases that are not paintings, skepticism skittering into feeling.

Plump, poured mirrored-glass letters—a hard material in soft-looking shapes—spelled out sappy lines such as *The Feeling of Departure Clings Like a Wet Leaf to My Heart*, like Lawrence Weiner in full meltdown. These mirror texts, extending almost floor to ceiling, were the show's most compelling works. Wynne's gift is his ability to use kitsch to spark real emotions, to wring wit and poetry out of the seemingly decorative. Other mirror-text works suggested a definition of art and a description of its transience: *A Place that Doesn't Exist* and *Like the Flickering of a Candle* (the latter also the title of the show). In both, form glamorously reinforces content.

—Lilly Wei