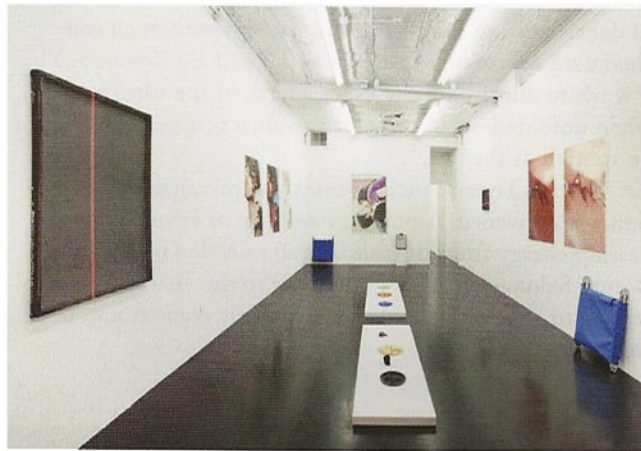


VALERIE SNOBECK Essex Street

The associations that could be made between the Grand Beauty Salon, located across the street from Essex Street gallery, and Valerie Snobeck's solo exhibition, "Grand Beauty Salon," at first seemed only titular. The works in the show had nothing to do with the beauty industry; in fact, they seemed disconnected even from each other—flat and three-dimensional objects positioned on the wall, on pedestals or on the floor. However, the Grand Beauty Salon provided more than a name. It also served as a fourth wall, filling the view through the gallery's picture window. Within this closed circuit, the 13 new works, upon closer investigation, proved to have numerous connections with each other.

In the front room, the wall-hung *En Femme 3* and *En Femme 5* were made of black debris netting wrapped around wooden frames, each with an orange stripe of the same material, recalling Barnett Newman's explorations of the sublime. Against the back wall, *En Femme 6*, a small, empty, wooden display case—a replica of a childhood gift from the artist's grandmother, according to the press release—sat on a knee-high white pedestal. "En Femme," a French term that refers to both femininity and cross-dressing, lends a gendered and sexual meaning to the works, and provided another framework for the exhibition.

Interspersed on the walls were six poster-size images from Wiki-Commons of couples kissing, from the series "Grand Beauty Salon." The pictures are on plastic laminate that was pulled off the surface of inkjet prints, which resulted in copies of varying saturation. (In the tiny back room, three more peeled prints from this series depict an electrical cord plugged into itself, the cord's brand name—Siemens—a pun tying into the theme of gender and sexuality.) Leaning against the walls of the front room were *Carton #343 of 382*, *Carton #266 of 382* and *Carton #381 of 382*, three folded "ostrich" beach lounge chairs. For the exhibition, Snobeck sewed an envelope of blue fabric around the chairs, preventing any sort of penetration into the guts of the objects, a gesture that is both protective and suggestive of self-sufficiency. In the center of the room lay *Toward distance between bodies* and *Of distancing bodies*, consisting of low white plinths upon which rested, in orderly rows, colorful Depression-glass plates, tiny pieces of eroded "beach" plastic and clumps of black tar covered in barnacles.



The exhibition, according to gallery personnel, was very much about how things fit together. This occurs on many levels—both in the imagery (the connected chord, the kissing couples) and between the objects themselves. For example, the artist plucked the barnacle-like paper scraps created by peeling the laminate off the prints and turned them into pulp. This pulp was dried in a mold made of debris netting to create handmade paper, which was then used as backing in *En Femme 3* and *En Femme 5*. The low white plinths are the exact length of the ostrich chairs when unfolded—and some of the objects upon them might be spotted at the beach.

As each layer of inclusiveness was revealed, the exhibition was enlivened. A pulsing organism of elements harnessing energy from the fourth wall provided by the Grand Beauty Salon—all this was available to the viewer who was willing to inquire, but did not necessarily come from the work itself.

— Brienne Walsh