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‘Rapaciously Yours’

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All images courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York.

Rapaciously Yours, the first major solo exhibition of works by South African artist Frances Goodman, is on display now at Richard Taittinger Gallery, 154 Ludlow St. The show is a breathtaking demonstration of skill and wit, managing to strike that exceedingly difficult balance between gravity and grace.

Greeting the viewer at the front of the gallery is *Violaceous* (2015), composed of a staggering collection of acrylic nails painstakingly fixed to a sculptural base. Hundreds of faux nails (a mere fraction of the 25,000) used throughout the show) in various shades of bruised pink and purple swarm out from the wall into a puckered mound. It's an uncomfortably organic piece, reminiscent of the malignant growth, the lips of a vagina, or as the artist has observed, a spider's nest in the impossibly tense moments before it bursts with life – hideous, fascinating life.



Violaceous, 2015. Acrylic nails, resin and foam.

In *Violaceous*, Goodman meets the abject with the voluptuous. Scores of fake nails become a fish's scales, or the exoskeleton of a glorious alien insect. The artificial is made to feel natural, mimicking the everyday alchemy of the fake nail, as well as makeup, hair and skin products, a performance of beauty intimately familiar to women. By exaggerating the scale, Goodman changes the stakes: too much of a good thing becomes unfamiliar, even repulsive, but at the same time, irresistibly tactile. Look, but don't touch.

Elsewhere in the show, the play of texture and contrasting materials continues. *Skin on Skin* (2012), a spray of faux pearl jewelry onto a tattered, deconstructed leather car seat, has a masterfully tawdry quality. The collision of sensibilities is plaintive – costume jewelry, cheap and delicate, symbolic of a girl's hope for womanhood, dots the gritty and masculine landscape of the worn leather seat. One can't help but wonder what else got lost between the folds, or for that matter, in the quiet empty triangle at the heart of the piece.



Skin on Skin, 2012. Faux pearls, leather car seat.

Skin on Skin, a phrase derived from interviews conducted by the artist with female sex workers, could refer to any number of frictions: whose skin against whose, and how? Is it pornographic, “girl on girl”? Are the two skins (for those are all we’re given here) grinding against one another in hopes of an intimate connection? Or, was it a more violent meeting that ripped the seat apart? Furthermore, are we to consider the leather seat itself a skin, composed as it is of a once-living material? Goodman forces the viewer to consider the role of the object in human experience, and vice versa.

The competitive composition of materials in *Skin on Skin* is echoed in the in situ installation *The Dream* (2010-2016). Housed in a chamber at the back of the gallery, a messy pool of worn wedding dresses – over 30, gifted to the artist by various women – erupts toward the ceiling, swaths of discarded fabric forming the suggestion of a mushroom cloud. Lit from below by flood lights secreted in the folds of fabric, it casts an eerie silhouette. Interviews with dozens of women across a range of identities on the topic of marriage fill the air, conducted and recorded by the artist over several years. It is cacophonous barrage of voices that interrupt one another at various points. Each of the panels that make up the column of fabric is embroidered in a different script with a phrase derived from the interviews.



The Dream, 2010-2016. Silk, lace, organza, satin, beads, embroidery thread, wedding dresses, sound installation.

The Dream multiplies the layering present throughout the rest of the show into a multi-sensory experience that threatens to overwhelm the viewer. Voices and dresses vie for attention, interrupting one another and forcing the viewer to alter their position to see and hear individual elements more clearly. Each woman interviewed offers a unique perspective on the expectations of women as wives and mothers in society, creating yet another friction between ideologies not always in agreement. In its unapologetic polyphony, *The Dream* refuses the possibility of an individual feminine identity, offering instead of any one answer a larger question, woven from the texture of various feminine experiences, and it is a generative refusal that works its way through the entirety of *Rapaciously Yours*.

Rapaciously Yours will be on display at Richard Taittinger Gallery through April 16, 2016.