

ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2006

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Jane South

SPENCER BROWNSTONE GALLERY

My initial impulse on seeing the nine sculptural assemblages in Jane South's recent exhibition at Spencer Brownstone Gallery was a juvenile one: I wanted to touch them. The checklist described the objects on view as made of cut paper and mixed media, and, with the exception of one floor-bound structure, each contained elements that cantilevered out from the wall on dainty paper hooks anchored by straight pins.

But the constructions' size (up to fourteen feet wide), color (mainly industrial grays and deep, metallic reds), and iconography (nonspecific, but undeniably machinelike) lend them a beguiling sturdiness that tempts one to verify their load-bearing ability. Then a brief, faint draft in the gallery caused a drum-shaped appendage on *Untitled (Small Wheeled Red)*, 2006, to flutter slightly, revealing these sculptures to be every bit as fragile as South's medium would suggest.

South is equal parts structural engineer, virtuoso origamist, and obsessive miniaturist: She begins

by painting on paper, which she then hand cuts, folds, and fastidiously fashions into three-dimensional assemblages with dozens of components, hundreds of small orifices, and thousands of tiny markings. The work on view is tougher than that seen in her last outing at Spencer Brownstone, in 2004: Her palette is reduced and darker, her compositions denser, and some of her objects tinged with menace (tiny sawtooth blades ring the edges of tirelike forms in *Untitled [Long Red Wheeled Construction]* and *Untitled [Long Wheeled Construction]* [both 2006], and several works resemble grossly inflated computer chips or circuit boards). Her sculptures remain largely abstract, but their constituent parts, excepting a kidney shape here and there, conjure the heavy-industrial landscape of both the city where she was born (Manchester, England) and the place where she now lives and works (DUMBO, Brooklyn)—vents and grates, louvers and scaffolding, pipes and ducts.

South should augment her description of her practice as one of "combining drawing and sculpture" to encompass her architectural

sense of spatial play. The invitation card for the show featured a photo of *Untitled (Red Square)*, 2006, shot from slightly below and filling the horizontal field of the card; without any contextual information, and if reading the white space behind the construction as sky, one could easily mistake its slats and grills for the facade of some *Blade Runner*-ish urban building. The space in and around her sculptures is activated via an array of illusionistic devices: The same form appears as convex in one part of the work, concave in another; delicate lattices are overlaid at different angles to dizzying Op-art effect; and cross-hatching covers nearly every surface, reinforcing three-dimensionality even as the spindly shadows cast by these objects summon their origins in flat sheets of paper.

Unfortunately, South's sculptures lose a bit of their wonder when seen in multiple. They seem somehow less curious, and there was a sense here that an attempt to counteract such leveling had led to some unusual and ultimately unproductive installation choices. *Untitled (Black & Yellow Wheeled Construction)*, 2006, for example, hung in the office on a side wall behind the reception desk, while *Untitled (Blue Fragment)*, 2006, was positioned nearly eight feet off the ground. Like most artists, South has been included in many group shows; like few, her work may actually benefit from such a context—the better to appreciate its singularly elaborate weirdness.

—Lisa Turvey



Jane South, *Untitled (Red Square)*, 2006. paper and mixed media, 63 x 73 x 12".