

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

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Stills from Rachel Perry Welty's *Karaoke Wrong Number* (2005-2009), 2009, digital video, approx. 6 minutes; at the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum

### RACHEL PERRY WELTY DECORDOVA SCULPTURE PARK AND MUSEUM

Massachusetts-based Rachel Perry Welty, who has been exhibiting for about a decade, is known for thoughtful images made by reconstituting such materials as supermarket labels and flyers, receipts, price tags, twist ties and fruit stickers. "24/7," the artist's first solo museum show, celebrated the obsessive and creative mapping of her daily rituals as a consumer/collector in a dazzling selection of over 20 works, including drawings, sculptures, installations and videos from 2001 to the present.

One of Welty's earliest and most lyrical works is *Altered Receipt: Children's Hospital Bill for Inpatient Services* (2001-02), whose source is a 37-page insurance record of her infant son's costly stay in the intensive care unit at Children's Hospital Boston. Welty masks a mother's agonizing and chaotic experience with an ailing baby by painstakingly painting over every word and number of the original hospital bills with opaque watercolor ovals in an array of colors. By devising a system in which specific colors correlate with alphanumeric symbols in the receipt, she transfers memory and meaning into bright, lively patterns. *Deaccession*

*Project, October 5* (2005-ongoing), another cathartic and personal piece, covered a 78-foot gallery wall at the deCordova with over 2,000 inkjet prints meticulously arranged in a chronological grid. Each dated photo documents the artist's practice of ridding herself of a single possession every day. These objects range from a stuffed animal to a shrunken sweater. Each photograph is accompanied by a neatly handwritten document, which, mimicking the language and practice of a museum registrar, includes an accession number, date, title, reason for removal and destination (for example, Goodwill, Craigslist or the wastebasket).

An insatiable fascination with issues of privacy, identity and miscommunication led to *Karaoke Wrong Number* (2005-09), 2009. This quirky video, which is a variation on an earlier work, features Welty lip-synching messages she received on her answering machine from people who dialed the wrong number. In a white T-shirt in front of a white wall, she gives personality and a sense of urgency to the disembodied voices meant for another. *Lost in My Life*, a stunning series of 40-by-24-inch photographic self-portraits begun in 2009, presents Welty camouflaged in a space covered in her precious collections of cereal boxes, fruit stickers, price tags or twist ties.

Welty's less successful images seem detached and decorative rather than funny and

visually engaging. But at their best, her works fully employ a subtle wit, design savvy and scrupulous craftsmanship. *New and Improved* (2010) is a 12-by-24-foot wall installation in the shape of a starburst made from dry-cleaning and supermarket twist ties. Here, Welty finds the perfect balance of content and form while keeping faithful to her efforts to arrange branded culture into striking compositions.

—Francine Koslow Miller