

# Art in Review

## Amanda Ross-Ho and Kirsten Stoltmann

Vaginal Rejuvenation

*Guild & Greyshkul*  
28 Wooster Street, SoHo  
Through Saturday

This exhibition of collaborative and individual works by Amanda Ross-Ho and Kirsten Stoltmann, close friends who work in the same Los Angeles studio building, promises more than it delivers. But it has a nice, nasty-as-we-want-to-be sizzle, starting with its clinical title, "Vaginal Rejuvenation" (although it is more concerned with female autonomy than with anatomy). Pornography, consumption, sentimentality and men are just a few of the topics the artists confront, mostly using images clipped from magazines.

Ms. Stoltmann makes deceptively pretty collages that spell out announcements like "I Want a Divorce" in dense fields of flowers above contrasting images — say, a muscle car surrounded like a shrine by scores of burning candles. In other works she pieces together pictures of quilts, using images of American Indian women or snippets of female nudes. Craft is "the other" of fine art.

Ms. Ross-Ho has several strategies of appropriation. One involves silhouetting an image of a woman in a provocative pose so that it suggests a woman in a different pose; this underscores the persistent legibility of even al-

tered images but also grants the subject a modicum of privacy. "Have the Courage to Be Yourself" is a large appropriated image of an Asian girl standing among cans of paint in front of a Pollock painting. Left unclear is whether aspiring to paint like Pollock is a sign of ambition or, by now, conformity.

The best work by far is a collaboration: a very large color photograph of Ms. Stoltmann, naked and quite pregnant, seated on a chair with her legs wide apart. To this Ms. Ross-Ho added fluorescent orange horror-movie letters that virtually shout, "You Can't Handle the Truth." This implicitly misogynist insult here comes from a woman close to giving birth — the time of great sexual difference when women experience a truth no man can know. No disrespect intended, but this image would make a great poster. Print up a few million.

ROBERTA SMITH



Best in Show

by **R.C. Baker**

January 29th, 2008 1:50 PM

**Amanda Ross-Ho** and **Kirsten Stoltmann** work in the same studio building in L.A., and their joint exhibition, "Vaginal Rejuvenation," is fraught with all the intimacies and betrayals conjured from collaboration (Guild & Greyshkul, 28 Wooster, 212-625-9224. Through February 16). In Stoltmann's 2007 *It's Over No Really*, the title is spelled out in flower decals pasted over photos of American Indians and wildlife—a failed marriage, or an epitaph for native cultures and the environment? It's the personal as political, for sure. Stoltmann uses snippets of pornography in her work, imagery that Ross-Ho sometime nabs, such as in *Flipped Nude*, in which she cut a curvaceous silhouette from one of Stoltmann's men's-mag castoffs, revealing a portion of bare ass and slim ankle within the lascivious contour. Doubled, such cheap titillations feel even sleazier. When the artists work directly on the same piece, the results can be startling, as in the photo of a heavily pregnant Kirsten defaced by Amanda's pink, drippy, upside-down text, "You Can't Handle the Truth." The decals, candles, and emotional outbursts (a rug is spraypainted "Jealousy Is a Bitch") put you in touch with your inner BFF.

Artists, Amanda Ross-Ho and Kristen Stoltmann, have taken on monumental subject matter in their current exhibition, *Vaginal Rejuvenation*—domestic and sexual imagery, pop and punk cultures, Robert Rauschenberg, and feminism, to name a few. The title itself implies that there is a reclamation, restoration, or re-appropriation. It is both sexual and inherently artistic. At the same time, there is something very intimate and sweet about the show emphasizing the element of collaboration and friendship between the artists. In many ways though, they haven't so much collaborated as explored, interpreted, and reclaimed each other's practices. The installation feels like a dialogue between the two ladies and their audience. Most of the work in the show is collage or assemblage using some typically "girly" clichés, like, stickers, pop culture icons, quilts, candles, and relationship taglines like, "This isn't working." The difference is that these things are not in a girl's bedroom or studio; they are in our faces, in the gallery, exposed. Aggressively. Humorously. While the gallery is full of cut up images of hard (and soft) bodies and fake breasts—like *Lack/Stacked*, a pretty hilarious play on the oddly named Ikea furniture line—maybe *Punk (You Can't Handle the Truth)* does the best at getting the point across. A pissed looking tattooed pregnant woman sits naked, legs spread, on a pink chair in an empty space. The photograph itself sits on the floor of the gallery, and spray-painted over the top (upside down), it says, "You Can't Handle the Truth." This image is successful because it directly addresses the viewer, the subject, mass culture, and most poignantly, the images surrounding it, which make it all the more powerful. *Untitled Still Life (Kell Just)* is a subtle, unapologetic collage that you might almost miss among the other works. In a way, collecting bits of each stereotype that appear throughout the show, it reads like a map. The work, though delicate, overflows with references containing images of lame pop icons, Justin and Kelly (the winner and runner-up of the first season of *American Idol*), a quilting pattern, a t-shirt that reads, "I wish these were brains" across the bust, a little photo of a wig, knife, and coffee cup on a table, and the words, "Divorce Court", scribbled at the top all put together with tape and pushpins. The collage, *American Craft*, made to look like a page from a scrapbook, is like a version of American history, from black and white images of Native Americans to cutout photos of present-day naked ladies in a sea of animal, baby, eyeball, and footprint stickers, candles, and buttons, all framed with Mary Engelbreit-like borders. There are some aberrations that seem more like cheap shots than complex, productive or even funny declarations. *Presents from Miami 2* is, unfortunately, more an allegory about a sloppy and over-saturated art world loving itself, than it is related to the core of the rest of their investigation. In addition, when there are bared breasts and covered up vaginas, things gets complicated. Because using this imagery, while commenting on it, simultaneously proliferates it. For the most part, though, this show is about activities, bodies and relationships that, despite continued objectification and prejudice in the world, are now more ours than ever.