



Aimee Rankin, *The Tomb*, from the "Atrocities" series, 1988, mixed media assemblage with lights, motors, and sound, 22½ x 22½ x 22½".

AIMEE RANKIN

POSTMASTERS

In 1942, one could view Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery by turning a wheel and looking through a peephole. That same year, Duchamp rendered this "pervert's-eye-view" by collaging a circular detail of a Paul Delvaux painting into an exhibition catalogue; the detail features a woman's breasts reflected in a mirror. By the time he revealed his *Etant Donnés*, the peep show piece par excellence, Duchamp had committed yet another artistic atrocity: the privatization of visual experience in a public space. The viewer's unshared peep into one of Aimee Rankin's boxed assemblages creates an object/viewer intimacy that recalls these pieces by Duchamp, as well as one's relationship with one's own television set. Rankin's continuing interest in the peep show has already produced the *Theater of Love* boxes, the "Ecstasy" series and now the *Atrocities* series. Her work has acquired an increasingly mechanistic sophistication, similar to Ashley Bickerton's recent leap into flawless technological precision.

The exteriors of Rankin's pieces have evolved from mute monochromatic boxes to cubes covered in a variety of decorative linoleum patterns. The peepholes, no longer simple circles, are now suggestive of the contents of the box. *The Flesh*, 1988, is viewed through a suggestively vaginal orifice; inside one finds a grotesque spectacle of organs and limbs, pulsating to the music of Psychic TV. Sound emanates from the boxes (previous work required the use of headphones), making the once-private experience more public, or at least slightly less furtive.

Rankin presents spectacles of satanic imagery that have already been culled from the folklore of the American music industry and reified in the forms of Alice Cooper and Meatloaf. Titles such as *The Dream*, *The Flesh*, *The Tomb* and *The Secret* suggest a desire to represent a broad range of primal fears and mysteries

by means of their current standard representations. In *The Tomb*, a skull is flanked by mummies and illuminated by flickering CAT scans. Moss and digital clocks litter the floor. In these part-Dali, part-rock-'n'-roll dreamscapes, Rankin is manipulating a preformed and popularized image-language of atrocity.

Rankin's entire project seems a bit overinvested. Her attempt to compress primal and modern fears, animism, seduction, desire, Baudrillard, and Debord into these small boxes makes them burst at the seams. Self-mocking and lewd as her work is, Rankin's humor is lost in her desire to be perverse. Her whiz-kid techno-fetishism is the most enthralling thing about these boxes. Once a button is pushed, things move, lights flicker, mirrors create illusions of vast spaces (and reflect the peeper peeping), music pours out, and all of the different components dance to it with a precision Cecil B. De Mille might have envied.

—MAW

(MATTHEW A. WEINSTEIN)

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