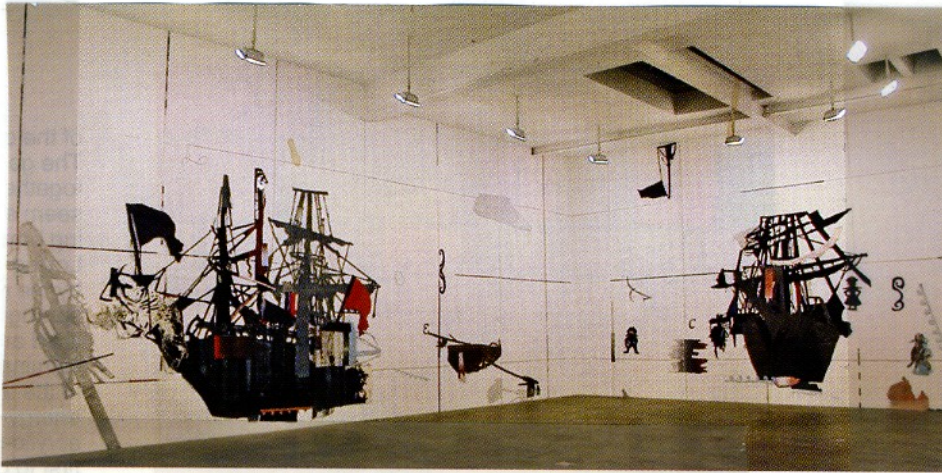


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View of Sally Smart's exhibition "The Exquisite Pirate," 2006; at Postmasters.

Sally Smart at Postmasters

Pirates, long a romantic symbol of the subversion of authority and the rejection of accepted social mores, seem newly fashionable these days. The word piracy has infiltrated the globalist vocabulary to indicate a swashbuckling disavowal of borders and property laws. In popular culture, pirates cross other kinds of boundaries, as in Johnny Depp's gender-bending performance in *The Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Australian artist Sally Smart takes the subversion one step further in her exuberant celebration of the pirate tradition. She uses the four walls of the gallery as a monumental backdrop, marking it with a large open grid that recalls the longitudinal and latitudinal indicators of a nautical map. Arranged throughout are intricately cut-out silhouettes of galleons, rowboats, flags and fearsome pirate shadow puppets. The twist here is that the pirates Smart memorializes are female, a fact attested to in the laciness of some of the cutouts, as well as the addition of collaged feminine fabric. Cutouts of strings of beads, skirts and flying braids adorn the stalwart pirates, aggressively planted throughout the piece with arms akimbo. Female presence is also suggested by additional composite figures made up of

body parts cut out of magazines, perhaps meant to function like exotic native totems found in the South Sea islands. Scattered about the wall, they are reminiscent of the surrealist figures in the work of Kenya-born artist Wangechi Mutu.

Smart notes that this work is based on her research into the historical existence of female pirates. Like these paradoxical figures, her sailing ships are an odd mix of delicacy and power. They are composed of black masses that give way to skein-like interweavings of cut-out fabrics, suggesting the lines of masts or evanescent threads of sea foam. Campy elements like the white skeleton gracing the prow of one ship are combined with references to real life, as when part of a ship is defined by an actual black shirt sleeve. Meanwhile, the room as a whole is activated by the depiction of ships and masts as if they are bobbing, which gives one the sense that they are indeed being tossed about by waves.

The title of this exhibition, "The Exquisite Pirate," refers in part to the Surrealist game of exquisite corpse, in which participants are asked to add to a drawing without being able to see what the other players have contributed. Smart's collaged figures and ships have a hybridity similar to such drawings, appearing to be made up of a variety of disparate and even contradictory materials and forms. The eye is constantly forced to shift between a straightforward reading of the images and the physicality of the materials that compose them. Meanwhile, the silhouettes are open to multiple readings—as when a flag might also be the outline of a country, or a gun a peg leg. In the end, this show may not provide a great deal of insight into the gender roles

of pirates, but it does offer a feast for the eye and a sense of the pleasure of making.

—Eleanor Heartney

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