

## Art Reviews

By **HOLLY MYERS**  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

### Carrying a Cultural Message:

There are few objects more representative of contemporary First World culture than the plastic shopping bag. Not only does the bag embody abstract principles that drive our economy—mass production, convenience, disposability—but it literally makes consumer capitalism possible, allowing us to buy many products at a time and transport them easily. We see and use so many bags in the course of a day, however, that we're not likely to pay them much attention before we discard or recycle them.

By using plastic bags as her primary medium, **Dianna Cohen** halts the usual cycle of production, distribution and disposal and calls upon viewers to reevaluate the aesthetic potential of such a common object. To make the work, she sews fragments of bags together into carefully composed, quilt-like wall hangings. Some of these lay flat against the wall, while others hang in draping folds. They're playfully asymmetrical in composition and most are deliriously multicolored, though one of the most memorable is composed en-

tirely in shades of pink, red and orange.

Cohen's approach to her medium is not new or entirely uncommon. The use of ephemeral, commercial materials dates at least as far back as Cubism and Dada. Unlike much of the work that is produced in this vein, however, Cohen's pieces don't seem trashy or junky.

In fact, they're as appealing as any mass-produced bag is meant to be. Rather than treating the used bags as byproducts or privileging their commercial qualities (nearly all of the works are happily free of logos), she focuses on their most exciting intrinsic qualities: bright, plastic color and sensual surfaces.

There's an element of girlishness in this tactile enthusiasm that also offers a welcome respite from the typical trash aesthetic. Her approach does not ultimately deny the ephemerality of the objects—the eventual fading and deterioration of each piece is predetermined—but rather presents them as one might present a bouquet of cut flowers: all the more beautiful because of their inevitable decay.

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1904 East Seventh Place Los Angeles CA 90021 USA  
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