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ArtReview

Martin Soto Climent How small gestures can articulate bigger questions of sexuality and desire

by Laura McLean-Ferris





Desirability is a powerful, society-shaping, yet ephemeral quality that lurks in people and things, which can be suddenly activated, switched on. It can launch a thousand ships, or sell a trillion bottles of Coke; it can be teased out by fashion, by flattering lighting, by hunger, touch or even the subtlest of interventions. The Mexico City-based artist Martin Soto Climent is highly adept at drawing out the appealing, sexual or otherwise heightened qualities of images and objects using the most minimal means. Indeed, it is most often the case in Soto Climent's sculptures that any of the objects he modifies can be returned to their found state. Venetian blinds are twisted so that they resemble the movement of a dancer, but can always be straightened back; shoes tied together in suggestive, fetishistic assemblages can be untied; tights stretched across the room can be unpinned from the wall.

Desire (2009), for example, comprises three small leather purselike antique eyeglass cases in shades of pale raspberry, warm khaki and faded tomato, all facing one another in a small circle on the floor. Each case has been turned inside out and had its bottom pulled through, so that it appears to be a small metal mouthlike gape from which a substantial leathery tongue is extended. The piece is both small and endearing in a Muppetey way, and yet also has certain erotic connotations: the tongues are a little too far out of the mouths, as though they might be wagging suggestively, while the purse as an object has a strong Freudian and surrealist history as symbolic of the vulva. It is significant, too, that there is more than one case here. In several such works of Soto Climent's, similar objects are bound together in groups: a chorus of around 800 crushed beer cans

which seem to be singing in unison in *Impulsive Chorus (Asahi)* (2009), or sighing, as the English phonetics of the Japanese beer brand might suggest; a pair of bottles bound together by pale green panties in another work; two economy-size cereal boxes dressed in office shirts for *Portrait of an Unknown Telepathy* (2010) to create a pair of characters.

Soto Climent not only draws out the polysexual qualities of objects that can doubly read as male or female, but also the way in which many objects might be subconsciously or associatively considered male or female, but then also have the ability to make a confusing switch using a slight twist, revealing the dualities that are always already inscribed within them. *Tight Game* (2009), for example, is a pair of black tights whose legs have been splayed in the air, stretched tight and thin, and pinned to opposing walls of a corner, while the gusset area, now hanging upside down, is stretched out around two basketballs, which hang down low. Perhaps with some reference to Jeff Koons's basketball sculptures (the suspended balls), the sculpture continually flips between resembling a large pair of breasts and a pair of hanging testicles, throwing the identification of other body parts – arms, legs and so on – into confusion.

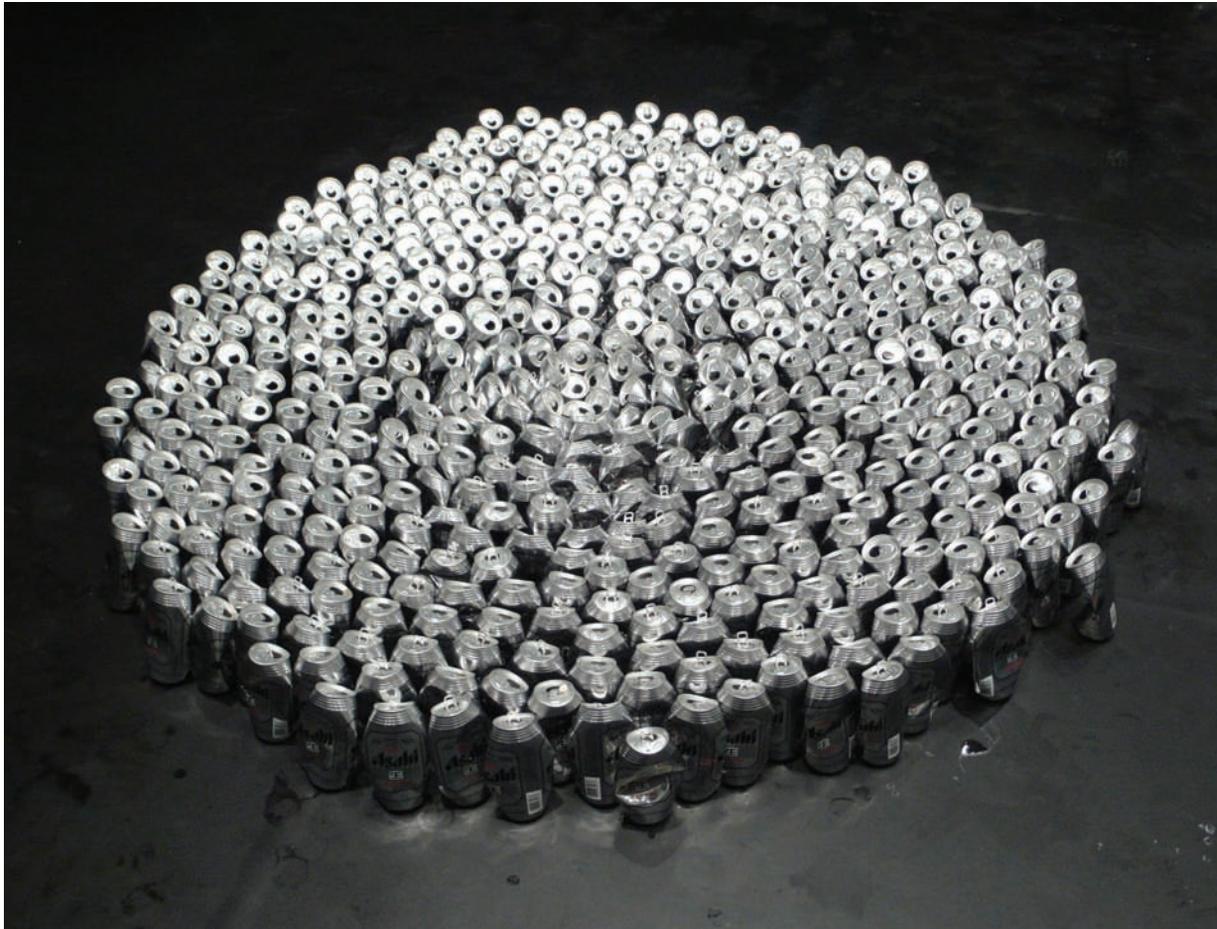
Even when Soto Climent makes images that appear like collages, the image sources remain uncut, unstuck and unharmed. A group of image works entitled *The Equation of Desire* (2010–11) were made by gently folding two or three images from a collection of photographic yearbooks published between 1959 and 1972 so that they collage together when placed, with one image momentarily touching another, on a scanner plate. The selected images, taken from

above *Desire* (detail), 2009,
three antique eyeglass cases, dimensions variable

facing page *Impulsive Chorus (Asahi)*, 2009, 800 Asahi
beer cans (approximately), dimensions variable

preceding pages *Equation of Desire*, 2010–11,
Piezo print on Hanhemühle paper, 25 × 31 cm

Each case has been turned inside out
so that it appears to be a small metal mouthlike gape



A chorus of around 800 crushed beer cans
seem to be singing in unison



a golden era of photographic experimentation, before the development of critical mistrust, feature unapologetic attempts to capture beauty and movement: in one example a lefthand image shows a beautiful woman in a croptop and shorts leaping high in the air from a sand dune, watched in delight by a young girl; the middle image shows an American footballer emerging triumphantly from a scrum with the ball, together with the caption 'through the middle'; while on the right, in a flight through the air mirroring that of the woman on the dune, a man with a camera is pictured trying to photograph a flying seagull. Rather than the adhesive permanence of collage, here several 'decisive moments' of capture are caught in their own decisive moment, to use Cartier-Bresson's turn of phrase. They are held briefly together on the scanner, and fixed to a time in which the creation of such images was experimental, expansive – something that now resembles a celebration of the form itself, and its attachment to picturing the body.

Recently Soto Climent has created a series of works that use car parts as their materials, stepping outside the domestic sphere from which his previous works have drawn their associations.

Car windscreens, curving and tinted with the faintest of blue, are paired to create wings in an exhibition entitled *Migratory Butterflies* (2013). A series made using car-tyre inner tubes extends Soto Climent's playful material eroticism, which he had until recently channelled into 'tights' works featuring coloured feather boas and feather dusters. While the tights tapped at a domestic form of kink that brings to mind a figure secretly riffling in an underwear drawer, these new works, knots of shiny vehicle inner tubing, take the clefts and bulges of a similar form (pliable empty tubes) and move them into the realm of the urban, inorganic and industrial. The aerosol spray-paint that decorates the sculptures smacks of graffiti in train stations and bus shelters, though it is shiny, almost cyborglike bodies that are conjured in these works, inevitably bringing to mind references such as J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973). In *Kiss* (2013), the cleavages created by the bends in the tube are highlighted with pink spraypaint, creating any number of associations with various body parts. But the work narcissistically only kisses itself, quietly suggesting the loop of self-love and mirroring that our contemporary cyborg bodies seem drawn into ever more deeply. ar

above *Tight Game*, 2009, stockings,
two basketballs, dimensions variable

all images but facing page Courtesy the artist and
Clifton Benevento, New York

facing page *The Moon and the Swirl* (detail), 2012,
10 twisted blinds. Courtesy the artist and
Karma International, Zurich

