

ARTFORUM

"Pae White"

By Michela Moro

2017



View of "Pae White: Demimondaine," 2017.

The interstices that Pae White's work occupies become monumental in this exhibition, where familiar objects warp, encouraging other associations. The show's title declaims "Demimondaine," but more than in just the nineteenth-century sense of women living at the fringes of affluent society, as participants without proper qualifications. This *mondo di mezzo*, or in-between world, is substantial in and of itself—as a choice, with a sidelong, insect-like gaze.

In the gallery's courtyard, visitors confront abstract marble sculptures: explosions of gigantic popcorn with a familiarity that dilutes any feeling of danger. Inside, the rooms are luminous and filled with color. Large-scale tapestries—recurrent objects in the artist's output—are woven with elements foreign to Jacquard looms, such as flat and wide pieces of Lurex, which forced the Flemish weavers who produced these works to modify their machines. But such technical details fade into the background as the vividness of the depicted insects, marijuana plants, and opium

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

poppies (in *Bugz & Drugs - Indian Summer* and *Bugz & Drugs - Mid-Winter*, both 2017) gain the upper hand in the sumptuous fabric, perhaps provoking an appeasement of inner chaos through alternative substances.

White blends contemporary technologies with ancient artisanal practices, addressing, with a non-neutral lightness, key issues such as our relationship with food. For instance, she transforms avocados and crabs into 3-D sculptures, using sandstone in a way that brings to mind eighteenth-century porcelains and vivid still lifes. An enormous chandelier made of colored glass stamped with runes, bees, and logos designed by Paul Rand generates a personal alphabet and illuminates our most hidden impulses. When she presses on with mobiles that are exceedingly friendly and elegant, one intuits just how highly evolved her sense of the elsewhere is.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

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