



## New York

### Niki Ketchman

Kouros Gallery

The use of nature in art can appear rather dubious today, given the dense flow of landscape imagery in mainstream advertising. Niki Ketchman's suite of new sculptures plays with a range of natural motifs, rendered by hand, and incorporates an aes-

**Niki Ketchman, *In-tent*, 2002.**  
Stainless steel rods, fiberglass mesh, Lycra, polyester line, and feathers, 27.5 x 20 in.

thetic that is most often encountered within the realm of public art.

Placed in the center of the gallery, the shiny black and green layer of Lycra that forms the abstract arch of *In-tent* (2002) suggests a functional purpose beyond that of simple decoration. Made of stainless steel, polyester line, and feathers, the curved slopes on either side serve as backrests for potential viewers, as illustrated in two laser prints hung on the nearby wall and titled *At Home with Laptops*. Notions of usability also surface in *Snake in the Grass* (2002), a stuffed 12-foot extension of neon green and camouflage fabric. Another selection of images, *War Games*, *Jesse Conquers*, and *Karen Succumbs*, illustrates how this work might be used.

For Ketchman, opposing notions of internal and external environments are seamlessly fluid. Her choice of materials also reveals that naturalism is a by-product of our contemporary urban environment, which finds itself moving further away from an entirely free and playful world. *Inside Out* (2004), for example, is a densely knit, interwoven rectangular structure of steel rods, aluminum mesh, and wire. Standing seven feet high, this piece partially references an elaborate Victorian mirror frame. A selection of steel-cut leaves drapes the right side and upper left corner. The high density of wire woven into a broad margin creates the form of a low-hanging tree. On the reverse side, a screen of mesh reflects black silhouettes of the leaves, while the weft of wire continues to seep over the top, functioning as a drape that frames the window.

A sense of eclecticism appears in *Comforter* (2003), which consists of a black pillow that depicts



a figure resembling the Venus de Milo. A thick, silver chord connects this piece to a four-foot, Corinthian-style pedestal made of black wire and steel rods. The juxtaposition of old and new is emphasized in a print hung on an adjacent wall. *Maya and Marge* (2003) depicts a young infant and elderly woman lying side by side, with the classical motif lending support to both.

In *Up Side Down* (2002), steel rods decorated with small fabricated lilies support a hollow sphere of silver wire filled with frayed, black feathers. The adjoining print, *Awry*, portrays a woman standing in the upper right corner looking down on a man who falls backwards into a dark abyss. Ketchman's narrative suggests that this piece is the source of an awkward moment.

Walking the fine line between sculpture and design, Ketchman's works challenge old dichotomies—art versus craft and spontaneous performance versus static formalism—making them irrelevant. In addition, the interactive, physical tangibility of these sculptures removes all taint of elitism and makes them available to a considerable audience.

—Jill Conner