

# ARTslant

**Minimal Mayhem**  
by Charlie Schultz

**PICK**

**Aesthetic Anarchy**

Elena Bajo, Sara MacKillop, Cristiana Palandri  
Scaramouche  
52 Orchard Street, New York, NY 10002  
November 13, 2011 - January 8, 2012



There's nothing beautiful in this show and that's the way the three women exhibiting work wanted it. Elena Bajo, Sara MacKillop, and Cristiana Palandri—all Europeans born in the mid-seventies—have created an assortment of sculptural assemblages from domestic and discarded material designed to flout the pretexts of aesthetic consideration. It's the sort of work that probably wouldn't strike you as art if it wasn't in a gallery.

In situations like this one discord is its own brand of unity and form takes precedent over content. Elena Bajo's contributions may appear off the cuff, and are likely meant to, though there are details that suggest they haven't simply been slapped together. Each piece in her series *A Script for a Form N* (there are four iterations, all 2011) is fundamentally rectilinear though that sturdy shape is constantly disturbed. Nails poke precariously from partially painted wooden slats, a slab of dirty green glass is supported by a pair of cinderblocks, stretcher bars attached one on top of the other are stuck up on a wall. These pieces served as props for a performance the artist executed during *Performa*. On their own they have a somewhat forlorn character, like that of something rescued and revived that's been left behind but not forgotten.



For better or worse if you put an object on the ground in a gallery you won't get away from comparisons to Carl Andre. Such is the case for Sarah MacKillop's piece, *Jigsaws* (2011),

which is comprised of five finished puzzles placed upside down and overlapping one another. It is inherently modular like much of Andre's work and draws its visual potency from its placement. *Jigsaws* is oriented on a diagonal against the square corners of the gallery. One of the puzzles arches up the edge of a wall, straining though not breaking the weave of its constituent pieces. There is an easy pacific sensibility to the work that is enhanced through its relative proximity to Bajo's gritty nails and cinderblock roughness.

To be fair, were I to see Cristiana Palandri's work on the street I would recognize it as art, which is to say that while there are art historical precedents for all the work on view—arte povera and minimalism mainly—Palandri's is the most obviously traditional. Her objects are handmade and hung on the wall right where we expect them to be, and yet like MacKillop and Bajo's work they are essentially gestural pieces. In a manner that recalled Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning*, Palandri almost completely obscures her ink drawings beneath a half-inch of paraffin wax. Titled *Diatomea*, after a type of microscopic unicellular algae with an incredibly complex geometric exoskeleton, the drawings appear as hazy abstract forms, perhaps flames, beneath sheets of scumbled ice. They remind me of what it feels like to dredge up a distant memory.

It's not easy to be an aesthetic anarchist. Anything with a given form is susceptible to considerations of beauty, even though that particular quality may not be the point of the object, gesture, or situation that is presented. In a sense it's an untenable position, which is not to say it's without value. Quite the opposite really, because what the exhibition does so well is challenge our assumptions about our ability to challenge our assumptions, and that may not be pretty but it's a damn useful exercise.

~Charlie Schultz



Images: **Elena Bajo**, *A Script for a Form N. 1*, 2011; **Sara MacKillop**, *5 jigsaws*, 2011; **Cristiana Palandri**, *Diatomea 7*, 2011. Courtesy Scaramouche NY.

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