

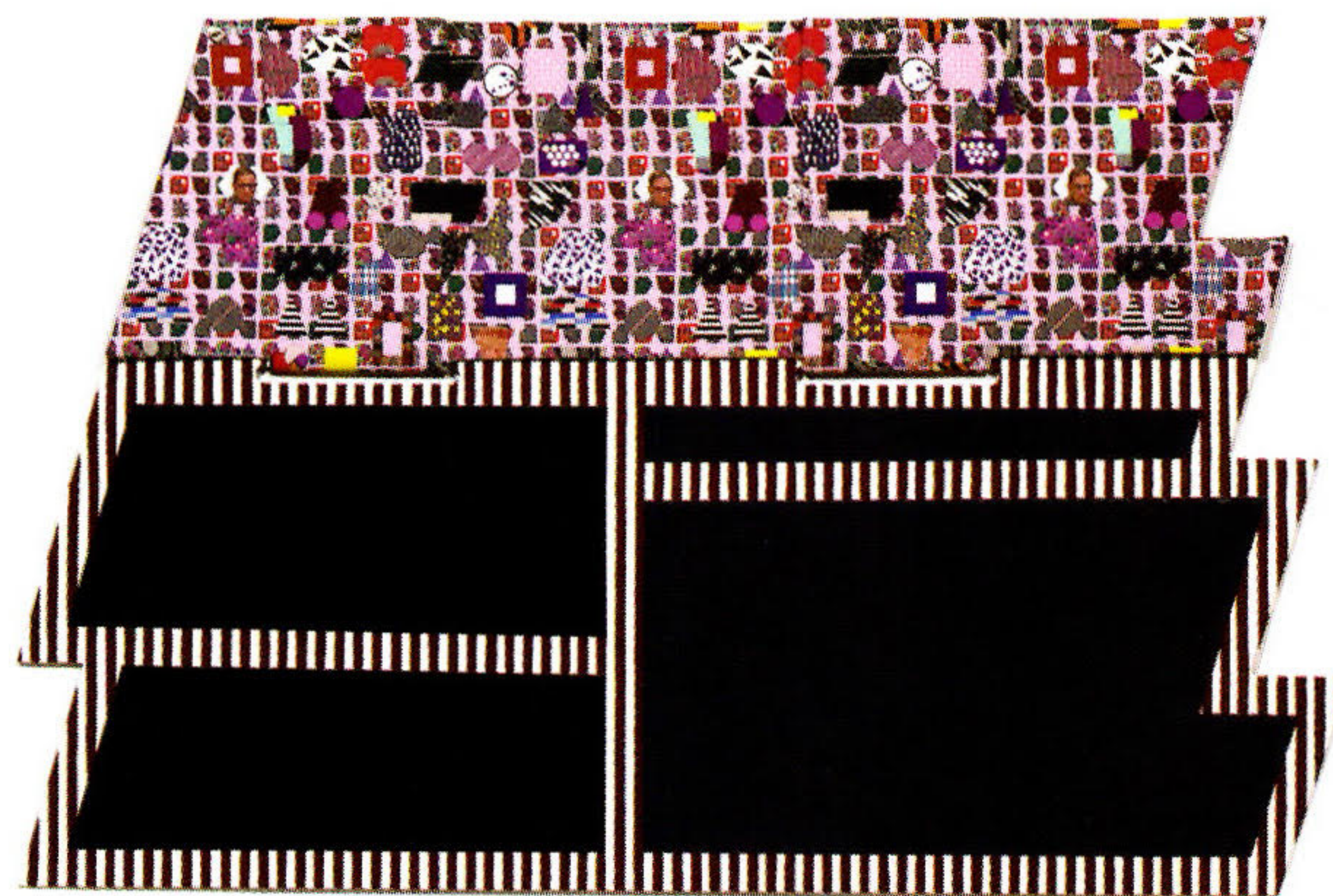
Ruth Root

356 S. MISSION RD.

In a press release for a 2008 show at Andrew Kreps Gallery in New York that transcended the largely gratuitous genre, Ruth Root offered a page of source images absent of any explanative text. She instead arranged thumbnails in gridded rows, their tidiness belying a capaciousness of interest, showing beachy toilet-encircling bath mats and forlorn-looking ski socks interspersed with exemplary works by Josef Albers, Lygia Clark, and Blinky Palermo, among others. All added up to her eccentrically shaped paintings: wafer-thin enamel-on-aluminum compositions of shifting color planes within extruding and sloping architectures that she mounted as closely as possible to the space's walls. For her outing at 356 S. Mission Rd., Root made such appropriations evident within the paintings themselves (all *Untitled* and completed in 2017). Each work exhibited there comprised two separate but interlocking sections. The uppermost registers were made of cloth pulled taut over fusible muslin and canvas interfacing, and the lower regions were painted Plexiglas (sometimes brushed and sprayed, and by turns messily gloppy and relatively smooth) that hung from the top sections like giant earrings from lobes. Continuing her recent use of fabric-and-Plexiglas paintings as fully imbricated constructions, Root acknowledges, materially, points of reference from quilting to modernist abstraction. The conceptual complexity of her works is predicated on questions of how paint—and paint as would-be image—sits relative to the support.

Likewise appealing to the diagrammatic anew, Root made one piece—a horizontal rectangular form that sits atop a quadrant of black polygons with connective notches running down its left and right edges—a winkingly self-reflexive Duchampian *Boîte-en-valise*. The pattern of the fabric panel—designed in Photoshop and implementing found imagery—is a sort of digital sampler, an oddly hyperreal assortment of items on a light-mauve field. Image samples include the head of the show's patron saint, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, but also a piece of pizza, its glistening surface blistered and oily; miniature artworks (Root's older pieces, as well as those of others, including Frank Stella); textile fragments from Sonia Delaunay and the Wiener Werkstätte; and the sharp geometry of a security envelope design. With so much stuff incorporated in such a compressed space, the constituents are necessarily small, but not uniformly so; Ginsburg, for instance, looms large over the variegated ground.

Root eschewed hanging the paintings on the gallery's existing walls, instead building new, freestanding ones that were installed at various angles in the center of the large space. This manner of installation made seeing more than one or two works at a time nearly impossible, and made getting a scene-setting shot of the entire display that much more of a fool's errand—even as the mechanics of each work suggested the parallax of part and whole that would perhaps, despite the implicit directives of the angled walls, remained unresolved. This strategy left



seemingly inexhaustible the possibilities for dealing with things that exist in flickering relation to convention as much as to real, physical space, performing a kind of unattainable gestalt. Furthermore, in moving the literal connection between painting and wall to the front of the surface as a visual element (in her earlier metal-and-enamel works, she

employed hidden cleats for this purpose, but here grommets were conspicuous), Root maintains the priority of canvas and stretcher. This is especially interesting since she separates the painted area from the fabric that historically might have received it. She importantly builds upon Richard Tuttle's dyed sheets nailed to the wall, or Robert Ryman's various backings screwed into it, in suggesting the canvas's incipient utility irrespective of its harboring of pigment. And yet she also allows for a functionalism quite apart from these precedents in claiming that the hanging mechanism exists as something between "a macramé plant holder, a shaped holder for a typewriter or gun, or a soft guitar case."

—Suzanne Hudson

Ruth Root, *Untitled*,
2017, fabric,
Plexiglas, enamel
paint, water-soluble
crayon, 46½ × 72".