

## FIRST LOOK



View of Anthea Hamilton's exhibition "Lichen! Libido! Chastity!," 2015. Courtesy SculptureCenter, New York. Photo Kyle Knodell.

# Anthea Hamilton

by Wendy Vogel

"IT'S ABOUT BEING faced with the physical object. Words become moot," British artist Anthea Hamilton remarked to me about her sculpture *Project for door (After Gaetano Pesce)*, 2015. The work—an 18-foot-tall foam version of a man's backside, his hands spreading his ass cheeks apart as they appear to crash through a brick wall—could certainly render viewers speechless. Based on an unrealized 1972 entryway proposal that the Italian designer and architect Gaetano Pesce made for a luxury Park Avenue building, it is the centerpiece of "Lichen! Libido! Chastity!," Hamilton's first U.S. solo exhibition, currently at SculptureCenter, New York.

Along with the towering naked butt, motifs like kinky chastity belts suspended from chains and "liberatory" platform boots reference the 1960s and '70s sexual revolution. Born in 1978, Hamilton herself looks to the era with the avidity of a fan, appropriating midcentury signifiers from fine art and pop culture into her sculptures, performances and films. But her work doesn't rely on nostalgia alone. Even the title of her SculptureCenter show, with its double exclamation of "Libido!" and "Chastity!," suggests ambivalence. "It's almost more taboo to be chaste," the artist said.

In Hamilton's exhibitions, references are often conveyed in various material registers. At SculptureCenter, brick appears in

the building itself, as a pattern on three sets of wallpaper covering architectural elements (including the wall surrounding the 3-D butt) and as a woven design on a wool jacquard suit. Stylized representations of nature also appear throughout, from the flowing vine-like Art Nouveau forms cut into the steel chastity belts to the kitschy floral pattern of a towel attached to a platform boot.

Hamilton's previous work often alluded to glossy consumer culture through the application of images onto cutout shapes, resulting in stage-set-like assemblages. *Leg Chair (John Travolta)*, 2010, includes a hinged clear base in the shape of a woman's open legs, on which the artist affixed images of the actor. Hamilton has also created several performances with amateur Kabuki actors, evoking a theater genre that she has described as "pure surface and image, a wall of noise."

In the Lyon Biennale, Hamilton shows an installation bordered with wallpaper mixing stripes, a landscape scene and a larger-than-life cartoon by R. Crumb. In Crumb's grotesque image—which Hamilton isn't entirely at ease with—a woman with a bodybuilder physique sports heeled sandals with socks, a pink bow, hairy legs, a white minidress and a wide-eyed grin. "It's really well-calibrated as an image," Hamilton says. "It holds you in that allure, and it also keeps you at a distance." Hamilton's work seems to aspire to the same effect. ○

**CURRENTLY ON VIEW**  
Anthea Hamilton's solo exhibition "Lichen! Libido! Chastity!" at SculptureCenter, New York, through Jan. 4, as well as works by the artist in the 13th Lyon Biennale, through Jan. 3, and "British Art Show 8," at the Leeds Art Gallery, England, through Jan. 10.