

Helen Rae: Runway

July 7–August 12, 2022

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present *Runway*, a solo exhibition of drawings by self-taught artist Helen Rae (1938-2021). The show will be the first since her recent passing at the age of eighty-three and features fifteen previously unseen works released by her estate.

Rae, born deaf and nonverbal, began making art at the age of fifty at the First Street Gallery (now Tierra del Sol), a studio arts program for people with cognitive disabilities in her native Claremont, California. Her deep level of engagement in drawing as her primary means of communication suffuses her work with a level of intensity and intimacy. Her artworks, modest in terms of media, made with colored pencils and graphite on standard 18 x 24-inch sheets of paper are anything but simple. They overflow with visual information rendered in painstaking detail, tightly juxtaposed and crammed within a dense pictorial field that seems to float and shift in space.

What is especially captivating about Rae's work is what she sees and how she sees it. Her subject is ostensibly the fashion and advertising photographs that she uses for inspiration. She translates these commoditized depictions of beauty and glamour in ways that create rhapsodic distortions and reveal a profound level of personal identification. Her remarkable focus in these pictures, their abundance of detail, her vivid colors, eccentric draftsmanship, sense of textural presence and glorious passages of patterning pile up in luxurious assembly. In a 2016 review in the *Los Angeles Times*, art critic David Pagel noted, "...So convincing is her vision of things that after looking at four or five drawings you feel like an alien — out of place in a world that shares significant features with everyday reality but is charged with a kind of sizzling energy that is both exhausting and intoxicating."

A runway show for the runaway imagination, Rae's art is a cornucopia of luxury apparel and accessories, carefully selected and edited by the artist, all mixed and matched as if in some elaborate game of dress-up, blinging with designers like Chloe, Prabal Gurung, Ralph Lauren, Diane Von Furstenberg and Versace, whose brand names function as semiotics of wealth and beauty. Rae was keenly attuned to the way each of us looks to this endless stream of pictorial seductions to divine what we might wear or how we can appear to others. This emotive veracity in her art is exactly why in 2017 the preeminent fashion magazine, *Vogue*, ran a feature article about her drawings alongside the photographs she based them on. Hers is a brilliant, unique act of imposing honesty on a medium that submerges any sign of reality beneath a mirage of lights, poses, unlikely anatomies, and layers of makeup and digital Photoshopping, exploring the dream that is self-identification and uncovering the elusive truth in beauty.

Helen Rae's work first gained the art world's attention at the Good Luck Gallery in Los Angeles, where Paige Wery produced three solo exhibitions in 2015, 2017 and 2019. Her only previous solo show in New York took place at White Columns in 2018; her art was also presented numerous times in group exhibitions and at the Outsider Art Fairs in New York and Paris. Rae's final solo show before her passing was at LA's Tierra Del Sol Gallery, where Wery landed as director after the closure of Good Luck. Helen Rae's artworks are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York) as well as the American Folk Art Museum (New York), where three drawings are currently on view in *Multitudes*, an exhibition celebrating the institution's sixtieth anniversary.