

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

A love letter to mom in 72 photos: Artist Susan Mogul's latest, now on view



Susan Mogul, detail, "Free Association," 2019. A grid of 72 5-by-7 inch digital prints. (Sharon Mizota)

By SHARON MIZOTA

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Susan Mogul's exhibition at the gallery As Is L.A. is an unabashed love letter to her mother, and by extension, to her former self. The L.A. artist has been making videos, installations and photographs since the early 1970s, and this installation harks back to her first exhibition, "Mogul's August Clearance," at Canis Gallery in the Los Angeles Women's Building in 1976.

In that show she created a bargain basement outlet to sell her photographs, which were hung on hangers like clothing or arranged in discount bins. It was a self-deprecating commentary on the raw commerce that underpins the art world.

The current show, "Less Is Never More," inflects that commercial language with the emotion of personal recollection. The show sets the stage with photographs and ephemera from that first exhibition, leading into the main gallery, which is set up like a designer showroom. Mogul's mother, Rhoda Blate Mogul, was an amateur photographer and interior designer. Her avid interest in Midcentury Modern furniture was clearly passed down to her daughter, as seen in plinths bearing six Modernist chairs. Each chair bears a Mogul-branded tag that tells its brief story. We learn how Rhoda gave the chairs to Susan or how Susan bought knockoffs that reminded her of her childhood home. In this case, the furniture not only evokes the bodies of mother and daughter, but the inheritance passed from one to the other.



Installation view of "Susan Mogul: Less Is Never More" at As Is L.A. (Sharon Mizota)

In the center of the space, two more pedestals bear rows of custom shopping bags, each adorned with a large, color photo of a significant object in Susan's personal history. Like the tags, the backs of the shopping bags relate the biographical import of each object: birth control pills, pieces of clothing and, of course, chairs. On the wall opposite hang five pieces of clothing that belonged to either or both Moguls. Each has its own story, told on a tag.

The Rosetta Stone to this whole endeavor is a grid of 72 small photographs mounted on the wall. These mix found imagery with images taken by Susan and Rhoda, including many that appear elsewhere in the show. The groupings often form humorous little meditations. For example, the upper left corner compares Rhoda's pregnant belly with a host of bubble-shaped chairs, furniture and dresses. The personal quickly shades over into product.

For many, shopping is self-definition. This was especially true for women of Rhoda's generation and class, who had the spare time and means to buy designer furniture and practice photography in a home darkroom. In framing her relationship to her mother as a showroom, Susan turns memory into a product. This may seem crass, but it does speak to the ways in which we imbue objects with sentiment. Isn't that what art objects are, anyway? And they can be bought and sold.

ON VIEW

Susan Mogul

Where: As Is L.A., 1133 Venice Blvd. (entrance on Constance St.), L.A.

When: Tuesdays-Saturdays, through Sept. 8

Info: (213) 610-4110, as-is.la