



SLUMPING AROUND Jillian Mayer's Sculptures for a Digital Age

BY DANIEL AUSTIN WARREN

Slumpie 65- Thicc Zucc, 2017.
Photo by Signe Ralkov at Ofelia Plads (Copenhagen).

Miami-based, internationally shown, multi-disciplinary artist Jillian Mayer is responsible for the “Slumpies,” an ongoing sculptural series designed for a theoretical space.

Put crudely, the “Slumpie” is an object meant to facilitate a more comfortable public-accessing of cyberspace. Taking it a stretch further, the Slumpie (as the artist herself claims) envisions “a practical solution to the contemporary world of cell-phone-dependent humans cum ‘post-posture’ persons.”

This makes the art object a real answer to a pseudo-hypothetical question: What do we do when our necks are crooked from too much doom-scrolling, or from walking-and-talking with our phones pressed to our ears, or from reposing bedridden and binge-watching for hours on end? It renders the series like a revolving showroom of imaginary solutions, as if some

furniture-based corporation was hypothetically hiring the new Man Ray or Herman Miller to design a response to our self-obsessed, imaginarily fractured state of being, along with its subsequent, and expected, deformations.

In light of this speculative marketing brief, the resultant objects are a hilarious hodgepodge of disjointed calamity; some “Slumpies” attach to walls and support akimbo elbows; others resemble lounge furniture, but with contorting undulations like mock medieval devices of detainment; some Slumpies resemble plinths or daises; others appear as both pedestal and trophied art object (therefore appearing quite useless in comparison to their also-mangled kin).

Variation and multiplicity aside, in the simplest sense, any given “slumpie” comes to life through its own publicity. Because

of its being anti-sensible, the Slumpie is nonsense in privacy—it might even suggest a certain madness. The object invites the awkwardness of interaction, the seen-ness of the user overcoming its preposterousness.

Regardless of the artist’s statement, I would argue for the Slumpie as being meaningful through public engagement. That’s because the Slumpie is not actually a tunnel to a more comfortable internet experience; it is an object encouraging self-identification through its tandem participation—a union of IRL and URL, if you will.

I only re-encountered the Slumpie lately because I follow Mayer on Instagram; she had reposted others’ photos of themselves straddling, contorting and bending to fit the molding of a variety of Slumpies. And in this reposted sense, this post-

Dadaist object becomes like an antenna directing a field of related, social-media transmitted objects, perhaps what would be replicating evidence of similar encounters.

I admit bias, though. I love the Slumpies series, if only because sometimes I see an unoccupied one and lack the imagination for its usage. I then see it in use, a person straddling it awkwardly, bent and turned in surrender to its absurdist design, and I enjoy a rush of endorphins, an unforced exhalation of windy suspiration.

Mayer portrayed a concern when she presented her most recent grand-master Slumpie, *Fort* (2020), at Miami’s Hotel Confidante, a hotelier’s structure of glass and orthogonality reminiscent of scenes from Brian de Palma’s *Scarface*. Mayer’s December exhibition was part of Art Week Miami Beach’s No Vacancy public art competition and exhibition. It kindly featured pump-station hand sanitizer for visitors and was wiped down between uses for pandemic safety. *Fort* included Wi-Fi honoring the zeitgeist of the series, i.e., web access. This latest Slumpie proved the tallest, widest, greatest of them all: less a solipsistic object of satire and more a carnival-size tiered cake, some 10- to 15-feet tall, begging to be climbed and played upon.

In conversation with Mayer at the end of the year, she brought up some points: (1) The Slumpies refuse design efficiency by being molded with uncycled materials: resin, wax, styrofoam, and even wood from used palettes. (2) These materials hearken back to Miami’s leisure activities: boating, surfing, wood lifeguard towers. (3) Theoretically, these sculptures float—meaning they should persist long after the ocean’s rise.

Mayer describes *Fort* as part of a series of “quasi-functional sculptural furniture” that is “a rejection of contemporary design efficiency” and that is “presented as an interactive sculptural installation...” The artist goes on to claim: “*Fort* is motivated by my concern that our cities, buildings and furniture will soon resemble the computer programs in which they were designed; clean lines on horizontal planes based on the optimization of manufacturing and their ability to be shipped flat efficiently... *Fort* is a rejection of this.”

So after volumes of user-centered selfies and conceptual ad-satirizing textual documents furnished by the artist herself, the key to grasping the Slumpie concept is to consider what it is not. The Slumpie is not comfortable; the Slumpie is not functional; the Slumpie might offer Wi-Fi access based on solar recharging capabilities (but it also might not; you’ll need to contact the gallery ahead of time, wink wink); the Slumpie is not public or private (a gallerist can be contacted to purchase them; others are cycled in and out of various public displays; some are just in artist limbo, either in transit, storage, or in rotation between galleries). And, if one accepts my argument, the Slumpie is *not* unless it is posted online. ■