

Skyscraper

★★★ — Kate MacGarry, Bethnal Green to Hackney — By JJ Charlesworth

The three artists here happen to be women who all share an interest in the potential of designed objects, while messing with whatever dividing line still exists between 'art' and 'design'. The anarchic girly collective Chicks on Speed show two weird, handbuilt electronic hat/headaddress/voice-amplifiers from a previous performance. Fashion designer Carolin Lerch, who runs the label Pelican Avenue, presents a curtain-hang of printed textiles whose geometric patterns suggest a concrete architecture at odds with the flimsy material. Finally, Madelon Vriesendorp, partner and collaborator of Rem Koolhaas, shows a peculiar cardboard sculpture of a couple playing a sexually-charged boardgame.

Taking its title from an American romantic novel of the 1930s, whose female protagonist sets out to make it in the big city in the shadow of the just-built Empire State Building, the show suggests some interesting connections between feminine identity and the supposedly male-only arena of architecture, construction and design. These are sharp issues: not so long ago, the artworld still clung to the ridiculous idea that women could never make great artists, yet the vast majority of today's 'starchitects' are still men. This slight and compact show takes on some big ideas, about what it means for men or women to desire, make and transform the world around them, ideas fit for a much bigger exhibition.

JJ Charlesworth

Illustration caption: Madelon Vriesendorp, 'Après l'Amour'.