

Jennifer Rubell 'Engagement'

08 February – 05 March 2011

Private View Monday 07 February 2011, 6 – 8pm.



Stephen Friedman Gallery is delighted to present American artist Jennifer Rubell's first UK solo exhibition of new work.

Responding to the news of the recently announced official engagement between Prince William and Kate Middleton, Rubell presents a provocative, interactive sculptural installation and a series of accompanying paintings. Inviting the viewer to participate in this fairytale-like coupling, the works engage with a narrative currently at the forefront of public interest, and explore the already iconic mine of imagery that has been borne out of this moment of declaration.

Realising the traditional portraiture genre anew in *Engagement (with Prince William sculpted by Daniel Druet)*, Rubell presents a minutely detailed, life-sized wax model of Prince William, mounted off-centre on a low white plinth. William stands in the exact stance seen in coverage of the engagement announcement. The famed engagement ring rests empty however, affixed to his forearm. Rubell invites the public to step up onto the plinth, slide their arm through William's and slip their finger through the iconic sapphire and diamond ring, first made famous by the Prince's late Mother, Diana.

The ensuing picture of royalty and its subject rests somewhere between an official portrait and seaside entertainment. By stepping momentarily into Kate's position, the work enables one not only to consider afresh the expectations of marriage (or civil partnership) as it is both imagined and experienced, but also the fantasies that this work might ignite within the participant. An illustration of democracy, the realisation of culture's Prince Charming fantasy, or an encapsulation of the contemporary monarch (and monarch's spouse): the work allows each visitor

to project their own feelings and illusions on to this global figure of power.

In the back gallery Rubell will present a new series of 'drinking paintings', based on the scale of Sir Martin Archer Shee's 1833 coronation portrait of William IV. A tap protrudes from the face of each raw canvas, connected on the reverse to a hidden plumbing mechanism. The viewer is invited to pour a drink and enjoy the libations on offer, thus combining a social function with aesthetic intent. As each drink is poured, the canvas will begin to bear witness to the interaction as splashes and stains of liquid 'paint' themselves on to the surface. This is Rubell's second series of drinking paintings; the first series was displayed at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

Rubell's work is abundantly generous, referencing notions of gift economies whilst simultaneously recognising the realm of privilege within which a large part of the art world operates. Indeed, the artist's unique upbringing, surrounded by the significant contemporary art collection amassed by her family, informs much of her practice. Muddying the waters of perceived social etiquettes, both art related and beyond, is key: the viewer is constantly asked to touch, taste and feel, to engage with both the artwork and each other. These interactions offer a welcome counterpoint to - or relief from - the ever-increasing virtual nature of contemporary life.

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Jennifer Rubell is widely recognised for a series of large-scale 'food installations' which have been exhibited in numerous museum spaces around the world, including the Saatchi Gallery in London, the LA County Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington and the Rubell Family Collection in Miami. Here, Rubell initiated a series of 'happenings' using food as a medium. Viewers were encouraged to acknowledge and then violate the normal boundaries found between spectator and revered artwork. A hybrid of performance and installation art, these unique occurrences resolutely demanded audience participation. In one installation, one ton of ribs rested on a plinth, with thick, syrupy honey dripping down on to them from the ceiling. A wall of tongs, hung in a minimalist grid, invited the viewers to serve themselves.

In her most recent installation entitled *Just Right*, Rubell commandeered a derelict property, accessible only through a crude, hastily formed hole in a concrete wall. This deserted building played host to a fairytale-like breakfast on each morning of Art Basel Miami. Amongst the stripped-back framework of the small cottage, 750 bowls, 750 spoons, 36 Crock-Pots of simmering porridge and 8000 boxes of raisins and packets of brown sugar were presented to visiting guests: diners encountered breakfast à la Goldilocks, with each visitor invited to conjure up the mixture that was 'just right' for them.

Jennifer Rubell (b. 11 June 1970) lives and works in New York City. Recent notable projects include *Old-Fashioned*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; *The de Pury Diptych* at the Saatchi Gallery, London; *Icons*, at the Brooklyn Museum; *Creation*, for Performa, the New York performance-art festival; and since 2001, a yearly breakfast project in the courtyard of the Rubell Family Collection in Miami during Art Basel Miami Beach.

Rubell, 40, received a B.A. from Harvard University in Fine Arts, and subsequently attended the Culinary Institute of America. She wrote about food for over a decade prior to beginning her artistic practice, including columns in the Miami Herald and Domino magazine, and the book *Real Life Entertaining* (Harper Collins). For further information about Jennifer Rubell please go to <http://jenniferrubell.com/>

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Gallery hours are: Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm