

## Nancy Grossman

MICHAEL ROSENFELD GALLERY  
100 Eleventh Avenue (At 19th Street)  
May 9–July 3

There's an unsalutary air about Nancy Grossman's wall-bound assemblages: a sense of impaction or suppurated swell like a beetle squished then left to harden. For all their blunt materiality, her bas-reliefs, produced between 1964 and '67, invite metaphor. Elaborated on canvas reinforced with plywood, each consists of leather artifacts—gloves, jackets, boots, harnesses, and so forth—which Grossman has deconstructed and collaged with bits of mangled wood, metal, rubber, and rope. Color is subdued, restricted to reddish browns and black acrylic, which coats the scavenged debris and canvas ground: here, a desultory splotch; there, a faux-AbEx drip. The results, hung alongside a selection of drawings and three freestanding forms, straddle painting and sculpture.

Consider *Mummy*, 1965, a buckled accretion of tubing, sheet metal, and machine parts atop canvas. Scabrous, peeling, and aggressively odd, Grossman's miscreation seems a direct counter to the steel geometries of David Smith, to whom one of the show's assemblages is dedicated. If Smith's process of welding mimed that of industrial facture, Grossman's channels the economy's underside: the discards of the machine age, made archaic by the economy's incipient transition from industry to information. Though rusted and disused, her materials are strangely vital. Their animism is heightened by the work's title, which names a mass of embalmed flesh imagined to possess the uncanny ability to come to life.

Grossman's art is often read as a landscape of psychic pain: an exorcism of childhood traumas, of the sort that rhymes more with AbEx anguish than 1960s cool. As the slang for mother, "mummy" does little to dispel such readings. Discomfiting, tortured, raw: Such adjectives cast Grossman as a feminist action hero, enacting the violence of Vietnam (1965 marked the deployment of American combat troops overseas) in material form. Piling up junk with suffocating density, her assemblages perform dystopia not through destruction, but through manic, heaving construction. There's apocalypse here and fascination in the aftermath.

— Courtney Fiske



Nancy Grossman, *Mummy*, 1965, mixed media assemblage on canvas, 73 1/2 x 77 1/4 x 15 3/4".