



Alice Hope Pops the Top in “Tab” at Ricco/Maresca

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by Janet Goleas

Alice Hope’s paint-box is filled with an unlikely assortment of magnets, metal filings, buckshot, ball chains and the occasional invented or recycled *objet*. Within her oeuvre, these elements fuse into works that trade on the exquisite simplicity of binary sequences, the golden mean, and lush, often expansive fields of color and non-color.

Ricocheting from austere to labyrinthine, in her most recent endeavor, on view at Ricco/Maresca through May 24, she considers the lowly pull-tab, transforming the quotidian into a concept that is thoughtful, inventive and synoptic in scope.

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Installation of “Alice Hope: Tab” at Ricco/Maresca, New York. Courtesy of the gallery.

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For Hope, the aluminum pull-tab is loaded with allusions to consumerism, identity and desire, possessing a usefulness that is as profound as its presence is ubiquitous. Last year during a residency in upstate New York, she visited a local metal recycling center, and there she stumbled on a bin containing 700 pounds of these tabs. You can’t buy pull-tabs, so this was epic – an unplanned artistic coup of some proportion. Contemplative by nature, Hope saw the ignoble pop-top as ripe for examination. As she entered into its cultural myths, engineering and rampant proliferation, a complex portrait and history emerged.

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Installation of “Alice Hope: Tab” at Ricco/Maresca, New York. Courtesy of the gallery.

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The modern pull-tab’s 1962 predecessor opened beverages well enough, but the tab peeled off completely, leaving bits of aluminum to accumulate along sidewalks, parks and public beaches,

where it sullied the landscape and posed a risk to small animals.

The new, ergonomic design implemented in the 1980s was an ode to the human thumb and forefinger. Its smooth edge could be neatly grasped and plied upward until the tab snapped open, tucking its tongue inside the crisp mouth of the can. Imagine the engineering! In fact, the process was so well designed that dislodging a tab from the can is no simple act. Ergo, if you're looking at 100,000 recycled tabs, you're also getting an implied sense of a large and determined communal effort.

And therein lay the narrative. For Hope, the tab is a signifier through which not only the human thumbprint but the human condition is implicit. Why? Because the considerable urban mythology that surrounds the tab is so enduring (pervasive rumors that recycled pull-tabs pay for dialysis and free wheelchairs are false); because their negative and positive shape is a perfect diagram of the golden mean; because every one of them contains the evidence of human touch and because they carry the promise, even if false, of charity, renewal and redemption.



"Untitled" by Alice Hope, 2014. 3D scanned and printed polymer tab and aluminum paint, 24 x 15 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca, New York.

In earlier works, Hope has layered thousands of ferrite magnets on steel substrate; commingled iron shavings with magnetic orbs to affect organic, sea-urchin shaped aggregates; created hypnotic scrimms from ball chain; and celebrated the moiré patterns in shifting squares of perforated aluminum. She works in a way that allows the material she chooses to determine form, imposing a structural format that invites the elements to morph into their own anatomy. To put it another way, for Hope, the medium is emphatically *the message*.

In *Untitled*, (all the works, by the way, are *Untitled*), pull tabs by the thousands are strung in a single shape-shifting strand held together by double lengths of ball chain. The ropy mélange dangles like coiled lassos, twisting and curling in vertical lines that glisten beneath ambient light above. At another corner, tabs are woven through sheaths of mesh, accumulating like millions of barnacles. The forms droop from above, hanging like sleeping jellyfish or thick, undulating fleece. Illuminated from within, they sparkle outward as if through spun sugar.



"Untitled" by Alice Hope, 2014. Aluminum tabs and double-stranded ball chain, 104

x 41 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca, New York.

In another wall work, this one tucked inside an alcove, Hope twists through the ticklish geometry of a bed spring, weaving a dense schematic of silver ball chains, anodized pull tabs and the swirling interstices of sleep logic. The complex tendrils hang down from the mattress grid, pooling on the floor like Rapunzel's long locks.



"Untitled" by Alice Hope, 2014. Found nickle-plated box spring, anodized aluminum tabs and ball chain, 90 x 37 x 7 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca, New York.

In lieu of eradicating aluminum scrap altogether, in another work Hope variously annihilated the tabs via train tracks and the forthrightness of a 10-ton hydraulic press, lending added meaning to Jasper Johns' dictum, "Take something. Do something to it. Do something else to it." Flattened, distressed, fused together and affixed to a thin membrane of clear resin, the assembled parts seem not deflated but energized, wearing the performative on their sleeves, if you will. But nowhere is the essence of the tab more immortalized than in the front gallery, where five oversize die-cut aluminum pop-top portraits line the walls.

With the words "Drink Me" etched in various configurations across bronzed anodized metal, one recalls the dilemma of Alice (in Wonderland) who shrank to the size of a Coke bottle upon imbibing that confounding magic potion. Likewise, contained inside what appears dreamily like airplane window casing, phosphorescent whorls assemble in inky magnetic fields—a wholly different sort of potion. "Airplanes are a lot like cans," said the artist. And notably, a tumescent three-dimensional print of a lone pull-tab hangs on a back wall. Robust, even fleshy, it lends to the exhibit a sense of the simulacra found at Madame Tussauds—a mixture of idolatry, artifice and cultural immunity.



"Untitled" by Alice Hope, 2014. Die cut, anodized and engraved aluminum, 24 x 15 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca, New York.

If the pull-tab has a unifying sense of logic for Alice Hope, it is in the humanness that lurks behind the annual deployment of billions of tons of reusable, recyclable aluminum. When we met earlier this week, she was quick to point out that for every thousand pounds of pull-tabs, one million people actually opened a beverage can. Their fingerprints are mightily transformed here.

BASIC FACTS: Alice Hope: "Tab" remains on view through May 24, 2014 at Ricco/Maresca, 529 West 20th Street, New York, NY. www.riccomaresca.com.

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