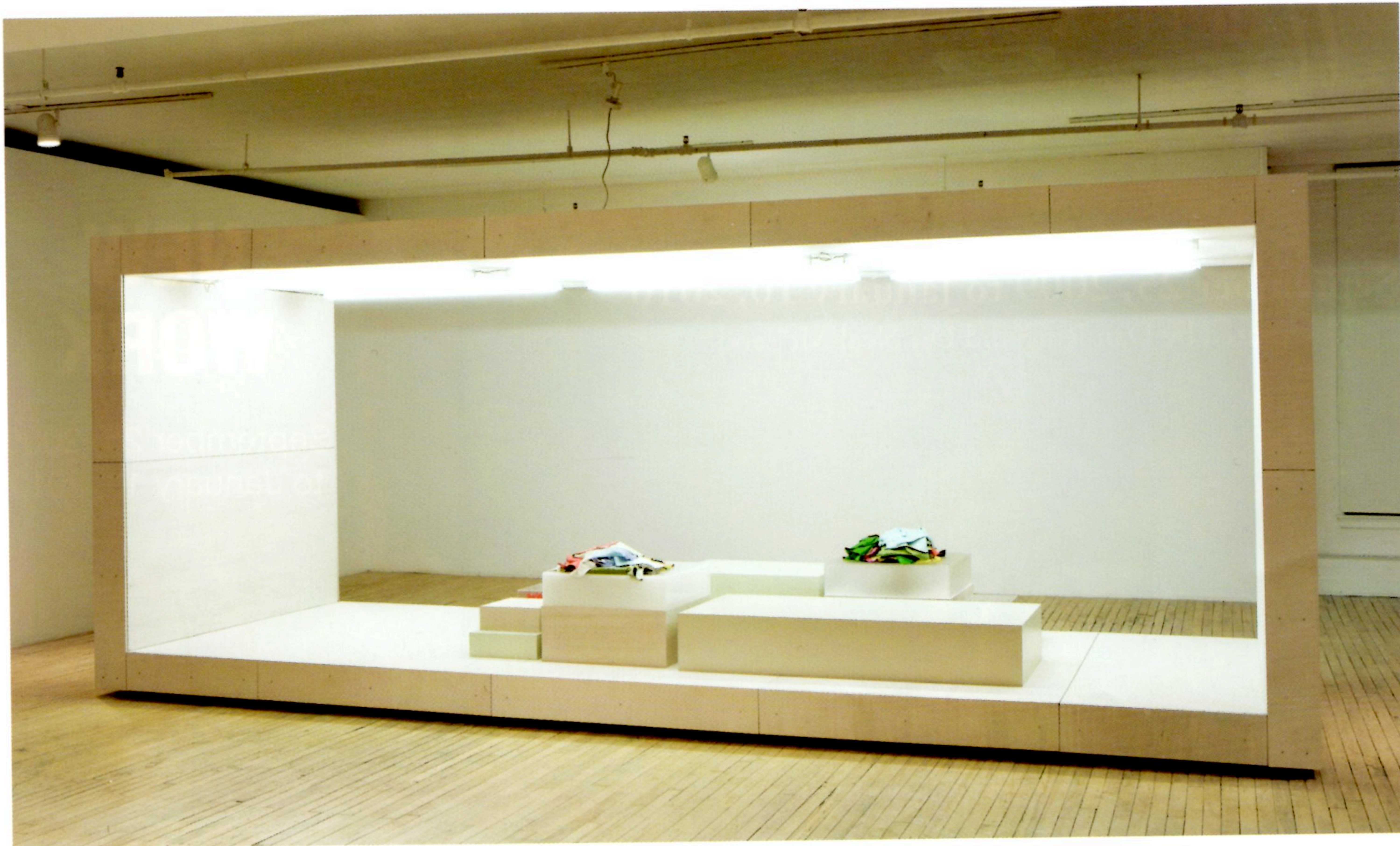


REVIEWS



JEANIE RIDDLE *California* 2009  
Plywood, paint, fibreboard,  
Plexiglas, tissue paper,  
fluorescent lights 1.82 x 5.48  
x 1.82 m PHOTO GUY L'HEUREUX

MONTREAL  
CENTRE D'EXPOSITION CIRCA

## JEANIE RIDDLE

by David Elliott

This year, Montreal has seen a surfeit of shows focusing on the connections between art, music and clubbing: "Warhol Live" at the Musée des beaux-arts, "Sympathy for the Devil" at the Musée d'art contemporain and Christian Marclay's "Replay" at DHC/ART. In a solo exhibition at Centre d'exposition Circa, Jeanie Riddle brought a very different tone to the party with a work of silent grandeur called *California*.

Riddle has emerged as one of the most interesting young Montreal artists to wrestle with the legacy of formalism. Her early exhibitions of square, primarily black paintings were both muscular and enigmatic, with the artist using layers of paint to obscure and finally bury hieroglyphic marks until the canvases had the battered surface of a worn-out coin. Riddle's later sculptural installations, although indebted to Jessica Stockholder, eschew that artist's baroque theatricality for something smaller, more intimate and kitsch. Displaying a weakness for pink and lime green, Riddle deployed stacked boxes and MACtac plastics to create memorable spaces where the whimsical and the austere lived amiably side by side.

In her latest show, Riddle quotes these older works in a series of four framed colour photos on a wall near the entrance. The show's principal sculptural element, which is the size of a room, stands at the opposite end of the cavernous gallery, an ocean of empty floor separating it from

the photos. Like an otherworldly spaceship, it floats just off the ground, aglow under a canopy of soft fluorescent lights. Call it *Evocative Minimalism*: if the term hasn't been invented, it should be. With a light hand and a keen sense of space, Riddle has placed Donald Judd-like boxes of various sizes, made from pastel-hued plywood and Plexiglas, within this larger architectural structure. The boxes create a gentle rhythm and act as containers for red paper roses and pedestals for soft stacks of multicoloured plastic that provide high-chroma bursts of energy and hint at an underlying romantic narrative. Compared to the wacky mix of Astroturf and fake wood in Riddle's earlier work, there is gravity to the way these elements function in the piece. The piles of undulating plastic look like a child's folded laundry or a collection of imported vinyl that's been left out in the sun too long. The plinths they sit on are the size and shape of professional DJ equipment.

*California* is haunting. While the piece is designed to elicit quiet contemplation, I suspect it will trigger different things for different people. For those of us who know Jeanie and her family, it is unmistakably a tribute to her husband, Keith Merritte (a.k.a. DJ Ever), who passed away unexpectedly last September. Riddle has taken a DJ booth, that ecstatic site of both isolation and communion, and placed it in the middle of a loft dance floor, transforming it into a beautiful Egyptian funerary barque.