

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

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Critics' Picks: Anna Betbeze at Kate Werble Gallery, New York

Christopher Howard

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Anna Betbeze, *Asbury Empress*, 2013,
acid dyes on terrycloth, 110 x 106 inches

Anna Betbeze's signature works—flokati rugs abused with acid dyes, watercolor pigments, and hot coals, distressed by the outdoor elements and sliced with razor blades—exhibit shaggy, savagely marred surfaces that beg to be touched. Her latest pieces, which substitute plush terrycloth towels and extra-large bathrobes for the woolen mats, are just as tactile, and the gallery even lets visitors try on the robes. The pure--blue *Cold Bath* (all works 2013) is roomy enough for a small whale yet considerably more lightweight than *Merman and Mermaid*, a ponderous pair of cloaks beautifully colored with algae-green, aquatic--blue, and rusty--orange dyes. *Pillow*, an absurdly oversize furniture unit made of wool and foam and shaped like a human hand, is plopped in the middle of the gallery, welcoming the robed to spread themselves across it.

While viewing the four rectangular hanging tapestries of sewn-together terrycloth towels that Betbeze soaked in vats of acid dyes, it's not difficult to detect certain themes—the cleansing properties of water, figures from mythology, and travel, leisure, and comfort—which might be the artist's concerted effort to get people thinking about more than just her unique staining processes and her use of utilitarian yet decorative materials. The sandy tan, hot pink, and tangelo in *Sex on the Beach* cleverly evoke sea, sex, and sun, while *After the Bath* features the iridescent colors of an oil slick. Named for a Jersey Shore hotel and incorporating two of its floral--patterned towels, *Asbury Empress* connotes the temporary splendor of vacationing in a fancy hotel. The towels are frayed at their ends but mostly intact, unlike several of the bathrobes, such as the singed Snake Coat and shredded Mars. With its heightened tension between elegance and debasement, both formally and conceptually, Betbeze's work has matured yet retains a viciously experimental spunk.

TEL 212-352-9700 FAX 212-352-9704

www.katewerblegallery.com EMAIL info@katewerblegallery.com