

New Objects in the American West

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This body of work is a catalogue of Western contemporary culture that presents itself both minimally and vaguely. In my recent work, I've heavily leaned towards the found object and the fascination with the object. As a pensive conceptual material, the late pieces, including the ones in this catalogue, were constructed very simply without much interference through abstract form or the additional use of different materials due to my personal desire to let the materials speak for themselves, naturally allowing for more broad expressions and connotations.

Using store-bought goods, thrifted unusual items, and a variety of stolen materials, the result became four selected pieces that make the *New Objects in the American West*. These convenient consumables, unembellished and overtly simple, directly reference television/soap opera clichés, late 60's California hot-rod culture, and the nature and customs of fast food present in the essence of modern America, and general Western influence.

The four pieces chosen were the last/latest to be made in what ended up being a sequence of ten different works, all of which referenced Golden Age children's television, industrialism, packrat culture and Southwestern plastic culture. The relationships of the last four pieces to each other (and the main difference of them compared to the first six) came from a personal time looking into my grandparents' history of leaving mainland China in the late 20's as a result of their home province being under siege constantly by both the Republic of China and communist rule under the People's Republic, as well as slavery making its way into the Southeast region. This part of my family's history set thoughts that seeped into the latest of the *New Objects*. Hosting a soul to both my experiences as a born and bred American and traces of my deep Chinese roots, the work juggles a lot of elements regarding identity and placement and isolation in what I hope presents itself with a certain context to offer a more thoughtful look at our social tendencies, stereotypes and aesthetic tastes.

Strawberry Ice Cream (Just Like a Woman)

The first piece in the show is a classic Häagen-Dazs quart of strawberry flavored ice cream, only the contents of the cup have been replaced for a blended mixture of several red and pink shades of lipstick purchased in bulk from a Chinese cosmetics company. The cup was left open during the show and had a spoon punctured at the top of the lipstick mix to suggest that someone had taken a bite out of it.

The piece gets its title from the Bob Dylan song of the same name; a nod to a certain period where red lipstick was essential to the classic image of the American heartland beauty. Popularized through the silver screen by figures like Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, the signature red lips seem to carry such an “on-camera” appearance open in referencing television stereotypes such as the girl who ate a whole pint of ice cream crying on the couch after her boyfriend broke up with her, speaking to how much popular television influences our sensibilities and notions when we think of women and their attributes as powerful tools of seduction, but also as lasting labels of being a “consumable” in the socially created male fantasy.

Stolen Bike

The second piece in the show is a full-sized bicycle entirely made out of stolen tennis balls, along with stolen resin and wire to form the spokes. The items were stolen by a handful of people over the course of a month. Initially coming from a self-given prompt to form an object in the spirit of the American dream, the piece became more of a performance about utilizing people and resources in a single location. Starting with nothing and slowly making a way to some form of higher aspiration, I had a team of a dozen people steal the unconventional items that were spools of stovepipe, a dozen PVC pipes, and around 200 tennis balls, which were then used to build one of the most commonly stolen objects in American households.

While the other pieces in the show let their materials stand out to inform concept, the bike displays a certain kind of humor in letting the form of a specific object stand out, and not the actual object. Playing with structure and the removal of function, and being crafted in a very substandard manner, it holds a very rolling-stone-like aesthetic that, if anything, simply conveys the temporariness of Western culture.

Packet Jacket Series I:

The Saint, the Villain and the Antihero

The third piece in the show is a set of 3 fully wearable costumes constructed out of fast food sauce packets collected for over two years, wrapped and stuck together with cellophane tape, and displayed on hangers.

Modeled after a specific selection of popular characters (Santa Clause, Darth Vader, and Sheriff Woody), the sauce suits come out of my personal fascination with Southern Californian plastic culture and classic television archetype figures; cowboys, spacemen, and the like. Collectively, the *Packet Jackets* reference a very specific American love for fake, well-crafted, and immersive open-environments purely for entertainment in my attempt to tap into the same sensibility and sentiment that places like Disneyland, Hollywood, and Chinatown have. As a conveniently packed and quilted arrangement of objects, the materials speak a lot about fast food culture and our the desire for convenience and ease, questioning the social culmination of our consumerist expectations and eating habits.

*New Objects in the American West,
(or Another Side of the American Communist)*

Grandly taking up half the gallery space, the title piece of the show is an installation composed of forty-some found objects seemingly random, all of which are presented on the floor in a haphazard and peculiar manner. The objects are all coated in a specific shade of teal that was popularly (yet rarely) used on automobiles in the late 60's, at the height of Southwestern car culture in the U.S., a color that radically contrasts the original colors of the chosen objects resulting in some kind of nullification, disrupting any hierarchy or aesthetic imbalance between the items. The compilation of oddly specific objects include a dozen fake and number-labelled eggs in a carton, a child's violin, a Buzz Lightyear toy, a pair of identical insulation foam tiles, a wireless vacuum out of battery without its charging cable, a fake Christmas tree, an American flag hoisted on a pole with a bald eagle ornament, a Chinese parasol, a plastic ice cream cone advertising neon figure, a stuffed rabbit, and an 8-ft. tall swordfish.

Growing up in Midwestern suburbia, I wanted to reference the indistinguishable neighborhoods and overall dullness of the areas I lived around as a kid by making something completely cookie-cutter. My main interest with the piece comes from the marrying of this kind of Americana with something almost communistic; a level playing field of bland evenness juxtaposed with a one unique color; making the blandness almost stand out to pointedly critique and find humor at the intersection of globalism and American culture.