

**COMMODITY  
CULTURE**

# COMMODITY CULTURE

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## BIZARRE BAZAAR

JULY 7 - AUGUST 17, 2016

## CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

JULY 7 - 23, 2016

## RECAST

JULY 27 - AUGUST 17, 2016

*COMMODITY CULTURE WAS PRESENTED AT ROOT DIVISION IN  
SUMMER 2016 AS PART OF THE 2ND SATURDAY EXHIBITION SERIES.*



# **BIZARRE BAZAAR**

## **CURATED BY**

Michael Arcega

## **EXHIBITING ARTISTS**

Terry Berlier

Christy Chan

Alice Combs

Bronwyn Dexter

Natalie Falero

Juan Luna-Avin

Whitney Lynn

Simón García-Miñaur

Gabby Miller

Chadwick Moore

Michael Ryan

Rebecca Szeto

Jon-Paul Villegas

Eike Waltz

# BIZARRE BAZAAR

*Bizarre Bazaar* explores the intersection of cultures and objects within a strange global economic system. The works selected for the show deal with the unexpected connections between commerce, the fetish commodity, and the resulting wake caused by the capitalist system.

The exhibition intersects yearning with an unsettling feeling that something isn't right. Conscientious consumers often find themselves in conflict with their relationships to objects/products and our material world. We have guilty pleasures. We have uncontrollable desires. We binge, hoard, and indulge. The fourteen artists explore the relationship we have with *Things* along with the internal struggles and the ensuing drama that results. From a reluctant submission to that desire or an outright rejection of the system, these works expose the spectrum of responses to our contemporary dilemma.

In some of the work, we are confronted with a desire, a longing for, and an impulsive "need" that is immediately interrupted. Almost within the same breadth, one is seduced, then repulsed in a sort of Love-Hate-buyer's-remorse paradox. Jon-Paul Villegas' arrangement, *Birds of America* offers a visual field of enticing objects that draw us in like a window display for a surrealist American holiday. Once engaged, we are met with a suite of suggestive objects that haunt us over our initial decision- leaving a lasting unsettled afterglow. Bronwyn Dexter's performance, *The Thickening* delves into an internal dialog about consumption and the discomfort we have with the body. Augmented "personal-field recordings" played throughout the galleries while the

performer literally internalized the products, shoving them into her second skin while staggering through the crowd. Natalie Falero's installation exposes the media's normative-masculine gaze. In the work, *Cena (Supper)*, the artist confronts the viewer with the "El Bombon de la Semana" ("The Bonbon of the Week" from a Puerto Rican newspaper) where women are reduced to dessert status, only to be consumed after supper. The space suggests a domestic space with wallpaper, each model's faces obscured by a single rose creating a texture that intimates morbid undertones. In *Welcome to Introduction to Fractal Sex*, Simón García-Miñaúr transports the viewer to a Phillip K. Dickensian dystopia. The mock-instructional video promises the joys of digital sex and clinical intimacy with one's idealized digital partner-- it presents a future where we can pre-select a perfect sensual experience. In a similar but retro-futuristic tone, Eike Waltz's 3-D Busby Berkeley-like cabaret, *The Shade of Amani*, is a hauntingly beautiful dance that is reminiscent of a fully automated assembly line. The mesmerizing movements remove us further from the haptic world like that of contemporary factory shows like *How-It's-Made*.

In other works, the object/s embody a frustration against a capitalist culture. The object suggests liberation and transcendence from the system, and maybe, to corrupt another. It uses itself as a referent to up-end its own cultural significance. Gabby Miller contributes a bone-like pile of 609 miniature containers that resulted from her time on a container ship from Oakland, CA to South Vietnam. The work is a reminder of Neo-colonial strategies through economic power

structures and the incredible toll it takes on global communities and the environment. Whitney Lynn's *Goldbrick* is a literal gold-leafed ceramic brick that sits atop a pedestal. The object connotes many possibilities- it represents a false value, and may refer to goldbricking (a tech-word for wasting company time online), and this brick is an object that can be used to build or be thrown to destroy.

While others exploit the object of desire, others look to the knock-off, the copy, and the simulacrum. These works challenge the authentic and succeeds in creating their own space apart from the original. Christy Chan's *Sending You the Very Best* explores the afterlife's economy with knock-off paper objects for the dead. The hand-made branded fakes are burned to transcend into the untapped after-market where they might subvert that economy as well. Meanwhile, Alice Combs' *Sweaty Palmistry* looks at the metaphysical realm. The work explores the commercialization of self-healing, and by the missing figure, a negation of the body through commodified cultural practices—the source forgotten, instead of transcended. Juan Luna-Avin presents *Untitled (Solo Para Coleccionistas)*, a work that solicits a transaction from the viewer. Two quarters in a capsule machine yields either a copy of an album from the artist's collection or an original. In the end, the process neutralizes the value between the authentic and the bootleg.

From the production of desirable goods, we find hidden costs. The delivery systems and the true price of the object is shrouded from view by retailers, leaving the product free of the burden of its making, Marx's *Commodity Fetishism*. The following works focuses on the mechanisms that conceals the production. Terry Berlier's neon sign *Open Secret*,

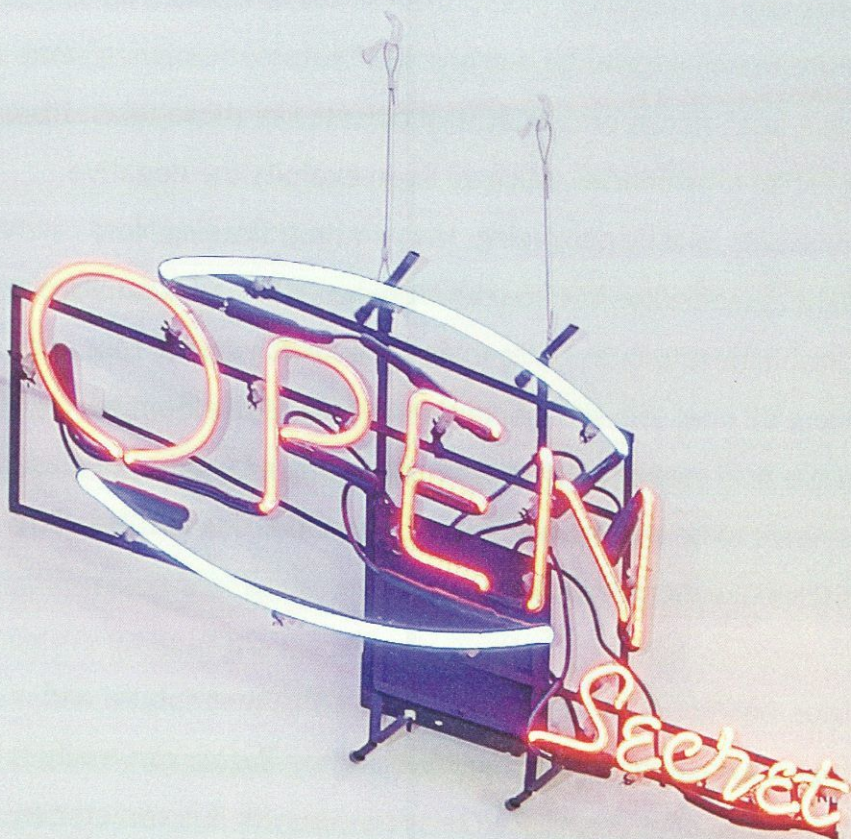
suggests the existence of information known to all but remains hidden. Using the language of the corner store or local bar, it confirms a coded truth, but just beyond the consumer's reach. Rebecca Szeto looks to the "left-overs" to produce the *Never (not) Broken* series of works. The scraps of fabric dictate the final forms by a process of "automatic sewing" that leads to "shape-less", non-representational objects like those taken from Africa by Christian missionaries. Michael Ryan exploits the negative space of the objects, plastic packaging. His painting, *Sleeping Nose Bleed*, highlights the residue from our consumer culture and reveals an uncomfortable beauty in its quiet toxic slumber. Chadwick Moore's *Marbled Iceberg #2* implies a similar cautionary tale of the looming iceberg and the true cost of plastics. The large conglomeration of plastic and steel appears to be the tip of the Pacific gyre floating in the gallery space like the smoke monster in *Lost*.

This exhibition only touches the fringes of the consumer culture and the experiment of capitalism. In many ways, *Bizarre Bazaar* can easily stand in for America. Our convoluted relationship with it is sometimes wonderfully confounding and often frighteningly oppressive. I'm personally grateful to Root Division, the artists in the exhibition, and all those who submitted for consideration and the chance to shape this question. This is just a minute glimpse within the continuum of our shared experience.

Michael Arcega

Curator, *Bizarre Bazaar*





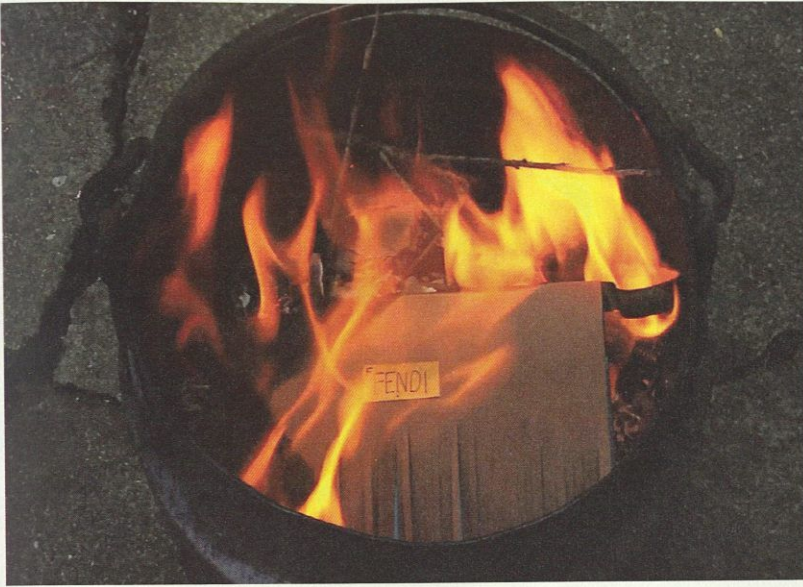
**TERRY BERLIER**

*Open Secret*

2013

Neon

18 x 35 x 5 in.



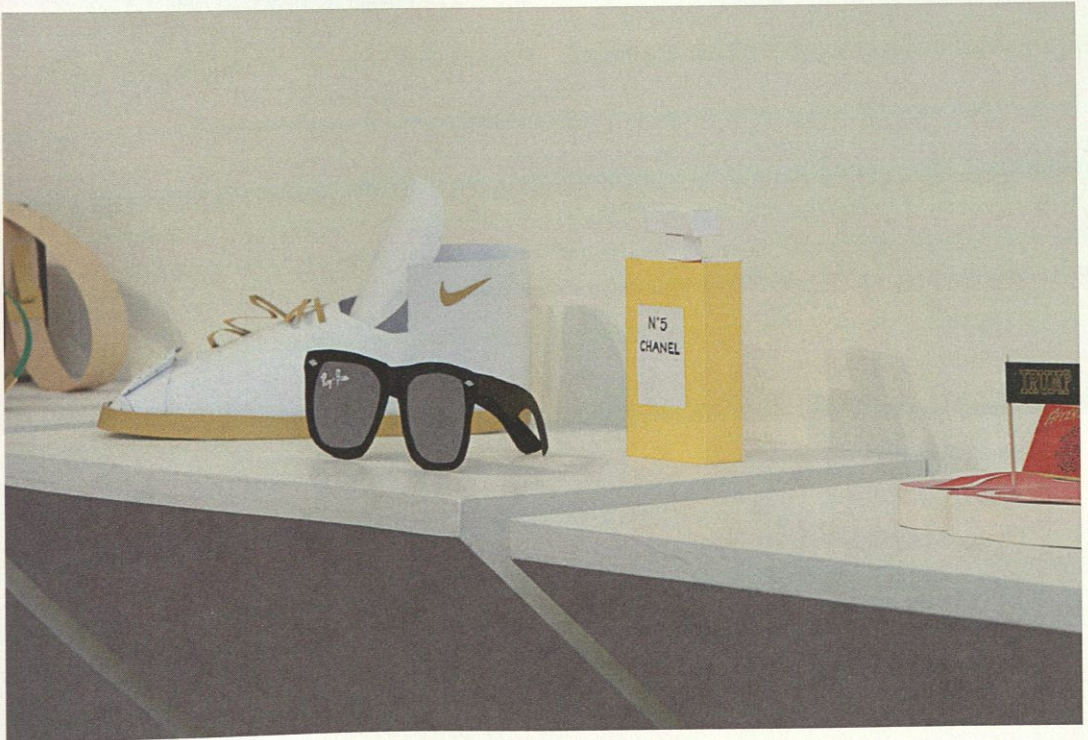
## CHRISTY CHAN

*Sending You  
the Very Best*  
2016  
Video

*Nike Shoe*  
2016  
Paper, glue, ink  
4 x 9.5 x 3 in.

*Ray Bans*  
2016  
Paper, glue, ink  
2.25 x 6 x 5 in.

*Chanel No. 5*  
2016  
Paper, glue, ink  
4 x 2.5 x 1 in.



## **ROOT DIVISION STAFF**

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## ABOUT ROOT DIVISION

Root Division is a visual arts non-profit that connects creativity and community through a dynamic ecosystem of arts education, exhibitions, and studios. Our mission is to empower artists, foster community service, inspire youth, and enrich the Bay Area through engagement in the visual arts. Root Division is a launching pad for artists, a stepping stone for educators, a door to creativity for youth, and a bridge for the public to become involved in the arts.

## SUPPORTERS

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