*Hypermarket Rupture*

A response to the work of Jean Borbridge by Davis Plett
Hypermarket Rupture is an installation comprised of four pieces. A large photograph of jumbled children’s toys, cleaning supplies, and construction detritus is printed on rectangles of paper and assembled like a geometric puzzle, pasted directly to a gallery wall that’s been spray painted bright green. Across from this imagery hangs a massive plastic glove reminiscent of the kind used in commercial food preparation. Between the collage and the glove, a vertical set of blinds hangs from the ceiling. A photograph of a masked figure embracing pool noodles has been cut into strips and attached to the blind’s panels. In the gallery corner a large screen TV rests on the floor, showing a video loop of objects being dropped onto a transparent surface and then pushed around with a toilet brush, filmed from below. Paradoxically, the neon kaleidoscope of Hypermarket Rupture is assembled from sorts of objects so banal that they’re easy to forget. Actually, they are meant to be forgotten.

This forgetting is in many ways the subject of Borbridge’s work. Advertising, as the visual life of commodities, requires a level of clarity; no matter how avant-garde the campaign, there must be an identifiable product. But the clarity of advertising is a ruse; we aren’t supposed to really see or remember the object, only the feeling it gestures towards. Hypermarket Rupture plays with this psychic action, turning the ontology of the product upside-down. The perspective from which objects have been photographed or filmed is askew. The scale of objects seems wrong; are they on the floor on the wall? Which ones are in front and which behind? So much marketing (and gallery curation) requires the ability to get a clear, immediately identifiable image of the product, something that can be captured, uploaded, and reshared, but in Borbridge’s work the objects press so close to the camera lens that they become difficult to identify. The panels of the blinds are partly opened, creating gaps in the image. The warped perspective of the pieces are mirrored by their placement in the corner of the gallery. The works live in such close proximity that when I tried to photograph the installation with my phone I found that I was always too close or too far away, never able to get a clean, squared-off shot. My lens couldn’t untangle the work, only add another layer of obfuscation.

As in much of Borbridge’s oeuvre, the colours green and blue are prominent. Products populating the works have often been repainted in these shades. Their visual relationships to one another become more about their lines and contours and geometric intersections than about their various expected functionalities. These colours also reference chroma key compositing, popularly known as green or blue screening and used from Hollywood to Twitch streaming. Chroma key photography and film techniques allow the surface of an object to become host to another image. This is an essential logic of capitalism – the product always points beyond itself, to a feeling, to a class experience, and inevitably to another product. In Hypermarket Rupture, this hyperlink gets broken. What a product means and does is obscured by its texture, movement, colour and sensation – and suddenly becomes memorable.

Borbridge’s work is so playful and fun to look at, but I think what surprises me most is that she isn’t showing me anything I’m not already intimately familiar with. I know what cleaning products smell like, I played with toys when I was a kid, I’ve moved 2x4s. But the sensation of objects, their very presence in our lives, are designed to be disregarded. What something really looks or feels like is as unnecessary as thinking about or doing anything about the exploited labour used to create it. A product’s success depends on the erasure of its materiality. The ‘rupture’ in Borbridge’s show isn’t of the objects themselves, but in my experience of them. The products, photographed the wrong way, painted green and blue, prepared to point beyond themselves, are denied their transcendent moment of being forgotten. They are just stuff: shapes, lines, geometry, history, scent, colour, capital, politics.
Jean Borbridge is a queer multimedia artist based out of Treaty 1, otherwise known as Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 2019, she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours through the University of Manitoba. With a focus on painting, photography, video and installation she works to understand the illusion and spectacle of images and the relationship between the commodification of objects and bodies and the fallibility of such endeavors. She is the recipient of the 2020 Platform Photography Award and is a mentee in the 2020/2021 MAWA Foundational Mentorship Program. She is currently the Education Coordinator at the University of Manitoba School of Art Gallery.

Davis Plett is an intermedia artist working in performance, writing, and media on Treaty 1. Their work has been shown by Cluster Festival, Nuit Blanche, Young Lungs Dance Exchange, WNDX Festival of the Moving Image, and Art Holm. Recent residencies include VideoPool Artists in New Media Residency, Plugin ICA Summer Institute, 8Days8, and Conversations on Performances at Festival TransAmériques. As a sound artist she has worked with Frances Koncan, Debbie Patterson, Alexandra Elliot, 2boys.tv, Waawaate Fobister, and Liam Zarillo. Davis is also one half of We Quit Theatre, a performance collective with Gisilma Patterson that has toured their work to SummerWorks, OFFTA, Theatre Catapulte, and PushOFF. We Quit Theatre’s latest project, Men Explain Things to Us... And We Like It! can be watched at the Stratfest@Home website as part of the Viral Transmissions series.

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