

Transition, Transform questions the notion of value in a late capitalist, western cultural context. Artists Candice Davies, Lois Schklar and J. Eric Simpson valorize low-value items that many people would consider to be ancillary in their everyday lives, such as wall fixtures, miniature trinkets and toys, and plastic bags. In doing so, they acknowledge the historical privilege of artists and art institutions to assign value to any type of object or material. By making, collecting and transforming materials, they draw attention to the cultural significance of objects beyond their monetary worth.

In *Wall Plate: Series #2* (2018), Candice Davies leverages her agency as an artist to assign worth to an item that is usually considered secondary in an exhibition setting. The wall receptacle plate is cheaply made and mass-produced for the sole function of covering the wiring in electrical outlets. Davies appropriates this item, declaring its heightened value as a work of art. She carves the familiar form out Italian alabaster, a material deemed to be of greater worth than the traditionally used white plastic. The wall plate performs its function the same way regardless of the change in material, but Davies' choice of alabaster situates the piece within the scope of sculptures that have been canonized in Western art history. Wall receptacles and outlets are common features of the standard landscape of any given room, and often go unnoticed. In a gallery setting, they inhabit the viewer's peripheral vision. Davies' choice to work with these forms reminds us that anything that exists within the gallery can be interpreted as art; in a Duchampian fashion, the artist and the art institution can classify any item as desirable, cultured and thus elevated in value. Davies' work emphasizes the power that artists have in shaping culture, prompting viewers to critically consider every object they encounter within the confines of a gallery.

Lois Schklar's installation, entitled *Specimens* (2018) is a display of a collection of small found objects on a wall, arranged in a gridlike precision that echoes the preciousness of a specimen case. The items vary in their form and function, ranging from recognizable miniature toy figurines, to lost pieces of Tinker Toy sets that are isolated from their collective whole. Removed from their original contexts, the items in the collection each read aesthetically as miniature abstract sculptures. Schklar says that the objects have stayed in her possession for various reasons throughout her life, and she has kept each one because of its personal associations. Schklar's decision to keep and display these objects highlights and challenges the "well-developed consumer culture based on a continual influx of products designed to be used briefly, then discarded" and that "[...] trash has been central to our lives generally, yet it has been silenced or ignored" as written by Gillian Whitley in her book *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash*.¹ Through her careful consideration of display, Schklar uses her role as an artist and the context of the gallery to transform the items in the collection from throwaway byproducts of commercial society to items that assume a high art status.

Schklar's piece operates within the tradition established by assemblage artists such as Louise Nevelson in the way it gathers found objects and recontextualizes them to convey a new narrative. What distinguishes this work from traditional assemblage is an unusual element of interactivity. A log book and extra magnets are cues for viewers to physically engage with the collection. The small

¹ Gillian Whiteley, "Junk : Art and the Politics of Trash." London: I.B.Tauris, 2010. Accessed March 30, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

objects are attached to the wall with magnets. The ability to dismount them allows viewers to inspect, rearrange, or even remove and add objects to the collection. Viewers are invited to modify the collection based on their own value systems and through the lenses of their own life experiences. Schklar releases the personal values that she has assigned to each of these objects, accepting that her view of the collection is only one of many possible assessments.

The meaning of *Self Branding* (2015-18), by Eric J. Simpson can be derived from the value assigned to the plastic packaging of which it is made. Convenient, single-use plastic bags are criticized for their notorious contributions to both land and ocean pollution. Though we will not be doomed without plastic bags, and reasonable alternatives are increasingly available, their use remains pervasive due to their convenience. In *Self Branding*, plastic bags are transformed, crafted around a PVC pipe to resemble a whip, a device commonly associated with kinky sex and forbidden pleasures involving self-inflicted or the consensual infliction of pain. Simpson likens this pleasure for pain tradeoff to the consequences that result from engaging with convenience-based consumer culture, symbolized by the carefully transformed bags into whips. In an article titled "The Art of Saving Relics," Sarah Everts discusses the pervasiveness of plastic in art objects of cultural importance, such as acrylic paintings and plastic sculptures from the pop-art movement, and how this fact poses a problem for conservators as these cultural relics begin to age.² While leather and rubber are the usual materials associated with whips, Simpson invites us to consider disposable plastic as an item of pleasure and dominance within consumer culture, while also exploring its potential for destruction. For example, purchasing a few five-cent plastic bags at the grocery store when you forget your reusable ones in the car may be a convenient solution to a problem in the moment, but simultaneously contributes to the serious issue of plastic pollution in our landfills and oceans. Does plastic's environmentally destructive price tag contribute to the guilty, possibly kinky, pleasure of its convenience?

Simpson's work is accompanied by a step-by-step tutorial that equips viewers with the skills and knowledge to make their own whips out of plastic bags. In this way, he simultaneously uses his social capital to classify the plastic whips as fine art objects, while freely sharing the know-how needed to craft his work. This provides a satirical take on the question of authorship in a fine art context. Simpson's work also promotes upcycling and D.I.Y. practices: actions that counter the negative effects on the environment as a result of the plastic bags he chooses to feature.

The artists in *Transition, Transform* use their positions as artists to assign and subvert the value of objects that emerge from consumer culture. Each work utilizes easily accessible items both as materials in the making and as a conceptual jumping-off point for exploring value as a malleable and subjective concept. Davies relays how artists, the gallery, and fine art institutions can use their social capital to confer cultural value to just about anything. Schklar explores the subjectivity of value by allowing interactivity in her work, leaving the curation of her assemblage to the whims of viewers who will engage through the lens of their own life experiences. Simpson likens the seductive convenience of consumer culture to the combination of pain and pleasure involved in sadomasochist practices while also challenging notions of authorship and the role of the artist. Each artist sheds light on the different ways that value is constructed in art and society through their transformations of object byproducts of consumer culture.

² Sarah Everts, "The Art of Saving Relics." *Scientific American* 314, no. 4 (April 2016): 72-77. *Environment Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 30, 2018).