

Lump, Slump, Sunk

Adrienne Spier

April 7 - May 12, 2018



Inflation

Emily Rosamond

It bloats. Particleboard – a cheap, engineered wood product, made by binding woodchips, sawdust, and wood shavings together with resin – does not fare well when exposed to water. If soaked, its fibres swell and weaken. When used for furniture, flooring, countertops, or other home finishings, particleboard usually hides under a layer of waterproof veneer. This protects the inner resin-bound particles from water damage, and gives the illusion of solidity. Home furnishings made with particleboard project an image, however thin, of solid objects made from a single, durable material.

In her recent series *Line of Furniture*, Adrienne Spier explores particleboard's propensity to swell when exposed to water. Spier cuts cheap, discarded furniture into thin strips, and selectively bloats one side of each strip in water. When the pieces are stacked on top of one another, minute differences in thickness between the bloated and non-bloated sides add up to a considerable difference overall. Subject to an uneven inflation in thickness, the stacks veer way off vertical. Slicing through the diced-up, particulate core of cheap, discarded furniture, *Line of Furniture* reflects on the changing relationships between furniture, materiality and value.

There is finite space to house furniture, flooring and collected objects. Whether these items are used, stored or discarded depends on available space, and speaks to cultural and generational assumptions about which things are valuable enough to store. In the past, Spier has worked with discarded furniture made from high-quality materials. An important sub-theme of such works was the frugality of saving hard-wearing items.

In more recent work, Spier's interest in furniture's value has shifted. The low-grade materials in *Line of Furniture* speak to the rise of a new regime of valuation: financialization, which Arjun Appadurai has described as “the process that permits money to be used to make more money through the use of instruments that exploit the role of money in credit, speculation, and investment.”¹ For Appadurai, financial products ‘slice’ and ‘dice’ the world into composite investments,² such as mortgage-backed securities and collateralized debt obligations. Such investment products undermine the integrity of underlying, tangible assets. In 2008, they inflated shaky assets' value so much that they threw the entire financial system out of whack. In this world of “slicing and dicing,” Spier's operations reveal a core material and financial logic of our time: one of hollowed out, pseudo-solid, derivative products, made from many scraps.

Spier's *Mass Melt* similarly explores the shifting relationships between materials, value, and rituals of saving. She melts down dozens of beer bottles in a kiln, until they are scant lumps of brown glass. This renders the once-returnable beer bottles illegible to the recycling process. Collecting and

1 Arjun Appadurai, *Banking on Words: The Failure of Language in the Age of Derivative Finance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 2.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 65.



returning bottles for a small deposit has been a staple recycling ritual that many have grown up with, backed by container-deposit legislation in many countries.¹ Standard, domestic bottles are washed and reused, without being melted. Once broken or disfigured, the bottles can no longer be returned for the deposit, even though the amount of material returned might well be the same. Adding much heat to the equation, Spier turns the bottles into entropic, lumpy expressions of the quantities of glass needed for their manufacture, and draws attention to the irreconcilability between material quantity and monetary value.

To find so many beer bottles, Spier purchased someone's collection on Kijiji. He needed more room in his garage. Although he was around the same age as the artist, Spier felt there was a generational divide at play: a tension between disparate regimes of saving and storing. In an age of financial valuation, storing value in material form (as in, say, currency backed up in bullion) becomes something of a *passé* proposition. By melting bottles, Spier responds paradoxically to these shifting rituals of storing. By rendering the bottles momentarily liquid in the kiln, she takes away their *liquidity*: their ability to be turned into cash.

In her recent works, Spier navigates the shaky ground between the qualities and quantities of materials – and between everyday acts of saving and ever more abstract regimes of valuation. Hard-wearing items – furniture, flooring, beer bottle collections – slowly witness these profound, intergenerational changes – and ask us to reconsider how our ways of relating to material value might shift again, in even more uncertain financial terrain.

¹ Chris Riddel, "What Happens to Beer Bottles when you Return them to the Beer Store?," *The Torontoist*, April 19, 2013 (<https://torontoist.com/2013/04/what-happens-to-beer-bottles-when-you-return-them-to-the-beer-store/>).



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC.

155 James St N
Hamilton, Ontario
L8R 2K9
<http://theinc.ca>

Adrienne Spier (b. Montreal) is a Guelph based artist who works with discarded and unwanted materials. Spier received an MFA from Concordia University, and has a BA from the University of Guelph. Her work has been exhibited across Canada and in Europe. She has taken part in numerous residencies and is the recipient of various grants. Her work is held in both private and public collections.

Emily Rosamond is an artist, writer and Lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she is Joint Programme Leader on the BA Fine Art and History of Art.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

**HAMILTON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**



Hamilton



**ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO**
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Adrienne Spier would like to acknowledge funding support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

Cover: Adrienne Spier, *Line of Furniture*, 2014-18. Close-up view, Hamilton Artists Inc. Image: Abedar Kamgari.

Page 3: Adrienne Spier, *Lump, Slump, Sunk*, 2018. Exhibition views, Hamilton Artists Inc. Image: Abedar Kamgari.