

VORFREUDE; Substitutes for Personal Fulfillment

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Master of Fine Arts

by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined
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VORFREUDE; Substitutes for Personal Fulfillment

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a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,

and hereby Certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Bethanie Collins

Associate Professor William Hawk, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

While consumption has its appeal through the presentation of comfort and a worry-free existence, its actual effect is quite the opposite, resulting in an endless course of desire and discontentment. *Vorfreude* is a German word meant to convey the intense, anticipative joy that comes from imagining future pleasures. The work in the exhibition *VORFREUDE* highlights the absurdity behind empty promises of fulfillment communicated through appearances and marketing. We often equate what is salable and coveted with stability and a delusion of certainty is created through material possessions. The three-dimensional paintings that make up this exhibition create a heavily branded staging of a domestic space. Color and pattern are repeated to the point of overstimulation and fatigue; mimicking the effect that marketing has on our choices and creating a space that is an assault to the senses as much as consumerism is to our pocketbooks. The language and market of contemporary art and design is shown through material usage and serves as a metaphor for the artificial, consumer-driven world. Using canvas and wood to construct all of the

objects, the resulting forms are fragile and for display only. This showcases how superficial gains act as a short-lived, futile substitute for personal fulfillment. The irony is that I am an artist using art objects as a way to show the frivolousness of material goods. This contradiction is meant to show my own conflicting values and actions; desiring the very thing that I know can never give me any true, lasting contentment.

PART ONE: PERCEPTION, HOW WE SEE AND MAKE MEANING

“There is no correct perception, only personal ones.” –Sol LeWitt

Perception is the process of understanding our environment by arranging and deciphering sensory information. Creating a domestic space is a way in which we put into practice the way our minds organize our surroundings based on a specific set of rules involving color harmony and form. In my work, I create an interior physical environment that is contrasted by a heavily branded retail space and break the accepted rules of harmony within a space to overwhelm the viewer. This showcases that the way we arrange information involve complex, emotional triggers that are learned behaviors through marketing and social norms.

It is natural human instinct to seek out and provide for oneself the aesthetic materials to live not only a functioning, but fulfilling existence. “Rather than taking the world on its own terms of significance and value (the basic survival needs, sought and recognized by instinct), people came more and more to systematize or order it and act upon it. Eventually, this powerful and deep-rooted desire to make sense of the world became part of what it meant to be human- to impose a sense of order and thereby give the world additional (what

we now call 'cultural') meaning (Dissanayake 73).” This cultural meaning can be identified within a domestic environment. The spaces in which we live are often how we create stability and comfort in a world that is in a perpetual state of change.

Perception is the process of attaining awareness and understanding of our environment by organizing and interpreting sensory information. Color is one way in which we define our interior physical space. Color is derived from the spectrum of light interacting in the eye with the spectral sensitivities of light receptors. Color sensation is determined by the spectrum of light arriving at the eye. The colors of the visible light spectrum have varying wavelengths and frequencies at which it passes through the eye. As discovered by French chemist, Michel Eugene Chevreul, when viewed from a distance, two colors in close proximity produce a third, distinctive color. This finding became the impetus for the Pointillist technique of the Neoimpressionist painters, who were interested in the interplay of colors and making adjustments to achieve a certain harmony in their composition. Color shows us how our perceptual experiences change based upon context. Designing a domestic space is a way in which we try to create a distinct perceptual experience for the visitors, the viewers, of our interior spaces.

Georges Seurat, a Neoimpressionist, believed that the scientific use of color and the knowledge of perception and optical laws could be used to create a new language of art based on its own set of rules. He set out to show

this language using lines, color intensity and color scheme. Seurat called this language Chromoluminarism, defined by the separation of colors into individual dots or patches, which interacted optically. This required the viewer to take the separated colors and optically combine them into the intended hue instead of relying on the physical mixing of pigments, as seen in his painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1.1). This challenged the viewer's perception by making the eye blend colors optically, rather than the physical mixing of pigments on the canvas. Seurat used various techniques with color and geometry to create his own language and express his view of reality. He theorized that the elements of tone, color, line, and quality of light had influences on the emotions of the viewer. Lines directed upward created a sense of happiness and lines pointing downward achieved an environment of sadness. Therefore, lines that were horizontal were used as a basis for neutral, calm emotions. Color was used in the same way, with warm colors denoting happiness and cool colors indicating sadness. A balance of warm and cool colors created calmness. Seurat recognized that not only did our optical perception change based upon context, but that our mental state did as well. He made us aware of color and pattern as an emotional and subjective element in art. My work breaks all of these rules of harmony within a space involving line and color. Lines are positioned vertically and horizontally. Color is used in a garish way with unpleasantly saturated warm and cool hues conflicting with one another. This creates a space that is antagonistic and uncomfortable, using

Chevruel and Seurat's discoveries to create a distinct perceptual experience for my viewer.

Josef Albers defined the color block as authoritative and important, not the uses of color to define representational space like Chevruel and Seurat. Color became the subject of Albers' work. In his piece *Indicating Solids* (1.2), we can see that if we take middle gray and put it against two different surrounds: black and light gray, the middle gray will look lighter against the black and darker against the light gray. The surrounding color takes its properties away from the color that is inside it and vice versa. Colors interact with one another and change our perception accordingly. The colors are not altered. Our perception of the colors is the only thing that changes. The layering of color and pattern similarly present our aesthetic identity, attempting to shape perceptions of style, class, and affluence. This acts as a metaphor in my work by utilizing the space to change perception and using properties from the surrounding environment to alter the experience the viewer takes away.

“In all ecclesiastical society, war is henceforth declared on stripes, especially those that alternate bright colors- red, green, or yellow- and thus create an impression of gaudiness. In the eyes of the legislating prelates, nothing could be more unseemly (Pastoureau, 13).”

I use six colors in every piece and use them for very specific reasons pertaining to perception on an emotional and physiological level. Black, white, red, green, blue, and yellow, together as a system, are known as opponent process colors. This is a theory of how the human visual system works and processes color in an antagonistic manner. This model proposes that there are three opponent channels: black versus white (detecting luminance), red versus green, and blue versus yellow. Ewald Hering initially proposed this theory in 1892. Hering noticed that red was never perceived with green, blue with yellow, or black with white. In other words, you never see a bluish yellow or a reddish green.

Fundamentally, this model outlines the way the retina of the eye permits the visual system to perceive and distinguish color and how we process that information in a manner of opposing forces. In 1983, Hewitt D. Crane and Thomas P. Piantanide carried out an experiment where red and green stripes as well as blue and yellow stripes were placed next to each other. When a viewer would look at the pairings at a specific position from their eye, the borders of the stripes would seem to disappear, revealing a completely new color to the viewer; however, they were not able to describe the color. The viewer only knew that what they were seeing was not achromatic. This combination of the opponent process colors and stripes had an illusory effect.

Afterimages can also be explained through the opponent process theory of vision as well. When a pathway of one channel starts to fatigue, the

other compensates. So, if one were to look at a red square for at least 30 seconds, enough to let the color be absorbed by the eye and fatigue the red pathways, then look away onto a white surface, the green ghostlike image of the square would remain. The green pathways compensate for the fatigue of the red. This particular theory of color is used in my work because it is directly referencing perception on a biological level, serving in the metaphor of how we perceive on a learned, emotional level. Color and pattern are repeated in my work to the point of overstimulation and fatigue; mimicking the effect that marketing has on our choices and creating a space that is an assault to our senses as much as consumerism is to our pocketbooks.

Due to the strong distinction between all six of these colors, our eyes grow tired and confused over a short period of time. These colors are physically and mentally exhausting to look at and when they are completely encompassing a space. I include these colors on the walls, the furniture and the kits. Through repetition, a false sense of validity is achieved for the consumer, as if to say that abundance is equivalent to worth. This contradicts the findings related to color harmony by Seurat and Chevrueil and challenges the viewer by creating an environment where the stylization of the space is held above the comfort of its inhabitant.

Bridget Riley is an artist who uses pattern to force us to become aware of our perceptive nature and how we make sense of our surroundings. . In *Fission* (1.3), she takes simple black shapes against a white background to trick

our eye into seeing movement and three dimensionality that is, in reality, not there. Illusions use the visual world to destabilize and invade our senses, much like how the accepted rules of style manipulate our choices. As previously explained with afterimages and the opponent process theory of vision, when a person looks at an object for too long, their visual grasp begins to soften in a series of perceptual changes. As the pathways in the eye fatigue, perception undergoes a dramatic transformation. Riley understood that attention is not a timeless exchange between a viewer and an object. Everything is in flux and in the midst of a process of self-differentiation. Nothing is constant. Fashion thrives in the absence of permanence. Marketing depends on the fatigue of our desires over time and offers a newer, more stylish (therefore more coveted) version of a material good.

Our perception and understanding of what is around us is at the mercy of the way information is organized and presented. In the optical illusion The Rabbit and The Duck (1.4), one can make sense out of a confusing image by organizing forms to resemble something you have seen before. In this illusion, you may initially see a duck, but if you shift your perception just slightly, you may notice a rabbit. This illusion is an example of how our perceptual experience of the world is one that changes based upon the environment of what we are looking at. We will commonly try to find figures or objects that are recognizable in a new and confusing environment. A chair or a table has relatively basic properties to it with specific uses, so it is only natural that we make sense out of a

space through accumulation of familiar, functional objects. My work uses that source of comfort against the viewer, in an attempt to manipulate their choices in favor of my financial gain.

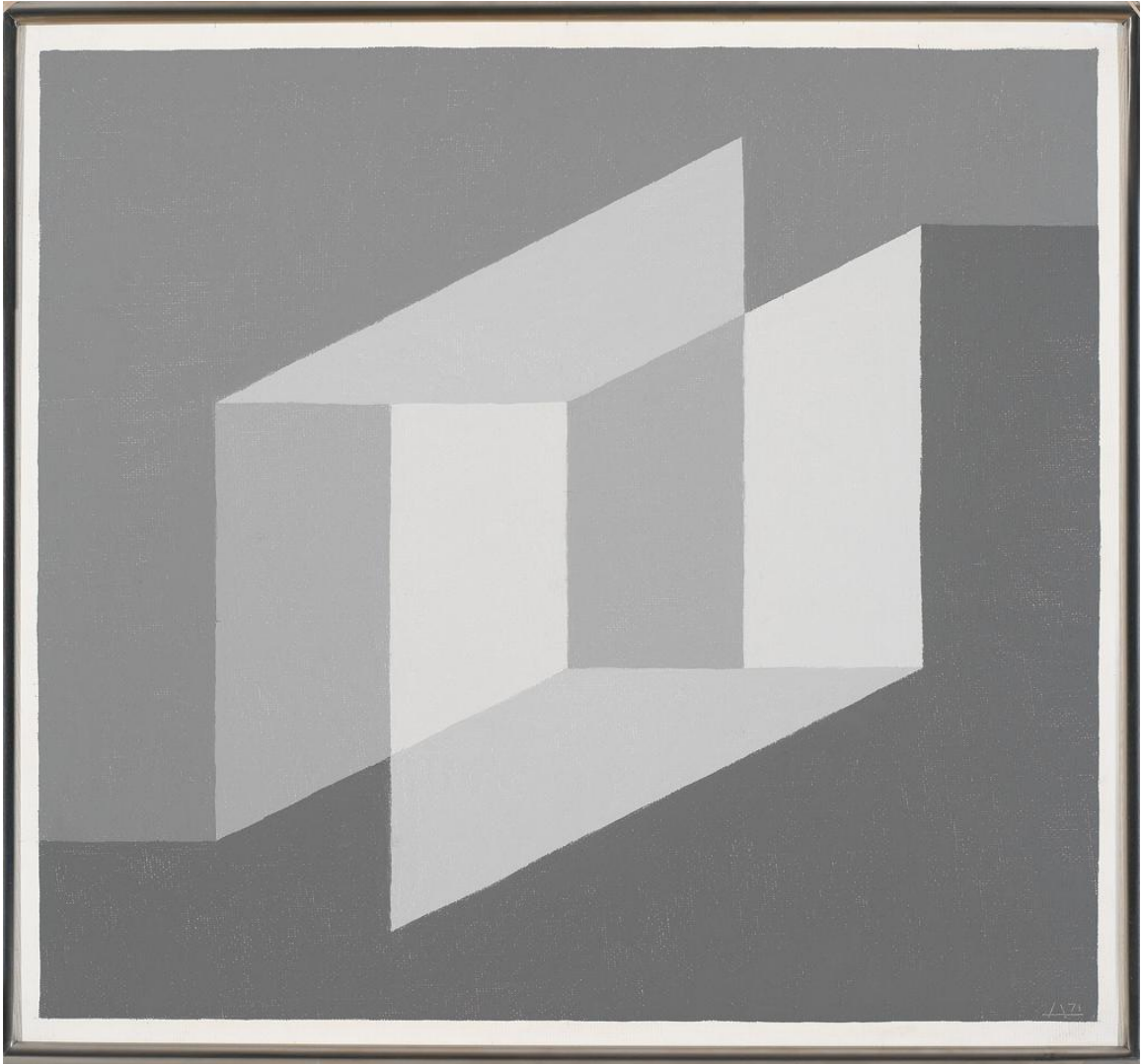
Optical illusions that many of us have seen as children are actually some of the most impressive tests of how our perception connects and changes due to the tangible world around us. For example, the Necker Cube (1.5) is an ambiguous line drawing. What is interesting is that the human visual system picks a version of each otherwise ambiguous part of the shape that makes the whole stable. The brain picks an interpretation based upon how we normally view information, such as reading text from left to right. However, based upon the fact that we all view information differently, the cube has no definite, consistent interpretation. How we learn to view information due to cultural norms leads to how we interpret and categorize environments and others. We pick a version of an otherwise ambiguous choice, such as style, that makes us feel stable. We then use those aesthetic choices to categorize others and perpetuate a false sense of security through the things that we own.

Illusions highlight the fact that the process of understanding our environment is tenuous, based upon changing modes of organizing, categorizing, and interpreting information. Our brains compare the surrounding environment in order to create our perception. The purpose of our senses is not to provide us with an absolute physical property of our external reality, but to interpret what we see as efficiently as possible in order to interact appropriately. Style is one way

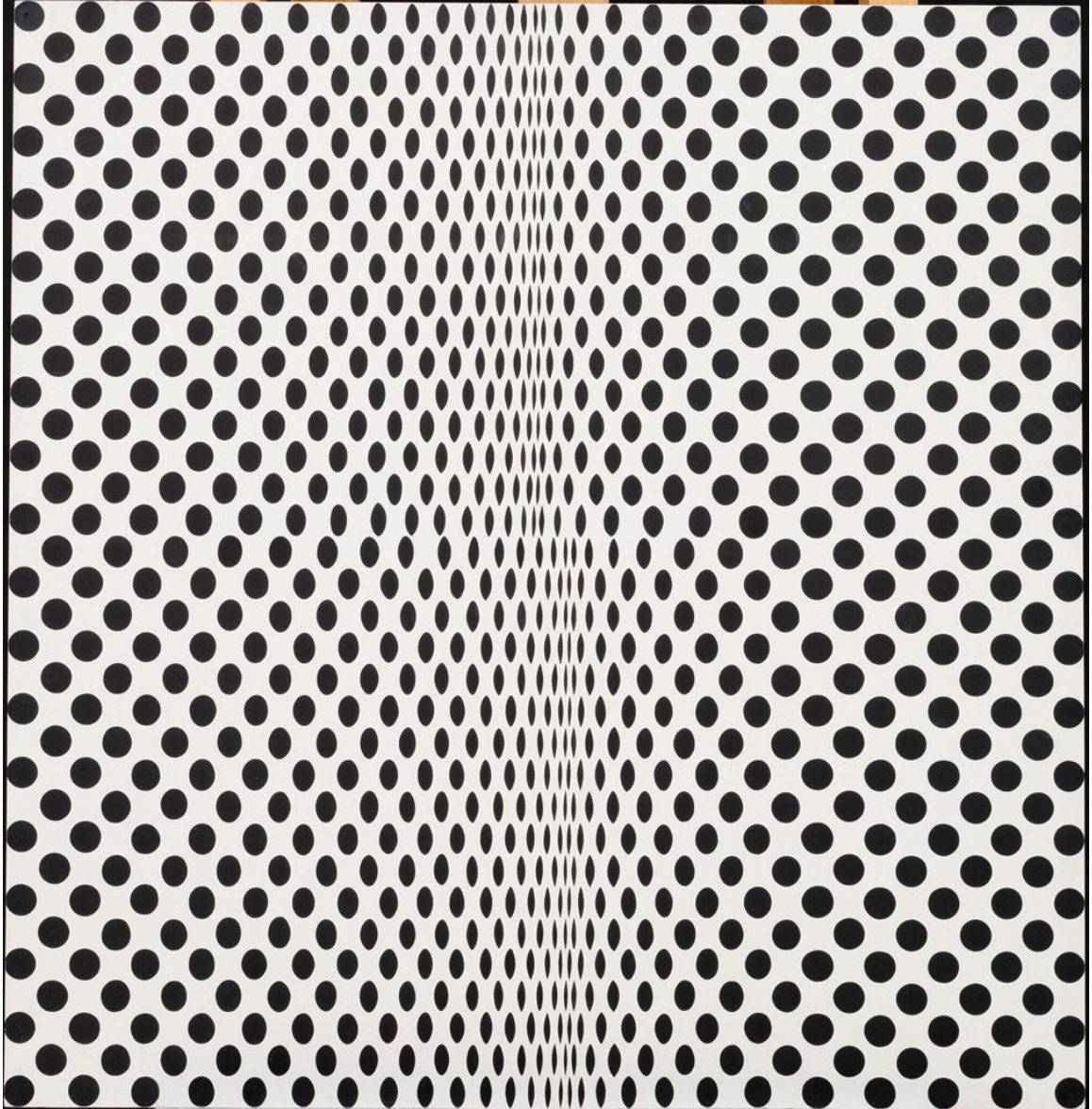
in which we create a persona and communicate with our environment; telling others how to interact with and categorize us. My work takes a specific style and turns it into a brand through repetition and presentation; showcasing how marketing attempts to over stimulate the viewer in an attempt to distract from the absurdity of it all. Our understanding of the world around us is not an infinite exchange between our senses and an object; it involves complex, seemingly arbitrary choices of others that are accepted as cultural norms.



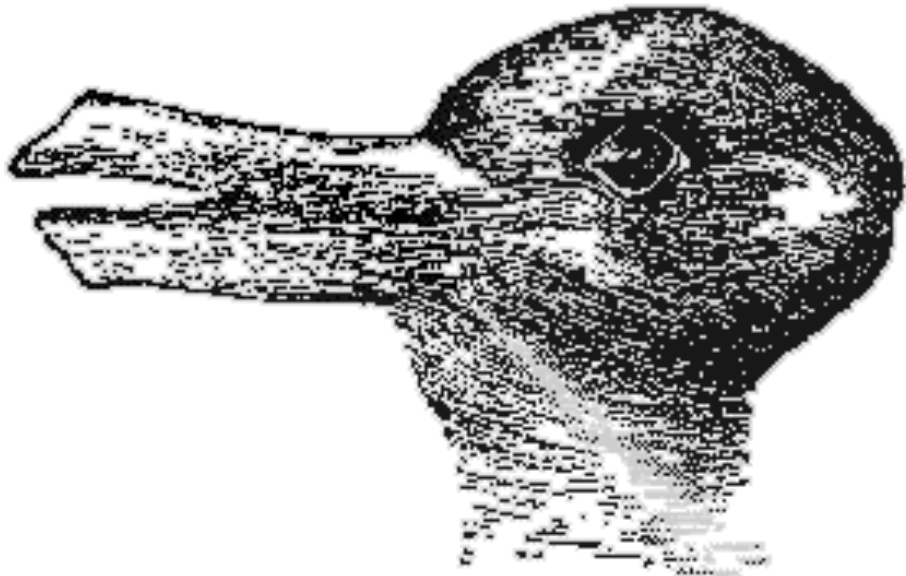
1.1
Georges Seurat
Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, 1884-1886
Oil on Canvas
84 in x 120 in
Art Institute of Chicago
ARTstor



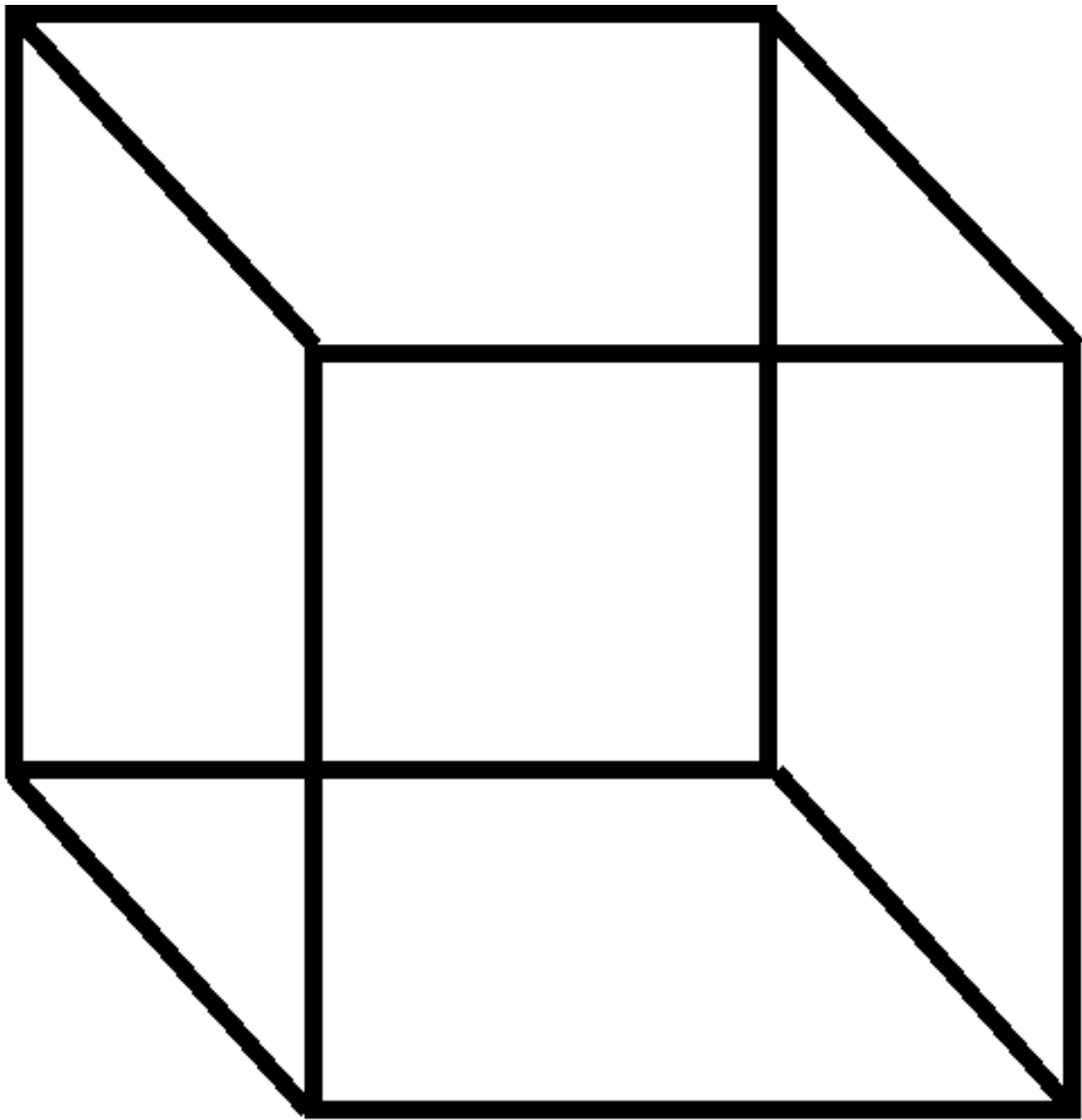
1.2
Josef Albers
Indicating Solids, 1971
Oil on Masonite
24 in x 22 in
ARTstor



1.3
Bridget Riley
Fission, 1963
Tempera on Composition Board
34 in x 34 in
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
ARTstor



1.4
Rabbit/Duck Illusion



1.5
Necker Cube

PART TWO: WHAT WE SEE, THE PHYSICAL AS METAPHOR

THE STRIPE

Pattern is used widely in fashion and design to embellish an object and heighten the perception of its prominence. Society has mechanisms that establish cultural norms and are then used as leverage for marketing that shapes our notions of meaning. I use stripes to embellish every object I make to signify importance and repeat them to the point of overstimulation and, eventually, fatigue. This functions in the same way that cultural norms and marketing has on our choices. The repeated stripe also becomes a brand and commodifies the element of fine art by communicating affiliation through pattern. Stripes function as a tool for classification and are a way in which we make sense of our environments, both on a physiological and learned, emotional level.

“What characterizes the contemporary period is the coexistence of two opposing value systems, based on one and the same surface structure. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the stripe can either enhance or detract from one’s status or do both at the same time. On the other hand, it is never neutral (Pastoureau, 55).” The absence of neutrality is one of the many reasons this pattern is repeated throughout my work. It is, in its fundamental state of being a

line, designed to gain a viewers attention but have also become a system with which we classify people, things, and behaviors. Stripes have a rich history whose meaning has changed throughout the centuries. In the following pages, I will discuss the history of the stripe and how each interpretation adds to the greater conceptual basis of my work.

In medieval dress, everything had symbolic meaning: the color of a woman's dress, the accessories, and how they were worn had certain, specific ideologies attached. Specifically in painting during this time, you could determine an individual's social rank based on the colors and symbols embedded in the work that depicted them. Clothing as symbol started to eclipse the functional purpose. During the Middle Ages, the stripe was a bold signifier of someone who was marked with scandal and trickery. "At the end of the summer of 1254, to be precise, Saint Louis returned to Paris after an unsuccessful crusade, a dramatic captivity, and a stay in the Holy Land of four long years. The king did not return alone. He brought with him a number of monks newly arrived in France and, among them, a few brothers of the Carmelite Order. It was because of them that the scandal would ensue: they wore striped cloaks (Pastoureau, 7)." These striped cloaks deviated from the normal dress at the time, so much so that it indicated a certain kind of disobedience and the Carmelites were endlessly mocked. The public had given them the nickname "les freres barres" which means "the barred brothers." "Barres" is a term for stripes in French, but also designates illegitimacy. Many thought the Carmelites were henchmen for the

devil and the Antichrist because they lived by begging and were relatively powerless in terms of the religious hierarchy at the time. But above all, they were criticized because of their striped attire and, for more than a quarter of a century, were ordered to abandon it for plain clothes. “Nevertheless, in 1295, in a specifically declared bull to this effect, Pope Boniface VIII confirmed the 1287 change in cloaks and solemnly restated the absolute ban against wearing striped habits for monks of all religious orders (Pastoureau, 11).” The uses of stripes in painting were a way to visually and conceptually produce an inconsistency to the rest of the environment and create a tone of skepticism. This very distinct tone is translated to my work by using stripes to embellish objects that are deceiving. By using the form of a chair or a kit, I am promising utilitarian function to the viewer. However, upon closer inspection, they see that it is a farce. The contents of the kit are permanently glued together and the chair is flimsy and unusable. Stripes, in this historical context, are used to signify deceit and I am using this history to relate the way my objects are constructed to the greater concept of the work.

During the Renaissance and the romantic periods, lines used to denote falseness still remained, but had also started to become a sign of freedom and celebration. There was a shift in the reading of stripes from the Middle Ages to the modern age, transitioning from the diabolic to the domestic. Servants began to wear striped clothing and slaves were painted in similar garb. “As early as the end of the fifteenth century, for example, in many representations of the Adoration of the Magi, the black king was given striped clothing. In the following

century, that became a veritable iconographic attribute. All the same, Balthazar was not a slave in the least nor a lowly social figure; much the opposite. But the custom was gradually established of associated striped clothes and Africans, no matter what their social rank. Thus a painter like Veronese never misses an opportunity to dress the black men he portrays in stripes, or even- the refinement of a great artist imitating himself- to place beside every black man a white man in striped clothing (Pastoureau, 40).” Striped dress had begun to transcend the original savage interpretation and started to represent a certain exoticism while still maintaining a hierarchy of social class. During the American Revolution, the stripe started to become fashionable, not only in clothing, but extending into upholstery. The new flag of the thirteen American colonies, with its thirteen red and white stripes, became a symbol of liberty. Wearing stripes or displaying it in or outside of one’s home showed support for freedom, belonging to a specific value system and sensibility. Those uses of stripes had become a tool not for categorizing others, but for creating ones persona. Using this stark pattern was a way in which one could announce their social or political affiliation through displays of flags or by showcasing art in their home that represented their refinement and cultured image. This is another interpretation that relates to my work in that branding relies on the desire to create a persona; to broadcast to the world what we are affiliated with and by what principles we live our life.

Stripes have a loaded history in the world of art as well. Piet Mondrian used line in the form of a grid in the 1920’s, using only verticals and

horizontals, embracing an art of pure abstraction. Mondrian believed that painting should set a precedent for beauty and order in the world, consisting of essential qualities of line and color (2.1). His paintings set out to embody the universal, yet dynamic rhythm of life. Agnes Martin was another artist who used line, paring down her compositions to the most reductive parts in an effort to achieve flawlessness and a divine quality (2.2). Both Mondrian and Martin sought to accomplish a heightened level of realism and, therefore, a heightened state of being through their use of reductive compositions consisting primarily of line. My work is in stark contrast to these ideas; asserting that, while a temporary sense of joy can come from physical manifestations, one cannot achieve a lasting improved emotional state from tangible items alone.

Sol LeWitt asserted that his wall drawings did not produce images but rather, created an advanced realism because he believed the line to suggest nothing in particular, just itself (2.3). “A line only stands for itself. It doesn’t describe anything but a line (Sol LeWitt, 10).” He believed that to stripe a surface meant to simply distinguish it, due to its contrasting nature. Daniel Buren similarly uses stripes for the formal quality of repetition and figure ground reversal. Buren separates each white and color chromatic alternation uniformly every 8.7 centimeters (2.4). He would describe stripes simply as a “visual tool”. Along with using stripes because of their historical significance, I also use them because of their formal properties like LeWitt and Buren. The furniture, tools, and kits that I make are meant to grab a viewer’s attention and the stripe does

just that due to its contrasting nature. In *Broom and Dustpan Set (2.5)*, the stripes are functioning as an embellishment and purely meant to attract a look from the viewer.

The stripe's physical and symbolic nature has changed throughout the centuries. The time in which we live combines all of the earlier symbology. Stripes can indicate deceit or affiliation, through prison garb or flags. They can be used as a tool to create one's persona by wearing or displaying a stark pattern that is associated with a specific group or brand to show our agreement with them, broadcasting our values to the world. Stripes have also become a mark of playfulness, used for children's toys or sports uniforms due to the contrasting nature of repeated lines that are designed to gain a viewer's attention. In any event, the stripe is never a neutral. Each interpretation of this pattern is used in my work to build multiple layers of representation and symbolic meaning; adding to the aspect of learned behavior and accepted social norms that is present in my work.

THE CANVAS AND IMPERMANENT DESIGN

Canvas is used in every object that I make. I use unprimed canvas and acrylic in my work as a way to physically and conceptually connect my ideas back to the emergence of Postmodern Art, when the barrier between high and low art and social class started to become more carefully analyzed. Art, in general, has its own level of exclusivity attached to it. I am using this sect of the visual world as a vehicle to satirize our consumer-driven culture. Painting has long been an object of status and wealth. If you see a Helen Frankenthaler painting in someone's home, you could assume that its owner is cultured and educated but also wealthy enough to be able to afford this piece of history. Painting and the materials that make up its structure have an extensive history that I utilize to add to the metaphorical framework of each piece.

Canvas became the main support for painting as early as the thirteenth century, replacing the wood panel. One of the earliest oil paintings on canvas dates back to around 1410, but the material became more common in sixteenth century Italy. During this time period, canvas was widely used in tents and sails in Italy and was of high quality and readily available due to the boom in the shipping industry. Linen was the first type of canvas that was widely used, as it is most suitable for oil paint due to its high quality and even texture. Renaissance painters made sure that the texture of the canvas did not show through in an effort to obtain the highest level of realism. In the early twentieth

century, cotton canvas was introduced. It was more economical than expensive linen and had a more even (but more pronounced) weave pattern. Acrylic paint's introduction in the 1930's increased the popularity of this new material as well. I use acrylic paint in each piece because it can be safely applied to raw canvas, unlike oil paint that requires that the canvas be properly primed to prevent deterioration.

Postmodern artists took advantage of the canvas texture and the unpredictability of the interaction of paint with the canvas weave. Jackson Pollock (2.6), Kenneth Noland (2.7), and Helen Frankenthaler (2.8) were among the first of many artists to use raw, unprimed canvas in their work. They went beyond representation and used materials as part of their conceptual basis. Typically, these artists would lay their unstretched, unprimed canvas on the floor and dilute their paints, letting it soak into the canvas. This also introduced the "objectness" of a painting; moving away from the easel. In each object I make, I am not denying the physicality of the work and stressing the objectness of the painting by showing the back of the canvas to the viewer. Artists that are involved in the recent art movement "Provisionalism" and "The New Casualists" are similarly using the objectness of painting as their physical and conceptual basis, allowing the supporting materials such as wood and screws become the subject of the work.

Using raw canvas to construct my painting objects, I am creating pieces that are not meant to withstand any sort of wear. This makes use of the

idea of planned obsolescence, which occurs when marketers deliberately reduce the time between replacements and upgrades. This is a strategy to design a product with a limited useful life, so that it will become outdated or no longer functional after a short amount of time, increasing sales of the product in the process. I use canvas in areas of objects that are designed to withstand weight, as seen in my construction "Chair" (2.9), deliberately reducing the life and functionality of the object.

Planned obsolescence also instills the desire to own what's newer and better, sooner than what is actually necessary. The replacement for an object becomes more desirable than the original, brought about by technological advances and changes in popular fashion. There are two categories of obsolescence: function and desirability. With obsolescence of function, the maker intentionally constructs a product to last a short amount of time. With obsolescence of desirability, the marketers attempt to psychologically wear out a product through changes in fashion and styling of new versions. Designer George Nelson, has been quoted as saying "Design... is an attempt to make a contribution through change. When no contribution is made or can be made, the only process available for giving the illusion of change is styling!"

Professor Jonathan Chapman describes how "the process of consumption is, and has always been, motivated by complex emotional drivers, and is about far more than just the mindless purchasing of newer and shinier things; it is a journey towards the ideal or desired self, that through cyclical loops

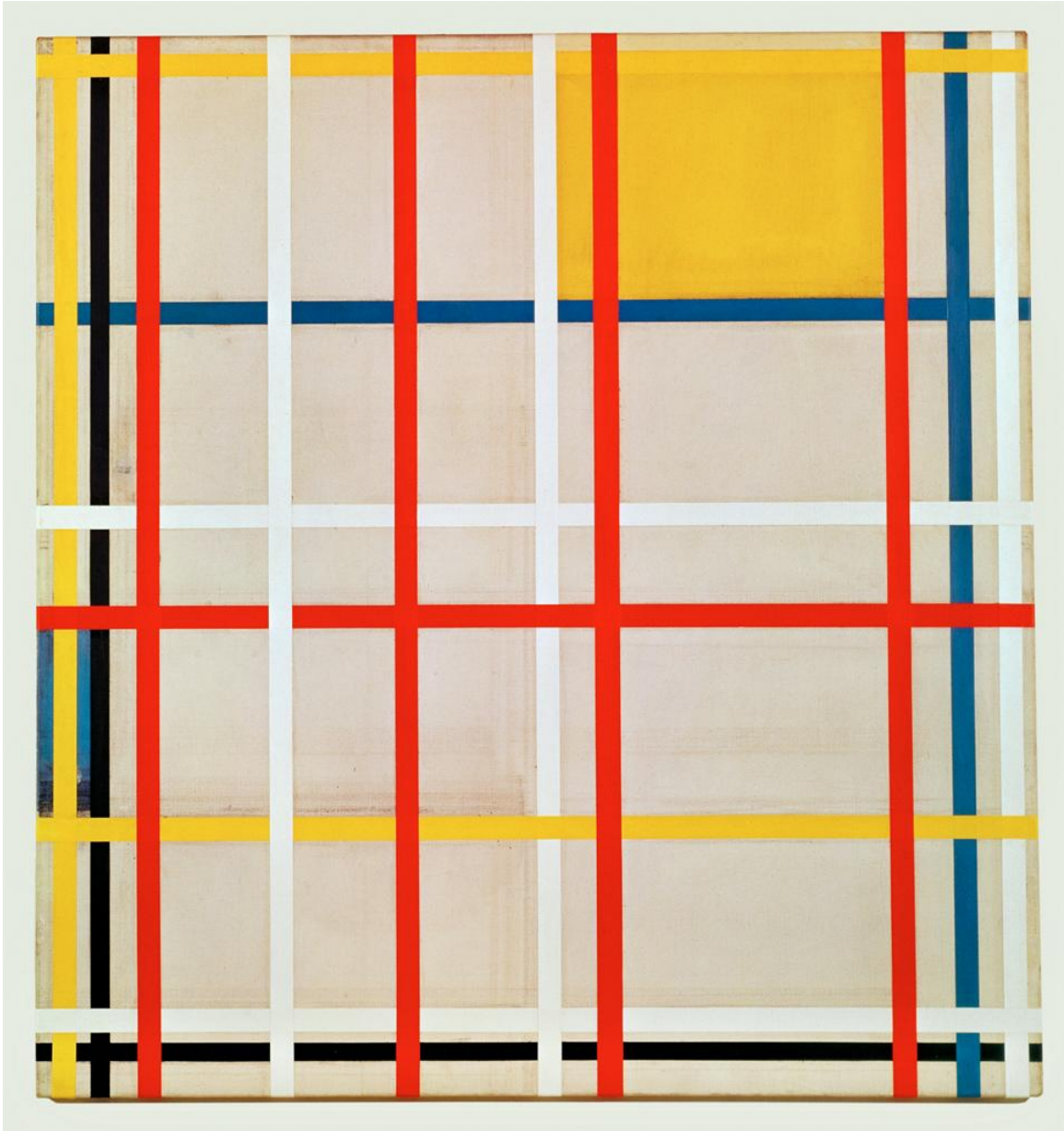
of desire and disappointment, becomes a seemingly endless process of serial destruction.” He asserts that “emotionally durable design” can be achieved by making a product that is well made and considers the following five elements:

- Narrative: How users share a unique personal history with the product.
- Consciousness: How the product is perceived as autonomous and in possession of its own free will.
- Attachment: Can a user be made to feel a strong emotional connection to a product?
- Fiction: The product inspires interactions and connections beyond just the physical relationship.
- Surface: How the product ages and develops character through time and use.

The individual objects I construct could not promote themselves as being autonomous because of the high, intense stylization involved. The objects are falling short on consciousness according to Professor Chapman’s elements because of the inability to integrate any of the objects into an existing space that does not follow the same, strict style rules of the exhibition space. Also, by using heavily stylized patterning of color and stripes throughout all of the objects, obsolescence of desirability is employed through the consideration of fashion cycles. While the stripes and colors can be promoted through marketing and branding, there is a limited amount of aesthetic life in it. The harsh colors and stripes become an assault on the senses after long exposure. While consumption has its appeal through the illusion of comfort and a worry-free

existence, its actual effect is quite the opposite. Planned obsolescence can result in waste and consumer debt, resulting in an endless coil of desire and discontentment.

Using theories surrounding planned obsolescence, I am creating a space that is highly stylized and has limited functionality. Canvas is used as a weak material of support to give reduced life to the otherwise functional objects. It is also used to relate this work back to the exclusivity attached to art and design. This sect of the visual world is used as a vehicle to satirize our consumer driven world and creates a humorous irony by using art as a way to show the superficiality of objects. My own confliction with desiring and denouncing these objects are thus displayed.



2.1
Piet Mondrian
New York City 3 (Unfinished), 1941
Oil on Canvas
46 in x 44 in
Repository, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza
ARTstor



2.2

Agnes Martin

Untitled #5, 1975

Synthetic Polymer Paint and Pencil on Synthetic Polymer Gesso on Canvas

72 in x 72 in

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

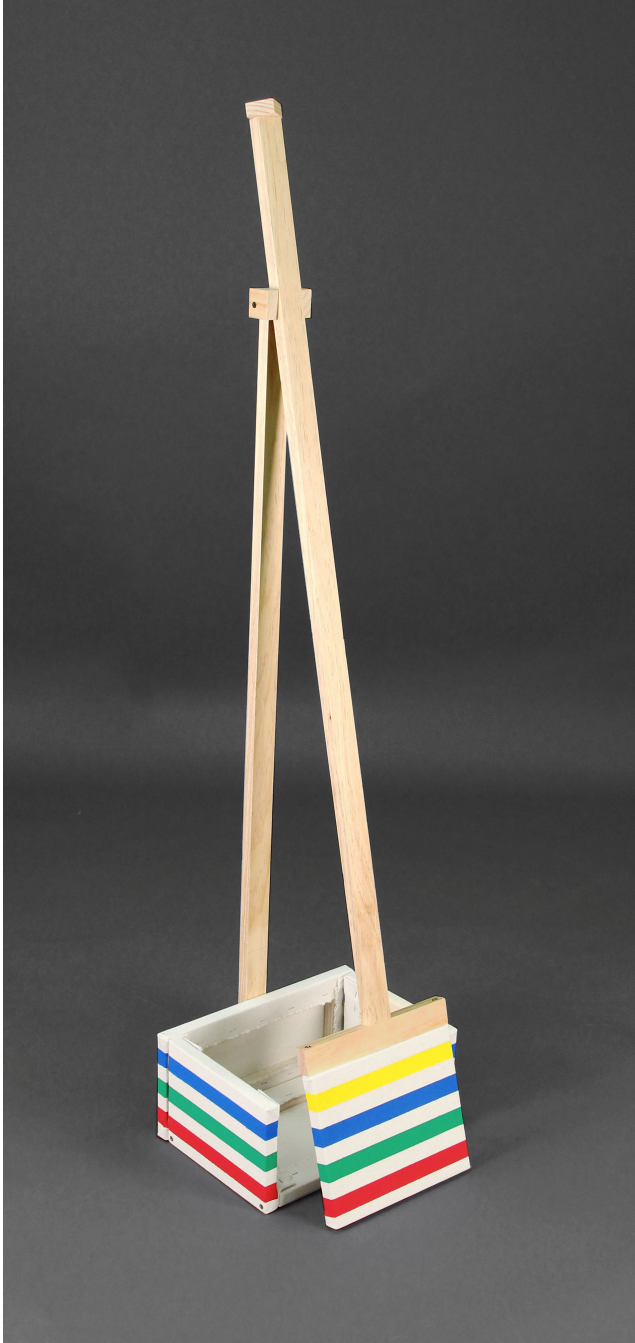
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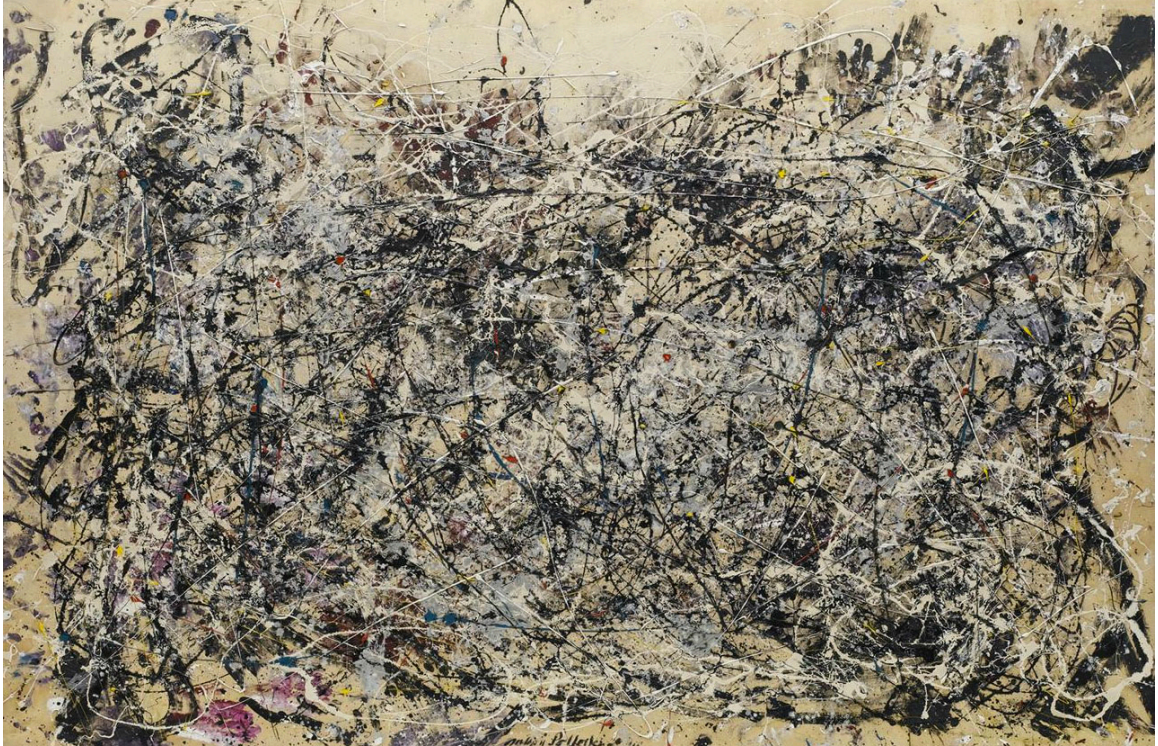
2.3
Sol LeWitt
Wall Drawing #761, 1994
India Ink Wash
Variable Dimensions
ARTstor



2.4
Daniel Buren
(Installation View) *Variable/Invariable*, 1966
Pre-printed Fabric
Variable Size
Exhibited at Bortolami, Winter 2007
ARTstor



2.5
Bethanie Collins
Broom and Dustpan Set, 2013
Acrylic on Canvas
13in x 13in x 13in



2.6
Jackson Pollock
Number 1A, 1948
Oil and Enamel Paint on Unprimed Canvas
68 in x 104 in
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
ARTstor



2.7
Kenneth Noland
Mercury (Ray Parker's Green in the Shadow of Red), 1962
Acrylic Resin on Canvas
70 in x 70 in
Yale University Art Gallery
ARTstor



2.8
Helen Frankenthaler
Canyon, 1965
Acrylic on Canvas
44 in x 52 in
The Phillips Collection
ARTstor



2.9
Bethanie Collins
Chair, 2013
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Construction
28 in x 44 in x 24 in

PART THREE: PRESENTATION, GESAMTKUNSTWERK

The term gesamtkunstwerk is translated as “total art work” (Franzen, Moriarty 506). This term has been used to describe environments and architecture as having a certain unity of style and spirit where all parts of a space work together to achieve a precise harmony. A lamp, a chair, even lighting can all be parts of an environment that share and contribute to a certain emotional response of anticipation and excitement with the items of a space. This concept is one that I use to create all of my objects and the spaces that they inhabit. Everything matches in color and design and works in unison to create a space that evokes a very specific, albeit over stimulating, space. The space is extroverted and confident and promises to offer the same to the viewer if they submit to it. Gesamtkunstwerk brings to light how environments can greatly influence our emotions and how targeted marketing manipulates that drive.

Daniel Buren understood the importance of placement, the unity of objects with the places where they reside. He refused the limitation of imposed meaning and oppression in order to discover new properties in art, seeing the presentational contexts not as neutral spaces, but rather an unexplored aspect of the visual field. His works were executed in the place for which they were destined, otherwise known as in situ. One of Buren’s first large-scale in situ pieces titled *Peinture/Sculpture* (3.1) was shown at the Solomon R. Guggenheim

Museum in New York in 1971. Frank Lloyd Wright designed the unusual architecture of the museum, consisting of a large central twisting ramp, with a strong visual impact of the spiral. Buren made two pieces, both made of cotton fabric with printed alternating blue and white stripes. The larger of the two pieces hung in the middle of the spiral inside the museum. The smaller was to be hung outside the museum, in a direction perpendicular to the piece inside (but was never fully realized due to censorship issues). This exhibition highlighted the importance of the perspective of the viewer; working with his or her placement in space, moving around the spiral and going inside and outside, instead of utilizing a fixed position of looking at a painting on a wall. Buren used the inside and outside environments as a way to challenge the viewer's awareness by focusing on context rather than content. By constructing opposing domestic and retail spaces, I am using internal and external spaces as a way to challenge the viewer's perception of each piece. By placing these objects in a gallery, I am also turning the objects into items of display rather than utilitarian function.

The German opera composer Richard Wagner introduced the word *gesamtkunstwerk* in the mid-1800's (Franzen, Moriarty 507). However, the concepts behind the term have been around long before that. The principles of having a total, harmonious work of art can be seen even as far back as the first large cathedral in Europe. In the year 1122 at the *Abbey of St. Denis* near Paris, the cathedral underwent a major transformation by the monk Suger (Franzen, Moriarty 505). He based his entire design on the concept that Christ had

ascended to heaven on a channel from material light to spiritual light. Suger had built portals and new windows that rose as high as possible to let the largest amount of light in (3.2). The objects within the church were those that would reflect light and enhance the power of it. Everything in the church, including the blue and red colors of the windows, had a shared purpose and centered on the concept of light symbolizing the Divine. It was thought that this would enlighten the church followers and bring them closer to God through the environment and the metaphorical, biblical, physical nature of lighting. Similarly, each piece in my installation holds a promise of fulfillment for any viewer who enters in the exhibition space by using vibrant colors and playful forms to enhance a very particular atmosphere of joyful anticipation that often encompasses the experience of purchasing. I use lighting to mimic a showroom and retail space and chose to concentrate light on the kits and retail side of the exhibition, while using a more dispersed, softer light on the stage set. Doing this gives the living room set a more intimate feel, while the kits are highlighted based upon their importance through salability.

In the late 1800's, a new art movement was emerging called Jugendstil, termed later as Art Nouveau. The followers of this movement were focused on design and style and how that could transform a viewer's experience. It was a movement that included not only painting, but fashion and architecture, even music and poetry. There was a central theme of achieving a certain standard of beauty in everyday lives by harmonizing everything with its

surroundings. “Charles Rennie Mackintosh, one of Jugendstil’s most famous artists, expressed the ideal of gesamtkunstwerk as a synthesis or integration of myriads of details, the product of a discriminating thoughtfulness in the selection of appropriate shape, decoration, design for everything, no matter how trivial” (Franzen, Moriarty 507). From the chair to the walls to the welcome mat, everything is taken into consideration in my installation. The substance is in the details. The concepts in my work are very similar to those addressed in the Art Nouveau movement. Art and life was to be expressed in ways that were youthful, precious, and decorative, as shown in Mackintosh’s playful, yet sophisticated *Fish Knife and Fork Set* (3.3). His design was decorative but thoughtful. Jugendstil enforced the idea that everything in a work of art should express and enhance the desired emotional state of the time.

The ideal of the total work of art was also the central objective of the Bauhaus movement, founded in 1919 in Germany by architect Walter Gropius. He wanted to move away from the notion that art was about narcissism and the self and wanted artists to focus as a team and combine all the disciplines of artistic practice to create a new moral compass for artists. “Gropius argued for an artful design of technical objects, in which ‘all the non-essential details are subordinate to the large form, which had to become the symbolic expression of the inner meaning of the modern building or design’. He summed up his ideal in the mantra ‘art and technique-a new oneness’ ” (Franzen, Moriarty 514). Purpose was held above aesthetics and there was a rejection of the

ornamentation that was so prominent in the Jugendstil movement. Gropius wanted to reach into the essence of an object and focus on the core function of it. In *Dessau: Isometric Drawing for Director's Office* (3.4) one can see how focused he was on the utilitarian role of an object, making the planning of purpose the subject. He wanted to be as honest as possible about the function of the object through its formal properties, and believed that one could create a better quality of life through honesty of form and function. This is a concept that I have often struggled with, so I have chosen to take a satirical stance on the subject of consumption but also not removing my own susceptibility to its seduction. The transient elevated mood I obtain from my purchases keeps me going back for more, even though I know that a better quality of life cannot be created through material goods alone.

My work utilizes the concepts of *gesamtkunstwerk* to make the viewer aware of the effect spaces have on our senses and choices. American architect Frank Lloyd Wright sought to gain control over the context through thoughtful design and placement. He believed that form and function are one, using nature as a driving force behind his work. He declared that organic architecture was to be the modern ideal in the whole of life and that simplicity, common sense, and the nature of materials would determine an object's form. So, much like the Bauhaus, he strived for honesty in his creations, staying true to his materials. He utilized many of the concepts applied in Jugendstil, but his sense of nature evolved into the meaningful influence of simple geometric

shapes and hard, definitive lines, notable in *Six Piece Place Set* (3.5). He did not want to necessarily imitate natural forms, but rather to reinterpret organic forms through the sensitive, smart modification into man-made objects. He expressed his standards in terms of an innate interconnectedness. “In organic architecture it is quite impossible to consider the building as one thing, its furnishings another and its setting and environment still another. The spirit in which these buildings are conceived sees all these together at work as one thing. All are to be studiously foreseen and provided for in the nature of the structure...the very chairs and tables, cabinets and even musical instruments, where practicable, are of the building itself, never fixtures upon it. No appliances or fixtures are admitted as much where circumstances permit the full development of the organic character of the building scheme” (Franzen, Moriarty 508). Wright knew that everything within and around an environment talked to each other and depended upon one another to build a framework of thought and that it all had to work together to achieve a total, unified whole of experience and this level of intense control by the artist is seen in my work through the obsessively repeated elements such as line, color, and form.

Pointing out exploitation of some of the really complex, eloquent ideas relayed in these previous stated art movements. Commercial interests extracted all of these concepts involving design and placement and instead of trying to obtain honest design and an enlightened state of being, but rather creates a culture of simply consuming and buying. Using a very specific set of

rules for the design of my work, I create a unified space that has a very precise experience for the viewer. Each piece focuses on the 10 main elements that distinguish Gesamtkunstwerk: a utopia, a visionary, an audience, multimedia orientation, control, consistency, interdisciplinarity, continuity, synesthesia, and interactivity (Franzen, Moriarty 512). I use the installation to display a utopian ideal of living, with me, the artist, being the visionary who is controlling every detail and merging many different disciplines of art to create a space that is interactive and consistent. Through uniformity and continuity, an artist can perhaps gain the confidence of an audience.

The carmaker BMW is an example of attaining the assurance of a consumer as well as branding an experience to create an ideal. The symbol that BMW uses on all of its cars is very simple. It is comprised of an outer black circle with the letters BMW in white and an inner circle divided into four equal parts, representing the “heart” of every car engine, its four cylinders (Franzen, Moriarty 511) (3.6). This modest design furthers the concept behind simplicity and quality as being the most important aspects to the company. Through specific and strategic marketing, it has become a symbol of prestige and wealth through societal standards. The company has presented itself as a timeless maker of quality objects and gives buyers a sense of understated exclusivity to their lives. The brand focuses on how their object can be a symbol for who you are and the morals you stand for in your life. This model is an important part of my work in that it showcases the misconception behind thinking we have control over how

others see us through what we own. Creating a brand through repetition of color and line creates a consistency in my work, in an effort to gain the viewers confidence and obtain a certain level of validity through excess.

Robert Irwin is an American installation artist who focuses more on the human perceptual element of control. In 1977, he wrote about himself, "I first questioned the mark as meaning and then even as focus; I then questioned the frame as containment, the edge as the beginning and end of what I see...consider the possibility that nothing ever really transcends its immediate environment...I tried to respond directly to the quality of each situation I was in, not to change it wholesale into a new or ideal environment, but to attend directly to the nature of how it already was. How is it that a space could ever come to be considered empty when it is filled with real and tactile events?" Irwin understood that the context and content of our environment are one in the same; it is not empty and emotionless. Rather, the energy of a room is a valid factor involved with experiencing a space and can be emphasized and brought to the surface through what we put into it, both material and immaterial. In sharp contrast to my work, he did not want to change the environment to produce a different, ideal one. He wanted to create the best environment he could with the properties of what was already there. Irwin was very particular about his placement of objects within a space, referenced in *Untitled Response* (3.7). In this installation, he used black tape to call attention to the fact that simple adjustments can alter an

environment and how our emotions and perceptual experiences were susceptible to even the slightest modification of that environment.

Contemporary marketing has appropriated these ideas that were proposed by the artists previously discussed. Through repetition of commercials and advertisements, a business intends to oversaturate the viewer with an experience of their product. Marketing is using these ideas surrounding gesamtkunstwerk not to create a better life for the consumer, but rather to create a greater financial gain for their business. Consumerism perpetuates itself because of the fact that we are all undoubtedly mentally vulnerable to our surroundings and the things that we own. Branding provides a context and material good meant to influence how we are perceived by the world. Everything is changed by context. Utilizing the concepts of gesamtkunstwerk and contemporary marketing techniques, I am controlling the context by manipulating every detail of the space, using a specific repeated set of rules in color and form for each two-dimensional and three-dimensional piece (3.8). Doing this creates an absurdly indulgent visual environment for the viewer and furthers the notion of valuing style above function. My work brings to light how environments can greatly influence our emotions and how targeted marketing manipulates our choices.



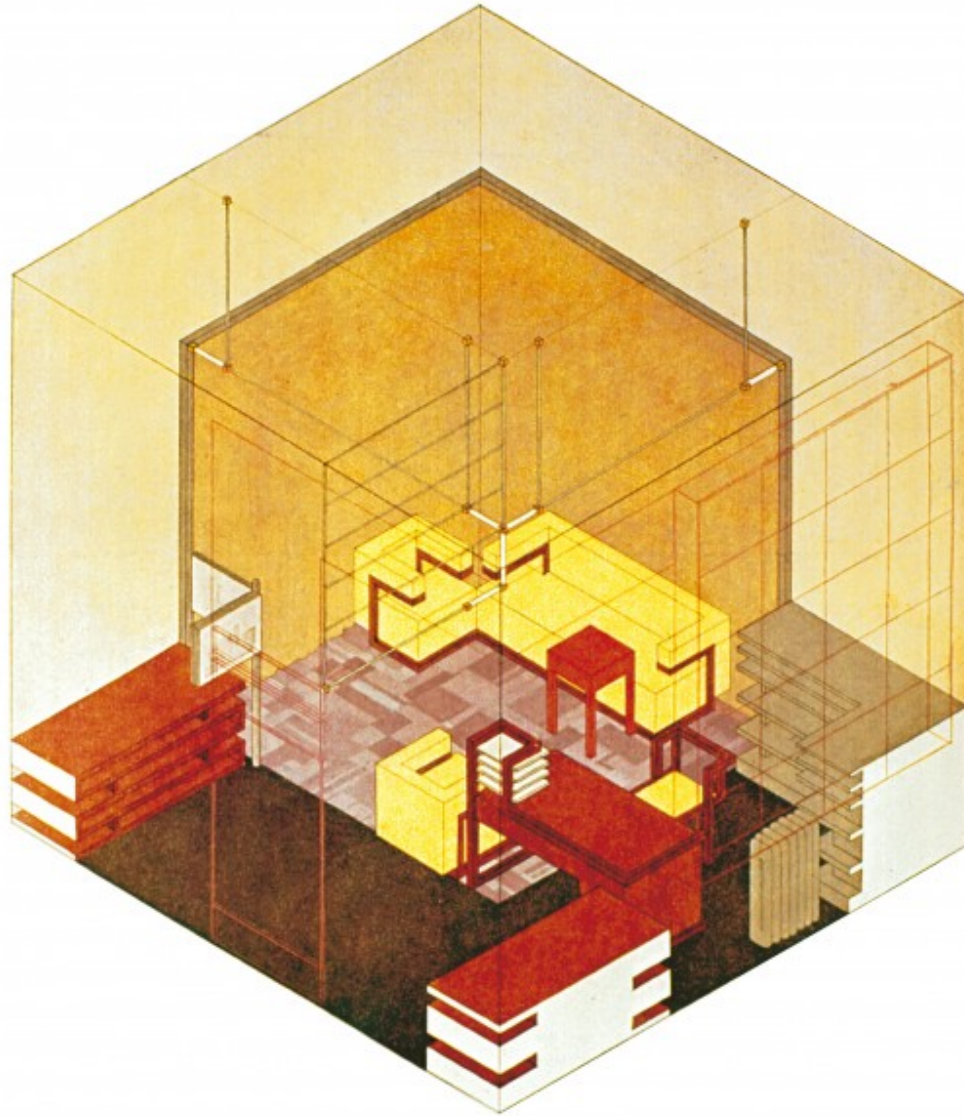
3.1
Daniel Buren
Peinture/Sculpture, 1971
Preprinted Fabric
Guggenheim Museum
ARTstor



3.2
Abbey Church of Saint-Denis, c. 1140-1281
St. Denis, France
ARTstor



3.3
Charles Rennie Mackintosh
Fish Knife and Fork, c. 1900
Silver-plated Nickel
Fork 9 in x 1.3 in
Knife 9 in x 1.3 in
Museum of Modern Art, New York
ARTstor



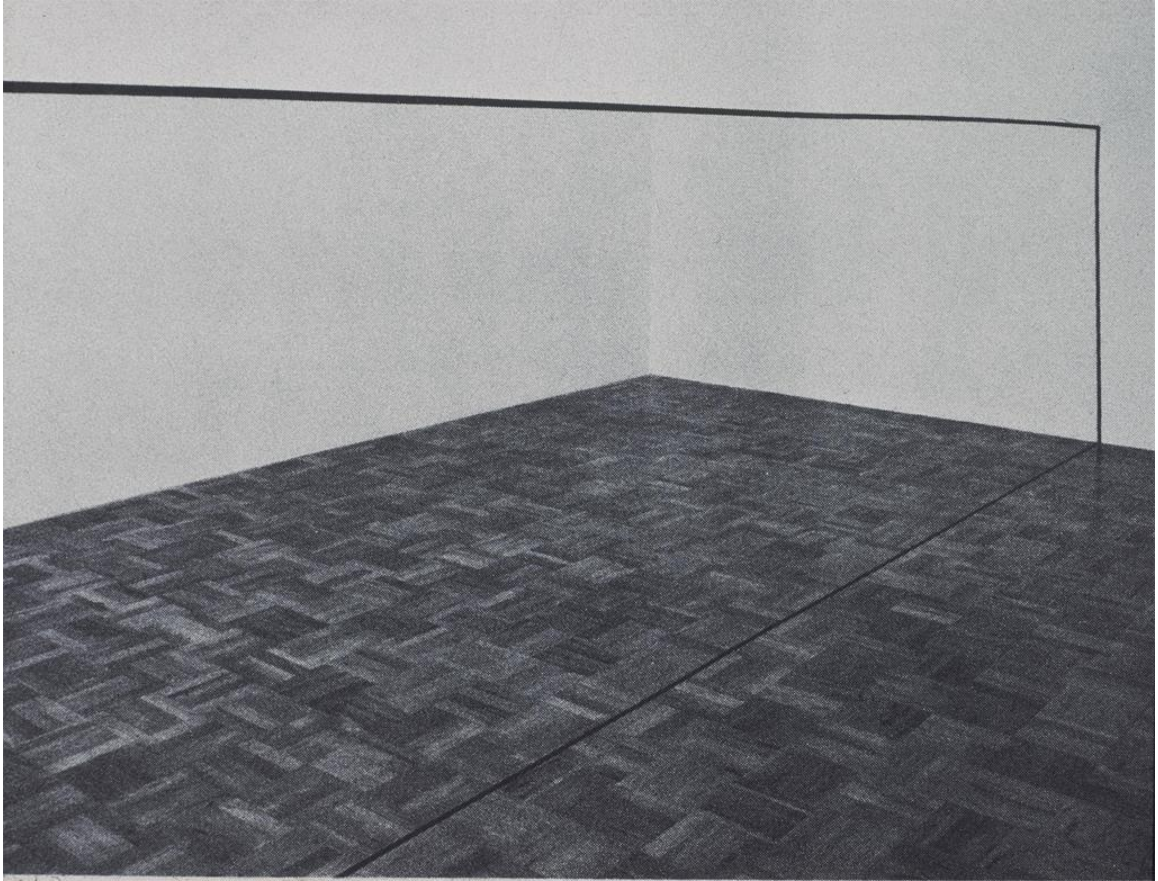
3.4
Walter Gropius
Dessau: Isometric Drawing for Director's Office, 1925
Dessau, Halle, Germany
ARTstor



3.5
Frank Lloyd Wright
Six Piece Place Set, 1984
Porcelain
Dinner Plate 10.5 in diameter
Soup Bowl 7.5 in diameter
Cup 2.3 in diameter
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
ARTstor



3.6
BMW Logo
www.bmw.com



3.7
Robert Irwin
Untitled Response, 1975
Black Tape
ARTstor



3.8

Bethanie Collins

Chair, Ottoman, and Lamp Prop, 2013

Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Construction

Chair 28 in x 44 in x 24 in

Ottoman 28 in x 13 in x 24 in

Lamp Prop 74 in x 16 in

PART FOUR: VORFREUDE, THE EXHIBITION

Vorfreude is a German word that is meant to convey “the intense, anticipative joy that comes from imagining future pleasures”. This title mimics the tone of the exhibition as being powerful and anticipatory. Consumerism perpetuates itself through the promise of a happier life with possessions. Using a furniture showroom as a stage for commercial culture, an idealist, rigid living space is created with a corresponding retail space (4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4).

The living space constructed in the exhibition *VORFREUDE* includes a couch, chair, and props for certain household items, such as a welcome mat and a lamp. I use raw canvas, wood, screws, and staples to create every object. Canvas is used mainly for areas of my objects that are designed to withstand weight, as in the seat of a chair or a tabletop. Canvas as a sole support will not withstand any substantial amount of wear. Using these materials make the constructions fragile and unusable. This also utilizes the business strategy of planned obsolescence by deliberately intending to shorten the lifespan of my objects through the use of inappropriate materials.

Do-it-yourself kits are included which contain the materials needed to make some of the pieces that inhabit the showroom; precut wood, staples, screws, paint color swatches, and exactly the amount of tape and canvas you will need to make each piece (4.5-4.12). However, each piece within the kits is glued together, making any use other than display impossible. Accompanying each of

these kits is an instructional painting that shows you how the finished piece should look but doesn't give any indication as to how the product can be assembled. Doing this communicates to the viewer that they can buy into this high art lifestyle, but it will ultimately be futile.

Stripes are repeated to the point of overstimulation in each construction. The stripe's physical and symbolic nature has changed throughout the centuries. The time in which we live combines all of the earlier symbology. Stripes can indicate deceit or affiliation, through prison garb or flags. They can be used as a tool to create one's persona by wearing or displaying a stark pattern that is associated with a specific group or brand to show our agreement with them, broadcasting our values to the world. Stripes have also become a mark of playfulness, used for children's toys or sports uniforms due to the contrasting nature of repeated lines that are designed to gain a viewer's attention. In any event, the stripe is never a neutral. Each interpretation of this pattern is used in my work to build multiple layers of representation and symbolic meaning; adding to the aspect of learned behavior and accepted social norms that is present in my work.

By using heavily stylized patterning throughout all of the objects, I am making them difficult to look at for long periods of time. However, by adding highly saturated, contrasting colors to the stripes, I am making the installation absurdly indulgent with visual information. The stripes and colors become a trademark of my work, but there is a limited amount of aesthetic life in it. The

harsh contrast becomes an assault on the senses after long exposure. I use black, white, red, green, blue, and yellow in each piece. Not only are these colors visually garish when used together, they also speak to perception on a bodily level. This color scheme is used in the opponent process theory of vision, which tells us how the human visual system works and processes color in an antagonistic manner. These colors serve as a metaphor for how we perceive the world physiologically. Using highly saturated colors throughout the space also indicates that the space holds style above the comfort of the viewer; breaking accepted rules of color harmony and style.

Each of the objects separate from the showroom set has a price tag attached (4.13, 4.14, 4.15). The shape of the price tag is an iconic one, symbolizing commerce and emphasizing that this space is mimicking a retail environment. Each price tag includes the same imagery: the *VORFREUDE* logo and a QR code. A QR code is an abbreviation for “Quick Response Code”. Barcodes are optical labels that are to be read by a machine that gives information and pricing on a product. The QR code was invented in 1994, originally used for industrial purposes, but has become widely used in consumer marketing. These codes can be scanned using a smart phone device, such as an iPhone, and brings the consumer to a website where more information about the product is featured. All of the QR codes on the tags in this exhibition lead to the same place: bethaniecollins.com. There you will find more information about each piece, but more importantly, you will find more products to buy and a more

targeted sales pitch can continue. This is an immediate way to let consumers know about more products that they can purchase, therefore creating more of the anticipative component. There is also an element of elitism in the QR code. Since only specific devices can read it, you are only allowed to know more about the products by possessing such a device. This creates a secret society, of sorts, where only insiders are allowed to be consumers of this product.

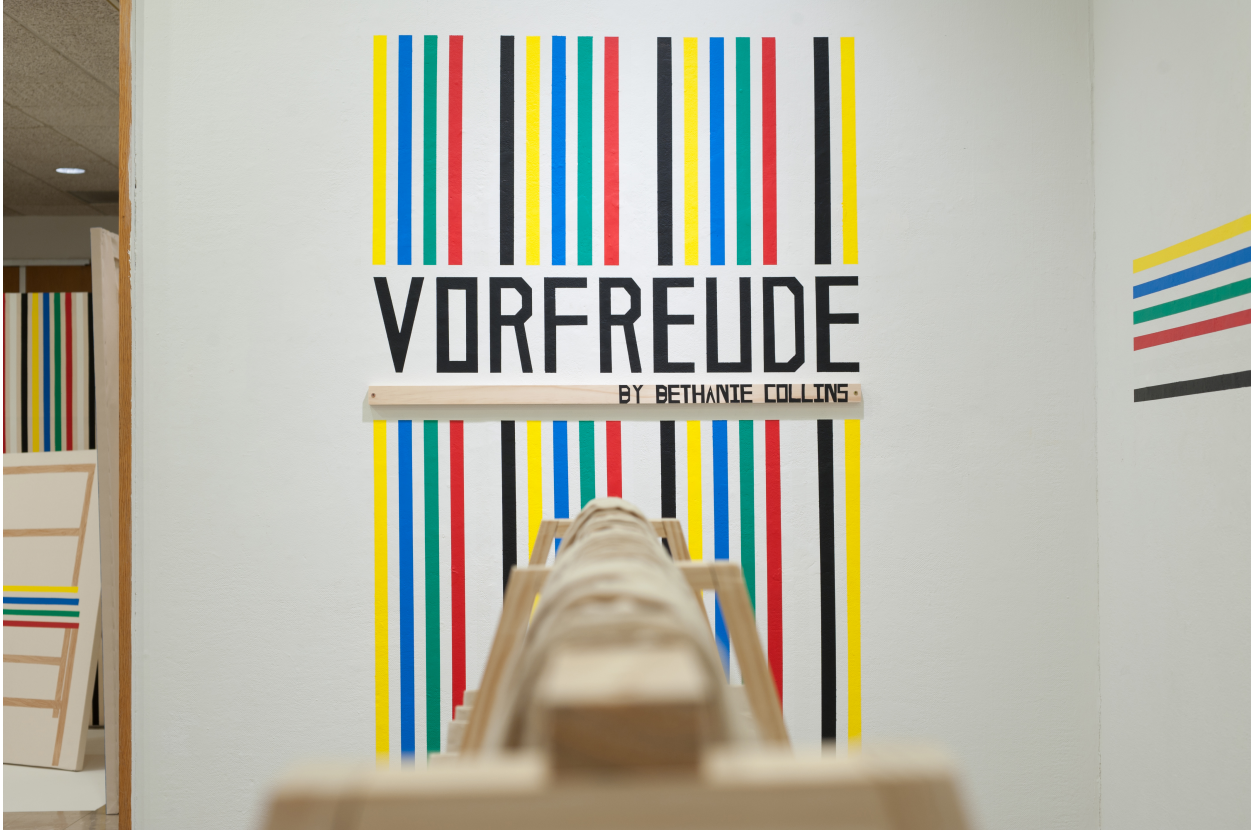
What is saleable and coveted is often equated with stability and is then transferred as a sense of permanence to our emotions. An illusion of certainty is created through material possessions and our emotions are altered based upon the space we inhabit. While a well-constructed space has its appeal through the illusion of comfort and a worry-free existence, its lasting effect is quite the opposite, resulting in an endless coil of desire and discontentment. This exhibition chooses to highlight that illusion to create a space that is an assault to our senses as much as consumerism is to our pocketbooks. The irony is that I am an artist using art objects as a way to show the frivolousness of material goods. This contradiction is meant to show my own conflicting values and actions; desiring the very thing that I know can never give me any true, lasting contentment.



4.1
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *VORFREUDE*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Various Dimensions
George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



4.2
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *VORFREUDE*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Various Dimensions
George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



4.3
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *VORFREUDE*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Various Dimensions
George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



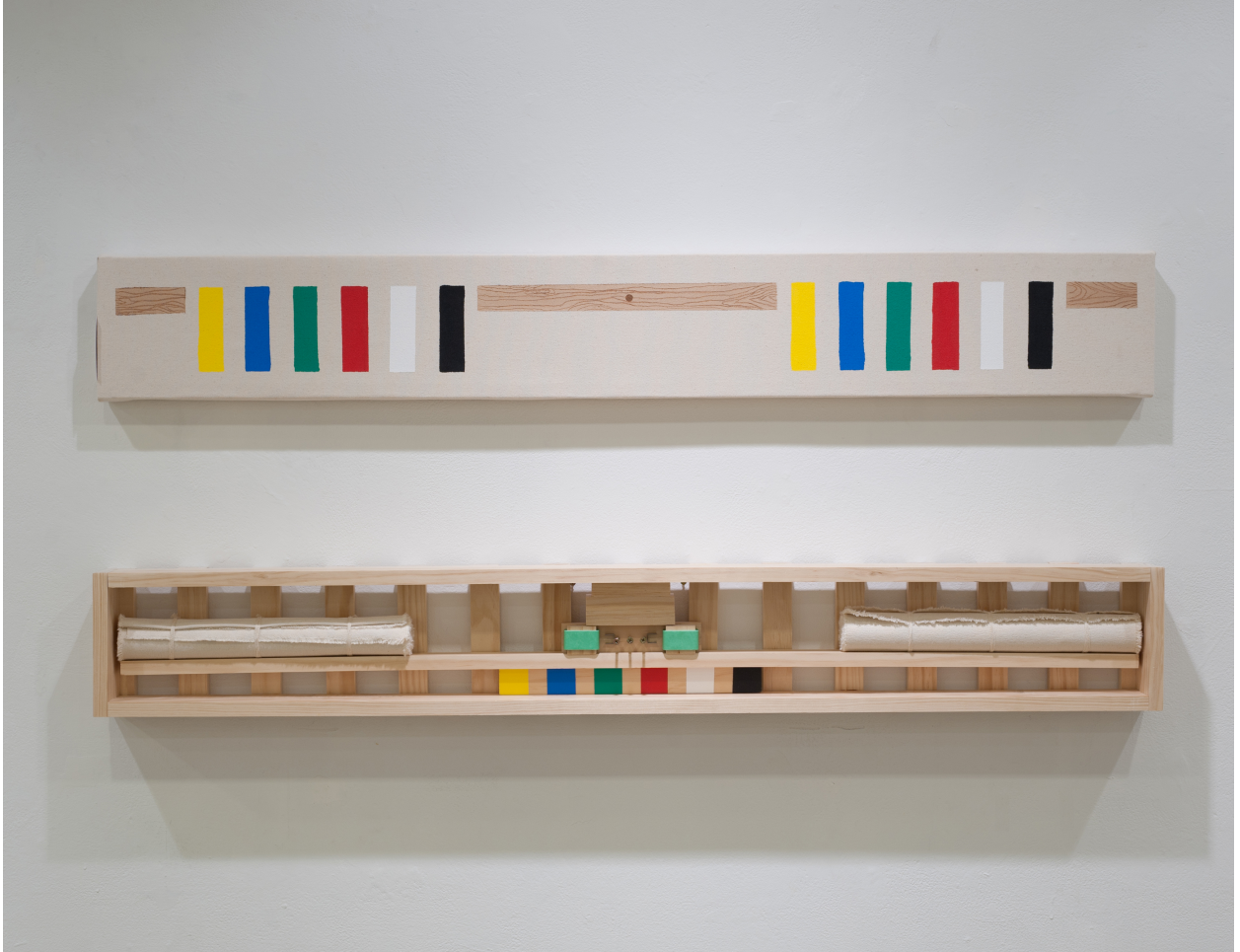
4.4
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *VORFREUDE*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Various Dimensions
George Caleb Bingham Gallery, University of Missouri



4.5
Bethanie Collins
Stencil Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 7 in x 12 in
Box 7 in x 12 in



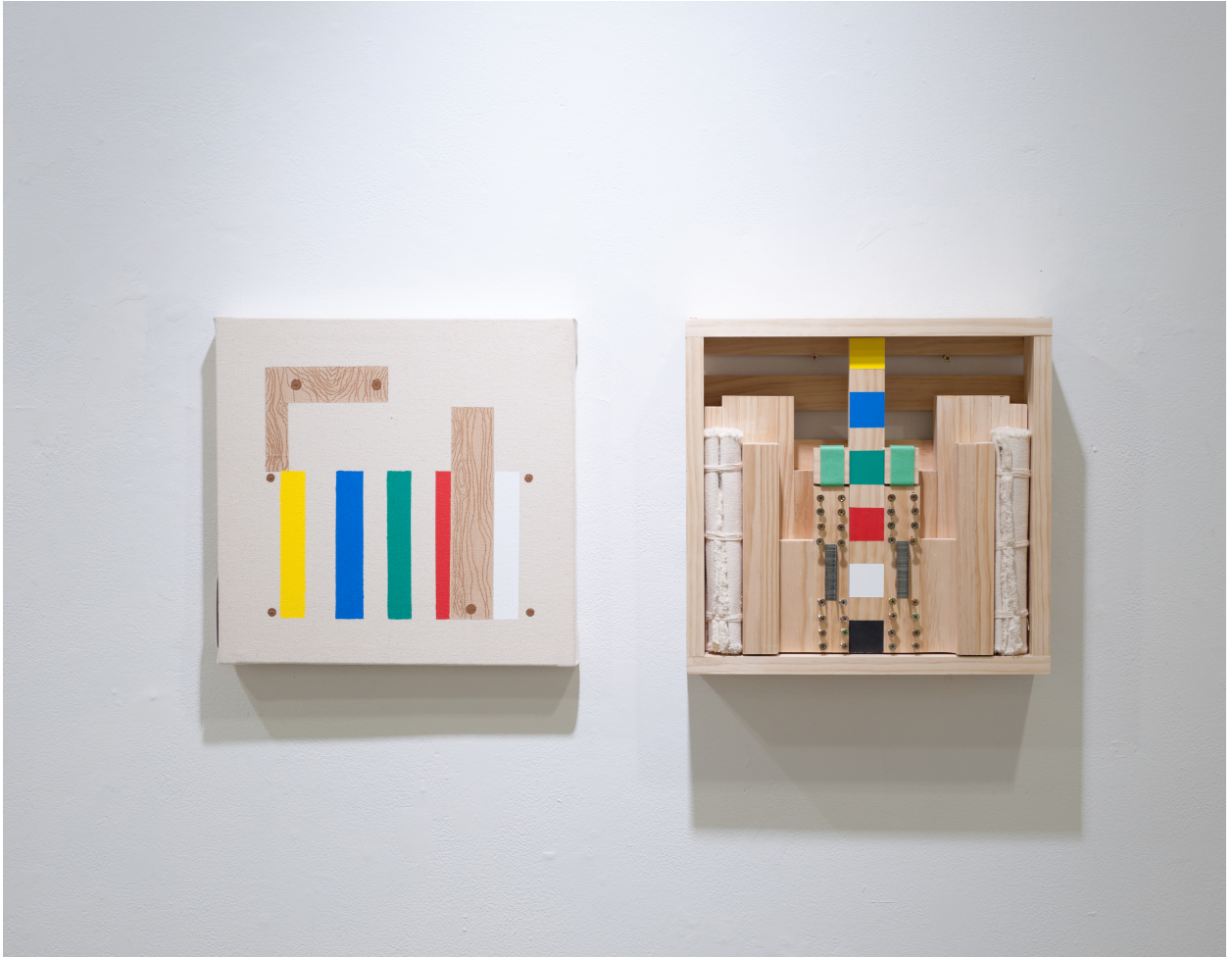
4.6
Bethanie Collins
Vacuum Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 16 in x 42 in
Box 16 in x 42 in



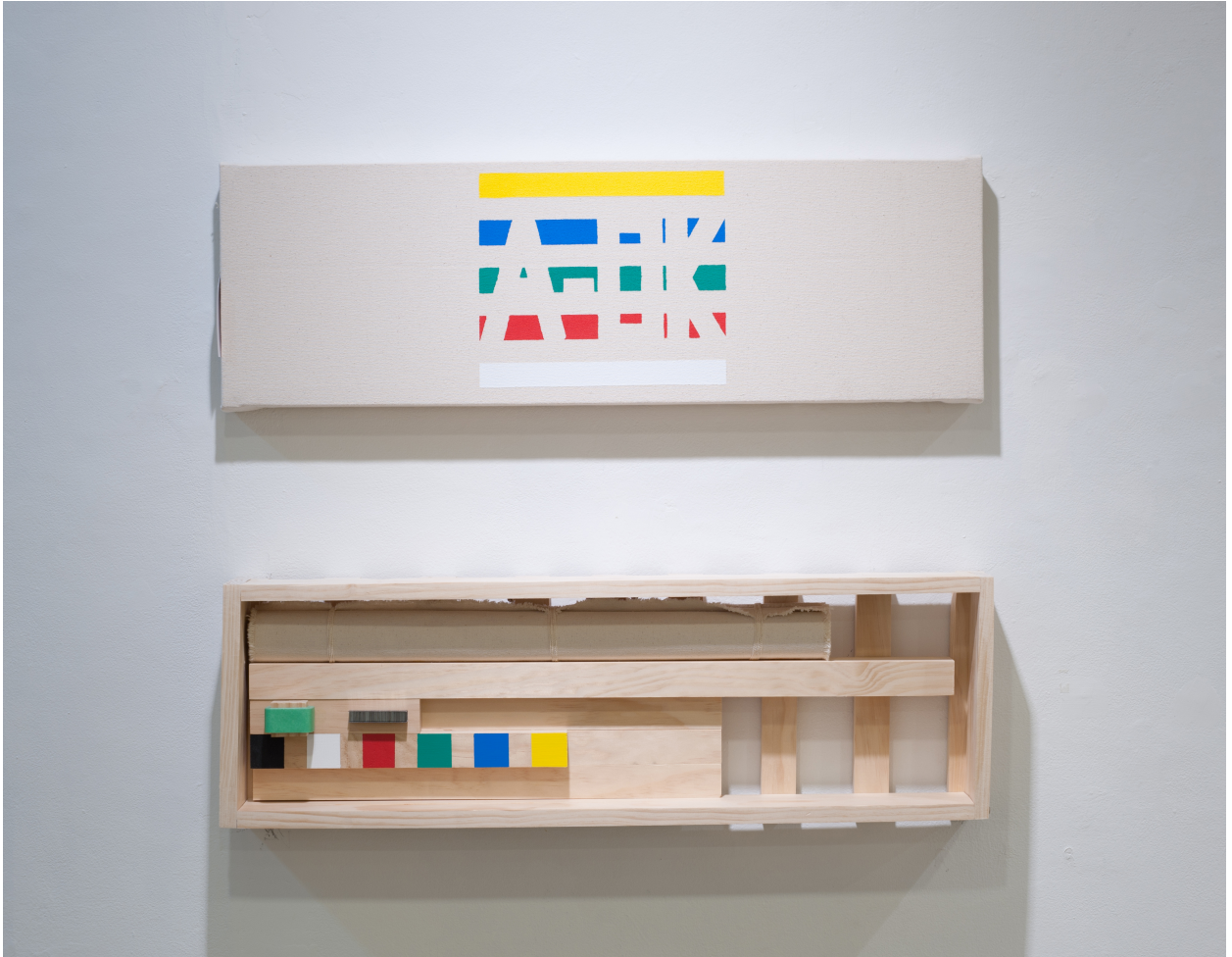
4.7
Bethanie Collins
Window Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 52 in x 8 in
Box 52 in x 8 in



4.8
Bethanie Collins
Chair Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 8 in x 52 in
Box 8 in x 52 in



4.9
Bethanie Collins
Shoe Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 16 in x 16 in
Box 16 in x 16 in



4.10
Bethanie Collins
A-OK Painting Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 24 in x 10 in
Box 24 in x 10 in



4.11
Bethanie Collins
Canvas Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Construction
24 in x 34 in



4.12
Bethanie Collins
Ottoman Kit, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Top 24 in x 10 in
Box 24 in x 10 in



4.13
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *Handbag Rack*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Construction
54 in x 45 in x 72 in



4.14
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *Paint Container Kits*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
8 in x 5 in x 3 in each container



4.15
Bethanie Collins
(Exhibition Photo) *Tape and Wood Kits*, 2014
Acrylic, Canvas, and Wood Constructions
Tape Kit 3 in x 2 in x 2 in each kit
Wood Kit 4 in x 2 in x 10 in

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