

frieze

USA

SARA CWYNAR

Foxy Production, New York

Sara Cwynar's artist's book, *Kitsch Encyclopedia* (2014), patches together the writings of Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Milan Kundera in an attempt to catalogue a world completely coated in a layer of kitsch. Cwynar draws her definition of the term from Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations* (1981), which defines kitsch as a manifestation of the 'hyperreal'- simulations of the world that have started to matter more than the reality they represent. Cuckolded by its own image, reality is reduced to what Baudrillard calls a 'fetish of the lost object - no longer object of representation, but ecstasy of degeneration and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.'

Kitsch Encyclopedia provides the theoretical basis for Cwynar's latest body of work, 'Flat Death' (2014), a collection of photographs that exacts a kind of 'ritual extermination' upon the hyperreal by confusing representation and reality. The show was anchored by two large prints from 'Contemporary Floral Arrangements' (2014), a series in which the artist enlarges found illustrations of elaborate bouquets segment by segment, then manually tapes together the various sections to form a flat surface. On top of this newly reconstituted picture, Cwynar carefully covers the original contours of the blooms with assorted colour-coded knick-knacks, and photographs the composition from above. Technically novelty items, the objects- which range from birthday cake candles, hotel soaps, remote controls, pencil sharpeners, trading cards and pill boxes to Scrabble tiles and a button boasting 'Japanese Americans for Reagan/Bush'- register as more nostalgic than new, leaving no true clues as to when the photographs may have been taken.

Across the gallery, Cwynar presented excerpts from multiple series, hung side-by-

side in simple black frames, almost like a filmstrip. If there was a narrative, however, its tale was of how a flat image of an object can be transformed into a 3D object itself, only to later return to two dimensions as a photograph. Starting with found or staged pictures, Cwynar's images are then scanned, enlarged, cropped, reconstituted, repopulated, rephotographed, and reprinted. The artist makes no attempt to disguise her interventions. The distortions of the 'Darkroom Manual' series (2013-14) result from direct interference with the scanning of diagrams sampled from a how-to book for budding photographers. (The effect is akin to the exaggerated static seen interrupting important broadcasts in cartoons.) For *Toucan In Nature (Post It Notes)* (2013), Cwynar took a snapshot of the tropical bird and surrounded it with a foliage of green highlighter tabs, photographing the resulting collage. The 'Plastic Cups' (2014) series begin as sculptures: towers of plastic plates and tumblers set against the backdrop of a crude blue tarpaulin. Cwynar photographs and enlarges the images, but then adds references to historical architecture, via grainy photos of Corinthian columns or Islamic domes. She prints out each image in black and white segments, covering the seams with short strips of brightly coloured tape that align like crosshairs over the focal point of the final photograph.

While the layers of Cwynar's imagery can be picked apart, the photographs resist being pinned to a time or place. The black and white portions of the 'Plastic Cups' encourage a comparison to historical documents but, even when left in colour, the pictures elude exact dating through their casual use of modernist kitchenware.

This leaves the enigma of the title 'Flat Death', two terms Scotch-taped into a vexed juxtaposition. The first term is troubled by the fact that, while the images the artist ultimately presents are flat, they remain aggressive advertisements for their brief existence as 3D objects; the second by the fact that, while reality may be finite, the hyperreal can never truly die, it merely gives way to other representations. The true mystery, then, is how Cwynar makes these longstanding observations feel so contemporary.

