

To Hide the Absurd in Elegance

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紐約，一個資本主義社會的典型，現代大眾流行文化的中心，集一切符號絢爛與流行慾望的都市。同時也是速食文化的發源、造就消費文化的過剩，許多商品曇花一現，終究逃不過被丟棄的命運。這些被拋棄的商品所隱喻的無用文化 (Kitsch Culture) 反倒成為紐約藝術家 Beth Katlman 的考古現場。她將物品與社會的關係放入創作當中，以輕鬆、高雅的洛可可風格，將原本被視為廉價的物品賦予新生，精英與大眾文化疆界消彌，符號意義的扭轉也悄然運行。

New York – typical place of capitalism, center of contemporary mainstream culture and a metropolis that assembles all popular desires. At the same time, it is the origin of fast-food culture. It brought about the excesses in consumer behavior, so many of the consumer products that pop up everywhere like mushrooms, will not escape the fate of being chucked out. The *Kitsch Culture* that these products represent has become the focus of New York artist Beth Katlman. She incorporates the relationship between consumer goods and society, giving those gone-to-waste products the gift of new life in her lay-back art that resembles a sense of Rococo. This art, in which she plays with the estrangements of symbols, exists on the edges of popular culture, high end.





Promised Land, 2008



Blue Plate Special, 2005

從遠處凝視Beth Katleman最新的大型裝置藝術作品《Folly (荒愚)》(2011)，藝廊內整面擬仿過去法國上流社會蔚為風潮的鄉村風格 (Toile de Jouy) 壁紙，以綠松石色為底，潔白貞潔為圖騰花式，顯得高貴、典雅。觀者若因此被召喚駐足，便會發現這並非僅是貴氣的平面壁紙。牆上所有環繞的圖騰，為3D立體的瓷器裝飾器物，滿佈綺麗。若更細細端詳，你便會發現每個立體圖騰的細節中，偷渡著黑色幽默。

The latest installation artwork of Beth Katleman, Folly (2011), takes up the space of a whole wall in the gallery, mimicking the foregone trend of country-style wallpapers (Toile de Jouy) that were once popular in France. The color basis of the work is laid out in a bright turquoise background topped with plain white figure-work in the shape of totems, giving it a noble and elegant look. But if this initial sense of beauty succeeds in making the spectator stop and take a look, they will discover that it is all but an ordinary two-dimensional wallpaper. The totems on the wallpaper are actually made of porcelain decorative objects and stand out from the wall, creating a beautiful effect over the whole piece. When you look at the objects even closer, you will discover the black humor of the artist in every one of them.

Beth Kalteman現居布魯克林，是街頭的考古學家，漫遊在紐約各個跳蚤市場。她常在跳蚤市場找尋不起眼的小飾品，尤其是那些1950年代時期嘎嘎作響的玩具、紀念品、小雕像、異國建築飾品、卡通人物與玩偶。她尋著當下商品文化丟棄的痕跡撿拾，重新以黏土鑄造這些物品的分身，將廉價、塑膠的無用飾品，以象徵貴氣與高雅的瓷器形式再現，成為華麗的上流精品。「我的創作大多在於探索消費與慾望的天性」，如她所說，她的作品先以精品名門的質地，將那些被丟棄的寶物賦予皇室、精緻般的外表，實則也像是一場華麗的儀式，既哀悼亦慶祝。48個小型地景懸於牆上，在滿覆草莓、花朵樹葉與蝴蝶的浪漫裝飾藝術中，透露著Beth獨特的荒謬與幽默：伴娘輕鬆地談天，無視將沒入水塘的嬰兒；聖心教堂與不成比例的巨大蝸牛；在危險懸崖邊的嬰兒們…。裝置上超現實的對比與解構，讓這些被遺棄的「寶物」不再獨自擁抱哀傷氛圍，集體以華麗精緻的姿態慶祝重生，好似嘲弄著當下消費文化的敗物、愚昧與荒唐。

許多藝術家如漫遊者般遊蕩於紐約為人遺忘的角落，從社會底層挖掘故事，尋找下一個顛覆傳統的想法與靈光。就如同Beth Kalteman感受，紐約客非常具有野心，尋訪新思潮的灌注，「在此，創意的力量是具有傳染性的」，無論身分地位。漫遊者身無分文，也因如此，在每個紐約客心中，他們是紐約的無名英雄。



Beth Kalteman

Beth Katlman lives in Brooklyn, where she roams all the flea markets in her capacity as a street archeologist. At the flea markets, she mostly looks to find those unappealing accessories (especially rattled toys from the 1950s), souvenirs, small statues, architectural ornaments from foreign countries, cartoon figures and other dolls. She wants to pick up the traces of the consumer culture in the objects thrown away by others, giving them a new life by putting a cast of clay around them, turning these cheap useless plastic objects into extravagant and noble pottery art pieces. "Most of my art happens in search of the connection between consumerism and desire, and the nature of this relation," says Beth Katlman. According to what she says, the process of her creative work reminds her of a beautiful ceremony; she first gives the objects that were once things with a beautiful meaning and results of minute work effort to return them to their original splendor. Both celebrating the rebirth and mourning their former decay at the same time. In 48 pieces of landscape-like installations on the wall, the figures reveal among an abundance of strawberries, butterflies and green leaves. A unique absurdity and humor of Beth is the piece where bridesmaids are chatting along casually, unaware of the child that has fallen into a small lake. There's also the the disproportional large snail next to Sacred Heart Church and also babies that are playing dangerously close to a cliff. The immediate sense of contrast and deconstruction in the installations, gives these abandoned "treasures" the chance to embrace something other than the loneliness that they had to face before. It lets them unite for a collective celebration of their rebirth, seemingly mocking the absurdity and ignorance of contemporary consumer behavior.

Today, so many artists roam the corners of New York, looking for artifacts deserted by humans, digging up stories from the bottom of society, looking for the next idea to subvert traditions. Beth Katlman feels that many New Yorkers are driven by wild ambitions, desperately looking for new ideas all the time. "Innovative thinking is strongly infectious here," she says, no matter what your personal background is. Those roaming the corners of New York for old treasures don't get a penny out of this, and that is just why in the heart of many New Yorkers, they are the city's real heroes.

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