

## Project Description

*Whatever Happened To Us* explores the rapid changes in American material consumption from the 1950s until the present, as well as the ramifications of excess in our hyper-consumerist culture. The project began as a diorama that includes both vintage items (Barbie paper doll, doll clothes, and Coca-Cola bottle case) and modern replicas of vintage items (record player and blue car). These foregrounded items are miniaturized incarnations of commercial icons from America's first "golden age" of excess during the economic boom of the 1950s. The background of the diorama features computer-printed images of commercial culture in the 1980s, when new manufacturing technology rendered previous commercial products from the first "golden age" of excess irrelevant, relics of a simpler time. Yet these images of 1980s consumer culture are not simply gratuitous nods to this second "golden age" of American excess. They are stylized in the present-day vaporwave aesthetic, which critiques the overabundance of the 1980s through satirical and exaggerated portrayals of 1980s malls and popular products. Vaporwave art is often set in empty malls that are still glowing brightly even when entirely abandoned. In *Whatever Happened To Us*, Barbie arrives with her fellow advertising icons of the 1950s in one such abandoned mall, a liminal space in which her glory days have faded away. Yet this 1980s-style mall around her is devoid of customers--because 1980s consumer culture is also dead. It is the year 2022 and malls across America are empty, with consumers doing all of their shopping online. Another "golden age" of excess has dwindled with the rise of newer technologies, leaving abandoned malls as uneasy testaments to the pointless excess we continue to engage in. The viewer is left to consider the potential relics of our digital commercial age, one in which advertising culture is stronger than ever before.

*Whatever Happened To Us* inflates advertising icons to a massive scale to reflect the gluttony of hyper-consumerist culture. The piece blends fully colored sections with pixelated sections, dimensional objects with flat objects to recreate the strangeness of a liminal space, thus establishing a blurred sense of dimensionality and nodding toward the uncertain nature of our current reality.