

ABATTOIR

For *Cheap Thrills*, artists Erykah Townsend and Alex Vlasov enjoin their practices through found objects, cheap knock offs, and wry messages. They jointly align their work within the Duchamp-Warhol lineage, with some Wittgenstein sprinkled in, but they seem to at times align more with Christopher Wool or Richard Prince's dad jokes and freehanded appropriation--or you might see some Ruscha (the early years). They riff on familiar forms-- the grocery list, the to-do list, the receipt. Out of their ironically unironic process comes a series of visual hooks and puns.

Townsend, an artist deeply comfortable with the uncomfortable, examines a new form of found art within her practice. Riffing on sneakerheads and hypebeasts who favor fashion over function, she sources knock-off Off-Whites and Balenciagas, elevating them to fine art--the stitching and texture placed on a literal pedestal. Repeating the process throughout, she forces audiences to ponder authenticity and veracity.

Conversely, Vlasov approaches the wadded-up memo or post-it with equal irreverence. Grocery lists filled with off-brands and back-up plans are scaled up onto thick, gooey texture. Elsewhere, canonical books are reduced to their filler text, pocket philosophies for the modern street artist. A scrawpily painted "I did my fucking best" is hastily pasted onto a sheet of plywood and precariously balanced on a can of Rustoleum. This work, cheekily titled *It Doesn't Get Any Better*, leaves us to wonder if the artist means life or their practice.

Elsewhere, Townsend riffs on the CAPTCHA and Jasper Johns' personal Americana. Vlasov plays with installation and texture to reconceive value and technique. These louche jabs at the art world from two young artists offer a candid perspective of an often-vitriolic industry that they are now tasked to operate within. They bear the irony and mirror it back with the chaotic and deadpan approach of Gen Z. Why go for the feigned illusion of the name brand art world, they wonder, when you can have more fun with the cheap knockoffs.

Conceived as an ode to the knockoff, *Cheap Thrills* expands into larger critiques and meditations on value and commodity. Certain reflexes and responses are elicited by the knockoffs and revelations about the self are made. Those with a certain familiarity with Faygo or Baked Cheese will have Proustian nostalgia. The socioeconomic undercurrents and implications of their appropriations of Target vs. Walmart and name brand vs. off brand intensify the scrutiny around conversations of class and taste.

John Waters, whose philosophies echo very much throughout this exhibition, famously said "To understand bad taste, one must have very good taste." As cynical as it is magical this is a world where a urinal is a sculpture and where a splatter commands millions if done by the right hand. Having gone through the rigors and rigamarole of art school, Townsend and Vlasov come out with one big laugh, one last cheap thrill, ready to find their footing in a contemporary art world.

--Tizziana Baldenebro, June 2022