

RAWSON PROJECTS

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PRONK

BARB CHOIT

Opening reception: Saturday, November 14, 6 – 8 PM
November 14, 2015 – January 10, 2016

For immediate release:

Rawson Projects is very excited to announce its first solo exhibition with artist Barb Choit, *Pronk*, opening on November 14 from 6–8 PM.

For *Pronk*, Choit shows a new series of still life photographs that merge contemporary advertising photography with the *Pronkstilleven*, a style of 17th Century Dutch painting commissioned by wealthy merchants to show off their wares. This work continues her two past projects at gallery where she has investigated art, commerce, and the limitations of photography. In her summer residency with the gallery, *744 Hr Photo & Tanning*, Choit made a series of photograms at the Rawson Projects space. She used the storefront windows of the gallery to expose sheets of colored background paper to the sun for 744 hours (one month). Inside the gallery, she created photograms by subjecting backdrop paper to the ultraviolet rays of a tanning bed. Last spring, Choit collaborated with photographer Erica Baum, presenting two-person exhibition entitled *Shoes and Purses*. Her contribution included “portraits” of shoes inspired by Andy Warhol’s Polaroid studies for an 1980s advertising campaign for Halston’s Boutique.

An interview between the gallery and the artist about the exhibition and this new body of work follows.

Rawson Projects: Though this is your first solo exhibition here at the gallery, you have done a couple of projects with us before. Most recently you presented a series of Polaroids of shoes as part of a two-person exhibition with Erica Baum. The works for this show also use shoes as a subject matter. Can you discuss the relationship they have with your work, and what you find appealing about them?

Barb Choit: This new work is a continuation of my past project at the gallery. Again, I have photographed items for sale in my online vintage shop, [Division of Vintage](#). My shop was not originally intended to be an art project. I created it to sell my personal collection of vintage shoes. However, the store, and the—ironically, art—projects that it has spawned, are both related to my practice. My major projects for the past few years have involved cultivating and maintaining collections of objects or images. In this case, shoes.

For my last project with the gallery, I remade Andy Warhol’s shoe Polaroids from the 1980s using my shop inventory as subject matter. Mimicking the production of Warhol’s original photographs—which were studies for an advertising campaign—I documented primarily 1980s vintage shoes using an antique Polaroid camera from the era. One thing that fascinated me with Warhol’s shoe Polaroids was that in a 2012 Christie’s auction of his Polaroid images of celebrities, musicians, artists, inanimate objects, and himself, his pictures of shoes fetched the highest prices—second only to his own self-portrait. Perhaps the art collectors at this auction were also avid shoe collectors and this intersection of desires bolstered the value of the shoe pictures.

Shoes are objects associated with both desire and money. I am interested in how the popular cultural re-interpretation of the foot fetish—which is still listed in diagnostic psychiatric manuals as a sexual disorder—has become the “shoe fetish,” a term referring to the compulsive desire to own multiple pairs of shoes. Retailers celebrate the contemporary “shoe fetish,” which promotes the idea that shoes are particularly irresistible items that provoke a lack of financial control in female shoppers. I am interested in further examining shoe shopping as a gender-specific mode of collecting.

RP: Another way that advertisers play on our desires—and all of the problematic politics of those desires—is through display. It seems to me another layer of your work examines consumption through composition in images. In this particular series you pair (no pun intended) many of the shoes with fruit and/or flowers. They are presented in these hyper-saturated colors on flattened backgrounds. They are both undeniably appealing but knowingly absurd at the same time. Can you talk a little bit about your decision-making process in the compositions. Are there specific tropes you are interested in or is the process more organic?

BC: This series of photographs combines elements from contemporary product photography and 17th Century Flemish still life painting. The impetus for this series was the film *Stilleben, (Still Life)* by the late German artist Harun Farocki. In his film, Farocki compares 17th Century Flemish still life painting to contemporary commercial product photography. He claims that today's photographers working in advertising—depicting objects from everyday life—are the still life painters of our time.

These works specifically reference a subgenre of 17th Century Dutch painting, the *pronkstilleven*, named for the Dutch verb, *pronk*, meaning to “show off.” At the birth of consumer culture, the pronk still life depicted symbols of a merchant's newly acquired riches, such as foreign artifacts, precious metals, or exotic shells. Including an excess of expensive yet perishable items, such as flowers and food, was part of this display of wealth. I styled my compositions to reflect this sumptuousness.

Art historians have discussed the still life as the first type of image created to incite desire for material objects—a precursor to advertising. Being an artist and a merchant, I like the idea of creating an artwork that will provoke desire for a material object other than itself. Technically, the works in the show are advertisements.

Barb Choit (b. 1977 Vancouver, Canada) lives and works in New York, NY and Vancouver, Canada. The artist received an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts (2002), and an MA in Modern Art and Curatorial Studies from Columbia University (2004). Choit has exhibited widely at venues in the United States such as the Queens Museum of Art, NY; Rachel Uffner Gallery, NY; Bureau, NY; Lisa Cooley, NY; and China Art Objects, LA. She has shown at a number of international venues including Cooper Cole Gallery, Toronto, Canada; Office Baroque, Brussels; and the Aratoi Museum, Masterton, New Zealand. She has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the British Columbia Arts Council. Her recent book, *Ten Shows*, was published by Or Gallery, Vancouver, in collaboration with Black Dog Publishing, London, UK.

For more information please contact the gallery at info@rawsonprojects.com or call 212 256 0379