

SHOPPING: A GALLERY OF ART AND CONSUMER CULTURE

We usually do it every day. It's often listed as people's number one leisure activity. And although art has been consumed by this theme for decades (Andy Warhol's first show was in a department store window, at Bonwit Teller), until recently there had never been a big scale art show about it. *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture*, a recent co-production between Frankfurt's Schirn Kunsthalle and the Tate Gallery in Liverpool is the first large scale show to explore the links between distribution, display, consumption and its connection to modern and contemporary art.

Consumerism is where cultural and gender studies collide with decadent capitalism, producing a rich inspiration for artists and academics. They produced theories which condemned society to hell in an overpriced handbag. Shopping was filling a void, enforcing a stereotype, turning us into the commodities we purchase. The Director of Tate Liverpool, Christoph Grunenberg, argues that those theories are now replaced by a new and positive view of consuming. Grunenberg compares the British approach after WWII when people were told to re-use everything and "save every scrap of aluminum" to after September 11th when, he points out, then Mayor Giuliani told New Yorkers to go shopping and support the economy. Now, shopping is a good thing.

The line between shops and museums is irretrievably blurred. Department stores may not have become museums, as Warhol predicted, but they certainly are art palaces. In early 2002 Grunenberg went to New York to catch the latest art shows and didn't find much inspiration. He wandered into Rem

Koolhaas' new Prada shop in SoHo. There, Grunenberg says, he found "art and commerce really come together" in "a real fusion". He says "it was the most spectacular, the most avant garde, the cleverest thing I actually had seen on my whole trip there". There were so many things going on he says that "the idea of selling" was "the least important" part

some wonderful examples from photographers who chronicled shop development: Eugene Atget's store windows full of corsets or luggage in Paris in the early 20th century; Berneice Abbott's chaotic hardware shops saying so much about the US during the thirties; Walker Evans' depictions of the geometry of tightly packed shelves (1935), eerily echoed in Andreas Gursky's panoramic photo "99 Cent II" of a massive store (2001).

An historical graph of how stores have evolved climbs a wall. It's extraordinary to realize that it was only in 1824 that fixed pricing was introduced, and that the first unified shopping mall (in Kansas City) was built as long ago as 1930. This sets the stage which says how quickly shopping as we know it, permeated modern life and sensibilities. The show is so big (over 70 artists, over 200 objects), the gallery feels like a department store. In fact the show opens with a replication of a grocery store as its first stop. ("Your Supermarket" by Guillaume Bijl.) Bijl says he wanted to expose the choreography of the supermarket, and there is something naked, but not vulnerable, about completely pristine grocery shelves, where the products are arranged beautifully, the produce and the room are spotless. One critic described it as evoking the random and vague motion of a shopper walking,

looking for the missing something, which perhaps describes all of shopping. It is Grunenberg's favourite piece in the show because it pushes people to reassess their daily experiences. "People stare at ordinary produce for minutes," he says, because it "really conveys that idea of a perfect supermarket."

Stage set constructions and ready-mades



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Untitled, 1987 by Barbara Kruger courtesy of Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich; "Crispy Chicken Deluxe (Hermès)", 1999 by Tom Sachs courtesy of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg; "Hosiery, Shoes and Handbags", 1974 by Don Eddy ©Ludwig Forum International Kunst, Aachen.

of the experience. The "Shopping" show explores that constant exchange between the world of commerce and the world of art. Grunenberg wanted to replicate "the sophistication of that strategy" at Tate Liverpool.

The show was certainly as complex as the subject, exploring the historical and experiential as well as the theoretical. There were

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(n~) literally, gossip.

Figuratively, anything that may be of interest to an inquiring mind pursuing its course throughout any given day, week, month, or in this case, quarter.

Blasted Church

The postcard is of a wine label, a creation of Blasted Church, a South Okanagan Valley winery and vineyard. Created by Bernie Hadley-Beauregard, and carried out by Toronto artist Monika Melnychuk, the dozen Blasted Church labels deserve the attention. How can you resist the name? It's rooted in local history, referring to the ingenuity of a few brave pioneers who successfully moved an old wooden church some 16 miles in 1929. Their plan included the blasting of four dynamite sticks inside the church, to "loosen the nails". Don't laugh, it worked: today, the 104-year old church stands proudly on its second footing in Okanagan Falls. OK, they did lose the steeple in the process, but so it goes. JG

