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COLEMAN BURKE GALLERY

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Hues and Sickly Saturations: Review of Abby Manock's 'Counters'

by Laura White

We live in a colour-coded world where varieties of hue, tone and saturation are displayed for our pleasure, choosing and temptation. From household cleaning items, computers, kettles, cars and credit cards, these colour-choice selections are constructed to make us feel individual and special. (How unique am I to have a pale blue set of kitchen knives aligned next to my soft lemon yellow kettle in my bland IKEA kitchen!) These superficial choices of consumer products are pathetic attempts at giving us a sense that we are individuals with a choice, but as Abby reveals in her *Counters* video and installation, there is no choice, and we are fools to think we ever had one.

Abby's work is bright, exciting and humorous on the surface, but it does not take long for the sweetness of the candyfloss to make you feel quite sick! The bright seductive colours used in her work draw us in, begging us to touch its glossy surface. But this artificial seduction that initially draws us into Abby's work is exactly where her critique starts. Through further exploration, you uncover and decipher it's social/political agenda, which, by the time you realize it, it has already spat you out, wishing you weren't so fickle, to at first fall for its shiny façade.

In *Counters*, Abby counts through a sequence of actions, some mundane, such as paying for items in a shop with colour coded money and pulling coloured coded items from a chest of coloured drawers, while others are unexpected and unusual, such as five versions of colour-coded theft. We can't help laughing, but at the same time, are left thinking about the increasingly generic, bland, commercially driven world we all live in and accept, and how it is ever more difficult to make individual choices from the given pool of options. The repetition of Abby's work is a hypnotic and constantly 'nagging' reminder of this - 'nagging' in the sense that it will never go away...

Whether made for video, performance, or to arrange in the gallery space, Abby's objects are all kinds of props; strangely impractical and often made of card or paper and painted. They are volumetric but weightless, spectacular but fragile, exaggerated "fake" versions of their real life counterparts. However, sometimes she includes 'real' objects like a suitcase or a chair. These constant contradictions have us moving, swaying backwards and forwards, never totally understanding or settling on one meaning. This clever instability throws the choice back onto us, as viewers to think about our individual position in the "real" world.

The way Abby makes work is embedded in its appearance. It is always a performance, even when confronted with the still objects alone. Each object depicted explores motion – an aeroplane, cash till, gun and clothes. But it is not just functionality that these artificial objects represent that gives them life; it is when these artificial constructions actually function, (An aeroplane seat is made of card but uses a real chair to actually support a person.) that the installation is set in motion.

Interesting sets of contradictions maintain openness in Abby's work, such as the relationship between the performative process of making the elements of the work and the way the made elements function in, and as the work itself. This connects us straight back to the artist, imagining her systematically constructing these objects by hand out of unpredictable materials with the compulsion to repeat the process over and over again. This endeavour, and the confidence behind its gesture is what make Abby's work impressive. It makes no apologies and goes all the way. It is not arrogant, but incredibly sensitive, with great attention to detail. It is what it is – yet it is also so much more.