

JACK HANLEY GALLERY

Aria McManus
Virtually Blessed

Jack Hanley Gallery Project Space
April 27 - May 25, 2024

Jack Hanley Gallery is pleased to present *Virtually Blessed*, an exhibition by Aria McManus in our project space.

Drawing upon her background in critical product design, McManus explores the convergence of technology, consumerism, and spirituality through an investigation of value perceptions and utility.

Her latest project, *Virtually Blessed*, is a Chrome extension (a software that customizes browsing experiences) designed to virtually bless objects purchased online. This act of virtual blessing infuses the purchased items with a sense of spiritual significance, and prompts a reevaluation of our relationship with material goods. By enhancing everyday objects through this process, McManus provokes a reconsideration of the role of spirituality in shaping our perceptions of value. Displayed is a screen recording of the application in use, blessing a series of water bottles ordered from Amazon. The resulting virtually blessed water is stocked inside the mini fridge, a nod to the holy water available in places of worship.

In addition to the video, a series of Virtually Blessed pre-loaded debit cards are on display, conflating commerce and spirituality. These functional debit cards serve as symbols of consumerism and transactionalism, yet they also carry a deeper, intangible value bestowed upon them through the act of their blessing. The blessing imbues not only the cards themselves but also the future transactions made with them, creating a ripple effect of spiritual significance. Thus, the intersection of commerce and spirituality takes on a tangible form, as material goods become animated with a symbolic and metaphysical resonance beyond their monetary value.

Alongside the blessed cards, legal documents for the “Congregation of the Virtually Blessed” are framed on the wall—paperwork to be filed to form a tax exempt religious organization. With these documents, the line between commercial transaction and religious experience is further blurred, inviting a reevaluation of our approach to both consumerism and faith. This organization offers a platform for future experimentation in the benefits and limitations of the legal system.

Through this body of work, McManus invites viewers to question the value we put on both material possessions and on immaterial beliefs. By disrupting conventional notions of utility and value, McManus hopes to stimulate thought on the ways in which the immaterial and material shape our considerations and experiences in the modern age.

Aria McManus (b. 1989 USA) is an artist based in New York City. Her work has been exhibited in various solo and group shows, including at, Entrance Gallery, Fisher Parrish, the New Museum, Spring Break Art Fair (all New York), AALA Gallery, Ed Varie (Los Angeles), Sunset Drive Gallery (Miami), Material Art Fair, Salon Acme (Mexico City), and Biennale Internationale Design (Saint-Etienne, France). Aria has been an artist in residence at Silver Arts at the World Trade Center in New York, and was the grand prize winner of the Salon Acme Show. Aria is a founding member of Auto Body, a curatorial collective based in Bellport, Long Island.



Link to the Chrome Extension: <https://chromewebstore.google.com/detail/virtually-blessed/dbgjpijajkkoofjgjlocmjaengabcog>