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Sentiment

Elene Chantladze, Georgia Dickie, Gérald Lajoie, u
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From the window of my rental I came to observe over the course of months a man who sits at a small cafe-bar each day from early morning until late afternoon, always carrying with him a deliciously worn leather bag. Inside was a rotating roster of single paintings, none larger than the size of a manilla envelope. The work on display could be swapped at ease depending on mood, weather, audience. Gathered around a circular granite table with wrought-iron legs, conversations took up the short days and the nights began to fill with theurgy and awe.

Whenever the program participated in an art fair he sat on a bistro chair taken from the cafe, with the briefcase, opening it for viewers upon entering the booth. It ruffled the fair organisers a bit, but it was a PR machine, so they couldn't stay upset. The overhead of the program was so low it could survive what seems like an everlasting cycle of recession and inflation.

Eventually, the leather bag itself was the work on view. The container had found self-actualization in a lesson on becoming. It was the kind of leather that comes into itself more with age, beautiful creases and stress lines on its faces like dimples. The kind of bag you cross paths with on the street that makes you green. At times of deep speculation, the realness of a well-loved bag combats an uneasy heart.

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Sentiment assembles a recurrence of containers: Georgia Dickie's suite of cardboard box assemblages, u's *project spaces* (small-scale collaborations with invited artists housed in packaging tape boxes), Gérald Lajoie's sensitive cabinetry, and Elene Chantladze's paintings and drawings on found cardboard, pieces of plastic, small rocks, or other home-objects. These works trace a materialism that sympathises with the commonplace, and looks to the possibility for portraiture to accumulate through collected material. Looking to a life beyond their relationship to products, here lives an adoration of materials outside of capital—patrons of a sentimental realism.

In Georgia Dickie's *Cardboard Boxes* (2022-) the artist adorns the spaces used for packaging consumer products with adhered notions, paint, bits of packaging, collected images and objects that are rehomed onto and within the inherited substrates. The collaged compositions posit debris as a site of poetics, she crafts convincing semiotic partnerships with familiar labels and branded copy alongside handwritten notes or recipes on post-it notes or scrap paper. Recognizable advertising motifs exercise newly found freedom through separation. These fragments of language and symbols litter the sculptures, injecting bits of nostalgia from a recent past, the couplings unexpectedly at peace like longtime cohabitants.

u sustains a growing network of artists and collaborators through an ongoing series of "project spaces" and amasses a growing archive of containers. Invited collaborators are sent an empty project space constructed of clear packaging tape, eventually making their way back to u. The small selection of included spaces were shipped to the gallery for the exhibition in their own respective boxes inside of a larger box, their shipping labels to and from the artists still adhered to the cardboard. A piece of each practice sealed into a transparent box – in *project space 33 (More of this please)* collaborating artist Kate Newby casts branches in white bronze and aluminium, an Asian clam sits in another by Amy Yao, marked with paint and glitter, Nour Mobarak blankets the project space in red india ink, Elif Saydam deposits laminated plastic and found stickers in *project space 35*. These four completed project spaces are accompanied here by two empty ones, reserved for two of the included artists, Georgia Dickie and Gérald Lajoie. Through embellishment, adoration, intervention, or collection, u's project spaces depict containers as sites of possibility.

Gérald Lajoie's corsetted armoire reads simultaneously as new and well-lived, fresh material and notions sourced from existing objects amalgamate. Iron springs are sutured to the base of the cabinet, their tops slightly compressed by a jute string that traces them together before being tacked to the wooden armature of the cabinet. The structure's thin legs are bound loosely together by a thin copper wire. It wears linen and rabbit skin glue taut over its U-shaped

form. The feeble armoire's bodice-like construction and diamond-shaped keyhole combine the artist's interest in garment construction with rich historical references.

In a practice that marries commonplace materials with loosely painted depictions of the everyday, Elene Chantladze casts images of her life in Georgia onto reused materials that were to be otherwise discarded. She fuses these images with the life of the remnants she works onto (pieces of cardboard, here), collaborating with the traces that remain on their surface. The optimism present in her works project a certain way of inhabiting life—an unabashed realness reproduces life back on the viewer, or maybe in an adoration of life itself.

A painted pastoral scene (*Untitled*, n.d.) limns a conglomerate of flowers, shrubs, and birds which tower beside a figure clutching a bouquet. The bird's eyes float curiously onto the figure, as if they are listening intently to bits of shared wisdom, the flora tilts closer, too—their harmonious assembly appears as a daily gathering between old friends. The scene is framed by a painted blue border that washes to the edges of the cardboard substrate. The speed of life meets a palpable slowness in the image.

Elene Chantladze (b.1946, Supsa, Georgia) lives and works in Tskaltubo, Georgia. Her recent solo exhibitions include Elene Chantladze, Anton Kern Gallery, New York; Elene Chantladze, kaufmann repetto, New York; Elene Chantladze, Kaufmann repetto, Milan (2024); Elene Chantladze with Rooms studio, M KHA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich (2023); Fierman, New York (2022); Modern Art, London (2021); LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2020); Gallery Nectar, Tbilisi (2018). Her work has been exhibited in group exhibitions at Efremidis Gallery, Berlin; LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2023); Ermes Ermes, Rome; Lismore Castle Arts; Croy Nielsen, Vienna (2022); ADZ Gallery, Lisbon; Conceptual Fine Arts, Milan (2021); Gallery Nectar, Tbilisi; Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel (2015).

Gérald Lajoie-Restrepo (b. 1995) is a self taught Canadian-Mexican artist currently living and working on the unceded Kanienkehá:ka territory, also known as Montréal. Recent group exhibitions include Franz Kaka, Toronto (2023), Anexé07, Gatineau (2023), and Joe Project, Montréal (2022).

Georgia Dickie (b. 1989, Toronto, Canada) earned her BFA from the Ontario College of Art and Design University in 2011. She was one of the recipients of the 2020 Sobey Art Award, and the 2014 recipient of the Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts Artist Prize. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions internationally including Soft Opening, London (2022), Fragment Gallery, Moscow (2021), Oakville Galleries, Oakville (2019), Rolando Anselmi, Berlin (2018), Jeffrey Stark, New York (2017), Night Gallery, Los Angeles (2017), Cooper Cole (2017), Springsteen Gallery, Baltimore (2016), Art Museum of U of T, Toronto (2016), The Power Plant, Toronto (2013), and the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto (2012). In February 2015, she was the Canada Council for the Arts artist in residence at Acme Studios in London, UK. Dickie currently lives and works in Toronto.

u's recent exhibitions include Backrooms, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich, (2024), The Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, (2022-2024), Wschód, Warsaw, (2022), Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2019), Utopian Visions Art Fair, Portland, (2018), Carl Louie, London, (2018). As a project space, u's programming has occurred in various locations around southern Alberta. In 2025, u will open a newly constructed project space in Diamond Valley called u's hut.