



Michelle Grabner
American Trompe l'oeil

Reception: February 23, 6 - 8pm
Exhibition: February 23 – April 13, 2019

The Green Gallery
1500 N Farwell Ave Milwaukee, WI

Continuing to work with the cultural values of repetition and the material translation of found compositions and quotidian motifs, *American Trompe L'oeil*, an exhibition of new work by Michelle Grabner explores the conceptual merits of mimesis within a tricky political reality shaped by alternative facts and the agency of feelings.

In 1960 Jasper John's sensuously hand-painted the labels on two bronze-cast beer cans. *Ballantine Ale* (1960) foregrounds John's interest in "things which are seen and not looked at." In 1994 Gabriel Orozco's exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York was comprised of four transparent Dannon yogurt lids that hung minimally; one on each of the gallery walls. Both of these gestures centering on discarded objects wittingly elevate the mundane in order to critically debunk the lofty moral implications of subject matter. At the same time, these two

examples also extol the formal qualities and political potential of restaging and reworking consumable material.

Devoted to the representation of the actual, 19th century American trompe l'oeil painting worked to blur the line between the real thing and artistic recreation. Optical issues and illusionism were skillfully applied to the accurate depiction of commonplace items. When arranged on a picture plane and painted to-scale, these artifacts combined to embody human narratives, symbolic meaning and traditionalist memory. Unifying still-life genre and history painting, American trompe l'oeil painting evoked nostalgic and distinctly American values in a time of cultural transition, when scientific progress and vigorous capital was impacting new forms of consumption that yielded loss of faith and tradition. A late painting by John Frederick Peto titled, *Market Basket, Hat and Umbrella* in the Milwaukee Art Museum collection is an exemplary trompe l'oeil specimen while John Haberle's *Grandma's Hearthstone* (1890) at the Detroit Institute of Art is a monumental masterpiece of the style.

In Grabner's new work, she reexamines historical engagements with illusionism and everyday subject matter. When considering Orozco's yogurt lids and other forms of commercialized trompe l'oeil, she plays with the optical issues employed by the commercial branding and industrialized printing of gingham-patterned fabric on jam and jelly lids. Grabner's bronze cast lids are conspicuously hand-painted, ironically evoking the traditional values of the homemade as well as the material values of bronze. These virtues are in line with the wholesome signifiers of gingham; an effective advertising prompt for mass-produced food products. These gingham-patterned condiment lids are also the subject of a new series of photographs that use the tropes of systematic assessment in a humorous effort to simultaneously measure the signifiers of domestic virtue and formal abstraction. Also included in the exhibition are works from Grabner's series of re-casted domestic artifacts and two oil-stick encrusted cast-iron sinks.

Grabner's re-examination of a trompe l'oeil tradition and its uncanny ability to foreground the things in daily life that "are seen but not looked at" runs concurrent with her commission for John Michael Kohler Art Center's new satellite facility, the 54,000 square foot Art Preserve to open in spring of 2020. Here Grabner will co-mingle vernacular patterns and brass reliefs with a series of cast custodial artifacts. This spring will also host a survey exhibition of Grabner's work curated by Maximilian Rauschenbach at Galerie Clement in Bonn Germany that will contextualize examples of her new work with previous bodies of work.

Michelle Grabner is an artist, writer, and a curator based in Wisconsin. She is the Crown Family Professor of Art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she has taught since 1996. In addition, Grabner has also held teaching appointments at The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Cranbrook Academy of Art; Yale Norfolk; Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts - Bard College; Yale University School of Art; and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine. Grabner co-curated the 2014 Whitney Biennial and curated the 2016 Portland Biennial. She was the Artistic Director for the inaugural exhibition, FRONT International, the 2018 Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art. Her reviews are regularly published in *X-tra* and *Artforum*. With her husband, artist Brad Killam, they founded The Suburban in 1999 in Oak Park, IL hosting a range of international contemporary art. After 16 years in the Chicago vicinity, The Suburban began programming exhibitions in Milwaukee's Walker's Point neighborhood. In 2009 Grabner and Killam opened The Poor Farm in rural Waupaca County, Wisconsin.