

Edible Glasses

Feiko Beckers
Tamara Henderson
Eun Kyung Kim
Ieva Misevičiūtė

January 18th - February 23rd, 2013

Edible Glasses

Perhaps life needs to be deciphered like a cryptogram. Secret staircases, frames from which the paintings quickly slip aside and vanish...buttons which must be indirectly pressed to make an entire room move sideways or vertically, or immediately change all its furnishings; we may imagine the mind's greatest adventure as a journey of this sort to the paradise of pitfalls

- André Breton

Eyeglasses are usually the first thing we notice when looking at a bespectacled face, but for the wearer, the lenses and frames withdraw into the background as soon as they are on. Their arms gently hug our temples, and we forget they are there. This is confirmed by anyone who has had the experience of looking around for their glasses only to realize that they are already wearing them. Like most objects that support our everyday activities, we take our glasses for granted until they are broken or out of place.

The *edible* glasses that inspired this exhibition's title will never be worn, seen or eaten, but still they serve as a reminder of the potential of all objects to be something other than what we expect of them. The promise of generating new lives for everyday objects has long fascinated artists. The Surrealists looked to objects with glimmering eyes, mixing and shaking and breaking them hoping to stir up "the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'...the objects that have begun

to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them."¹

Faced with the pathologically consumerist culture that brought us the great pacific garbage patch, artists today seem less optimistic about the revolutionary potential of things, but many continue to wade through the flotsam and jetsam left in the wake of early 20th century avant-gardes. Looking to extract allegorical potential from the familiar, artists still regularly subject objects to all sorts of manipulations and transformations, but it is less common for objects to be considered independent actors able to actively collaborate on the construction of meaning. The artists in *Edible Glasses* never completely hand over control to the realm of things, but they do encourage the contingent possibilities that can arise when objects are allowed to perform their own particular kind of agency.

The object-characters in Tamara Henderson's films come to life through a process that begins in the artist's sleep. Henderson deciphers her dreams through experimental writing and sculptural constructions that become foundations for her cinematic storyboards. Each scene must be developed in advance of shooting because Henderson's

1. Benjamin, Walter. "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Edited by Peter Demetz, 181. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.

particular methodology accounts for the contingencies of another object: her Bolex 16mm film camera. Her films are always edited in camera, resulting in the gathering of choreographed scenes through mechanical cuts and cross fades into a narrative that fits within the temporal parameters of a standard three-minute roll of 16mm film. Henderson navigates the whims and limitations of analogue technology to bring out the latent potential of objects to contribute to the storytelling process.

Neon Figure (2013), Henderson's filmic contribution to *Edible Glasses*, is structured around a sleeping set of venetian blinds whose eyes open and close to reveal different scenes and events. The blinking blinds mirror both the camera's opening and closing shutter, and the dreamed origin of the narrative itself. The blinds slip in and out of consciousness while a mystery develops that involves the suspicious retreat of a neon figure, a spilling bowl of fruit, and a typewriter that writes by itself. With spectral qualities, objects work on behalf of the artist, and the film appears to have been made by a crew of phantoms. The absent typist chatters out notes foreshadowing the rest of the film, while a pair of lavender gloves lay nearby on a scattering of sand, as if discarded by a typing ghost. Materializing if they were dreamed to life: shapeshifting plies of hay, fruit fly cocktails, and sun tanning cobwebs all act their best in this looping oneiric puzzle.

Henderson's second contribution to the exhibition also finds its origin in an altered state of mind. *Pacific Peace* (2013) is the fourth in a series of furniture pieces designed under hypnosis. Through an Ultra Depth-Ultra Height session at Pacific Peace Healing Centre in Vancouver, Henderson took notes and made drawings, which she used to translate her hypnotic vision into a materialized object. The result is a white sculptural lounge chair with warmly colored upholstered waves emanating from one side. A pair of blue jeans and a Nova Scotia t-shirt occupy the space where a person might recline, which could suggest a perpetual out of body hypnotic experience, or a rebelling set of casual wear that decided stretching out on a lounge chair is more comfortable than being worn all day.

We usually see chairs and clothing as completely dedicated to the task of being useful to humans, but in this case the two come together to assert themselves as somewhat independent of use value. Where innumerable shapes and folds of dyed cotton, wood and steel appear, we see "chair". Where intricate minglings of minute polyester and cotton fibers appear we see "clothing". When a chair can no longer be sat in, and the clothes can no longer be worn, we see them as useless, but for objects to be useless is to be liberated, for they have the potentiality to really be themselves, or something else entirely.

In 1948 British Humorist Paul Jennings invented the “mock philosophy” *resistentialism* in order to send up existentialism. Rather than beginning with the human subject, *resistentialism* begins with objects. Nasty ones. It is a philosophy of missing keys, inkless pens, and socks with holes in them. The central tenet of *resistentialism* is “Things are against us”². While Jennings’ theory is purely in jest, it does contain a kernel of truth. Relations between objects and people are wrought with complications. To some degree, objects always resist our attempts to get to know them, and as Karl Marx reminds us in a well-known passage from *Capital*, it gets even worse. He describes a scene where, through the abstraction of commodity relations, a regular old wooden table eclipses its own form: “It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing on its own free will.”³

The artists in *Edible Glasses* begin with objects dancing of their own free will and go from there. Many of the objects Eun Kyung Kim’s sculptural installation *Peacock Parade with Goddesses on Mushrooms* (2013), began their lives as inhabitants of the strange world

of the mass commodity before being inserted into new, perhaps even more bizarre, object relations. Kim’s installation consists of four semi-autonomous anthropomorphic forms set in such a way that they gaze at each other through myriad aesthetic correspondences. In the center of her installation a circular wrought iron base supports a mirror, a vase, and a shiny silver-plated glass bowl to form a kind of elegant all-seeing mushroom that absorbs and reflects the other surrounding sculptures.

To the east and the west of the ‘mushroom’, tall wooden legs hold object arrangements crowned with half-circle plumage made of transformed window blinds. The bird-like forms stand tall, their bodies illuminated by dangling colored lights. With the logic of a sunset the east sculpture glows blue and the west is a warm pink. Attached to a south wall, two large orbs shrouded in a shimmering platinum fabric resemble what can only be described as a giant pair of breasts. Circular and spherical forms are repeated throughout Kim’s constellation, evoking early cosmic mythology. The central mushroom mirror takes on idol-like qualities and viewers who circle it observing the physiognomic relations between the “goddesses” may also observe themselves performing along with the surrounding sculptures. Through this carnivalesque object dance, blurring aesthetic correlations have the effect of foregrounding the constantly interconnected lives of people and things.

2. Harrington Elster, Charles. “*Resistentialism*.” The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/21/magazine/21ONLANGUAGE.html> (accessed January 15th, 2013).

3. Marx, Karl. *Capital*. 163. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Objects play roles in all social encounters to varying degrees of prominence. In Feiko Becker's work objects are always foregrounded as semi-autonomous agents positioned to express themselves so that they must be taken into account. Through performance and video Beckers practices the art of parallel storytelling. While he chats to the camera about events in his life, he simultaneously activates objects that enter into their own dialectical narratives, with force.

The video *Merely a part of life* (2011) begins with a smash. It is object suicide, or perhaps it is murder. One at a time, a series of vases are placed onto a small skinny plinth, but like the Irish Elk, which went extinct due to its tragically oversized antlers, the vases each have a fatal flaw. A large arrow-shaped appendage juts out of each vase, ensuring that when set on their base, they inevitably topple to the floor and shatter. Knowing their fate, Beckers casually, continuously, places them on the plinth until all that remains is an entropic scattering of ceramic debris on the floor. While Beckers has a broom he makes no moves to sweep up, and his brother, who is standing deadpan nearby, does the job for him. The artist then weaves a tale about inevitability, eventually exonerating himself from missing his nephew's ninth birthday, arguing: "these things just happen". All through Beckers' story, the pile of objects, which have been activated through their destruction, act as silently dialectical witnesses to his questionably deterministic logic. It is not until the very end of the

story, however, that the shattered objects are referenced verbally when Beckers finally states: "I'm certainly not the person responsible for cleaning up any mess."

It is quite clear that the objects in the video meet their doom partly because of their own material conditions, which Beckers created in the first place. So in making the vases with intentional defects, the artist predetermines material support for his narrative of predetermination. Elsewhere in the gallery, however, a very low plinth supports a remaining arrow vase as if to suggest its potential beyond what is represented in the video. The object left behind suggests that Beckers doesn't totally subscribe to his own logic, and that perhaps, no matter how seemingly inevitable, there are ways stopping things from *just happening*.

Some things in life do seem inevitable. As our bodies age we increasingly rely on objects for support. We become machine-like and then we become dust. Eyeglasses are one of the first steps in this process, and they represent one of the most intimate relationships a person can have an object. They help their wearers navigate life, and they can also aesthetically define them. Glasses can become costume, prop, and even stand-in. They can lend their wearer an aesthetic tic so strong that, as in the case of the great comedian Groucho Marx, they seem to be performing both on and in addition to their wearer. In their uncanny specificity, glasses are clearly implicated in Henri Bergson's

infamous formula for comedy as: “Something mechanical encrusted upon the living”.⁴ This might explain why glasses are so often employed in slapstick comedy, but being closely identified with a particular object can have its problems. Groucho’s glasses had such a mind of their own that they started multiplying, and took the comedian’s eyebrows, nose and mustache along with them. Stores began offering up this distinct visage as something to buy when you want to signify funny without really being funny at all.

Through performance, Ieva Misevičiūtė employs objects in such a way that they resist identification with particular tendencies, and complicate the reifying potential of being associated with specific things. The objects she collaborates with morph throughout her act. A shaggy carpet may become a chair, a bag displays potential above and beyond the everyday when it is filled with hot water. Other objects are less overt in their intentions, and only really speak through the atmospheric assemblage of the overall performance. Objects populate her routine through language as well. The title of this exhibition comes from a joke in an early version of her performance script. Misevičiūtė’s act will premiere on the closing evening of *Edible Glasses*, so while the exhibition will be anchored by her future performance, it is currently cast adrift.

Moving through complicated interactions between people and objects it is easy to feel a little bit lost, but whenever objects are involved understandings can go astray. Once particular readings of things are emphasized over others there is an inherent surplus of potential articulation unaccounted for. Objects only reveal themselves in degrees, and the promise of encounters with previously overlooked characteristics of things has enthralled artists for generations. As André Breton says of Surrealist mentor Giorgio de Chirico’s practice: “he could paint only when surprised (surprised first of all) by certain arrangements of objects”.⁵ When static objects are employed in the service of art, from creation to reception, they carry unknowns far beyond the artist’s intentions. The objects in *Edible Glasses* are not only positioned in potentially illuminating constellations, but they are also dreamed into particular scenarios as active performers, dialoging with the people around them and with each other. If objects on their own have the capacity to surprise, the artworks in *Edible Glasses* are steeped in the potential to positively bewilder.

- Jesse Birch

4. Zupančič, Alenka. qtd in *The Odd One In: On Comedy*. 122. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

5. Breton, André. Nadja. 15. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

Biographies

Feiko Beckers is a Dutch visual artist, primarily working in the fields of video and performance. He graduated from Academie Minerva in Groningen in 2006 and in 2011-2012 he was a resident at the Rijks Academy in Amsterdam. In 2012, he was a resident at Le Pavillon at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Beckers has exhibited at Beursschouwburg, Brussels; deServiceGarage, Amsterdam; La Casa Encendida, Madrid and Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Paris.

Tamara Henderson is a Canadian-born artist who works in 16mm film, sculpture, drawing, and printed matter. She studied at the Royal Art Academy in Stockholm and Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. Henderson has exhibited at dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel; Botkyrka Konsthall, Stockholm; A1C Gallery, St. John's; articule, Montreal; Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main and Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal.

Eun Kyung Kim is a Vancouver based artist working in sculpture, painting and installation. She received her BFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 2012. She has shown at Amazing Gallery, Vancouver and recently had her first solo show at Yactac Gallery, Vancouver. Kim employs everyday objects and sculptural support systems as actors in embodied narratives that explore the social construction of wonder related to culturally idealized places.

Ieva Misevičiūtė is a New York based artist and curator. In her artistic work she unites the methods of action theatre, dance, and stand-up comedy, with works often resulting in the form of performance, lectures, or music videos. As an artist she has performed in such venues as Swiss Institute, New York; SMART Project Space, Amsterdam; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, among others. Misevičiūtė's curatorial practice often unites methods of curating and directing. Her recent projects include Alligators! at de Appel, Amsterdam, and the 11th International Baltic Triennial (retitled "Mindaugas Triennial"), CAC, Vilnius.

Programme

1. Ieva Misevičiūtė, Exhibition title and performance, 2013.*
2. Tamara Henderson, *Pacific Peace*, 2013, mixed media.
3. Tamara Henderson, *Neon Figure*, 2012, 16mm film, soundtrack made in collaboartion with Julia Feyrer.
4. Feiko Beckers, *Merely a Part of Life*, 2011, video with ceramic sculpture.
5. Eun Kyung Kim, *Peacock Parade with Goddesses on Mushrooms*, 2013, mixed media.

* The performance will follow the exhibition on February 23rd, 2013 at 8pm in the Luxe Hall at the Westesrn Front. Misevicuite will also host an Action Workshop on February 26th from 8 to 10:30pm. To register please contact exhibitions@front.bc.ca.

