Juan Ortiz-Apuy
The Garden of Earthly Delights

JANUARY 13 - FEBRUARY 11, 2017

G44 Centre for Contemporary Photography
Junkspace thrives on design, but design dies in Junkspace.¹

There’s a blonde braid cuffed with a designer watch running down a freshly painted fuselage. The smooth carves and edges in a manner that’s mostly didactic, yet almost smoothly glossy surface. "Junkspace pretends to unite, but it actually splinters."²

Ortiz-Apuy’s The Garden of Earthly Delights plays within this territory of interests where smooth aesthetics and the breakdown of junky materials intersect, so-called ‘timeless’ design bungs up against the inevitable entropy it’s attempting to avert. Like where furniture ranges shiny and perfect in an IKEA catalogue, meets furniture, dent and splintered in the IKEA AS-is section, meets furniture, pieces toss and forgotten in a landfill. Throughout the exhibition, Ortiz-Apuy blends these distinctive areas of presentation together into a complex and exuberant whole. The sanctified platforms upon which our commodities are glorified and fetishized, and the abject spaces where they are broken down, merging into one frenetic, uncanny, and brightly-toned landscape not unlike Hieronymus Bosch’s infamous titular work, which shares the same title as this show. "Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout."³

Central to The Garden of Earthly Delights is a triptych of large-scale handcut collages on foam board. Each is littered with images sourced from a multitude of IKEA catalogues, design history books, and National Geographic magazines. They’re glossy bodies of the human, animal and furniture variety, fracturing together amidst the visual apparatus of commerce: price points, bright hues, dynamic lines, modeling hands. Like their early Netherlandish predecessor, they seem to imply a world that is at once disturbing and hilarious, yet strangely enticing, and (dare I say it) pleasurable. It’s a space that visualizes what Ortiz-Apuy (by way of Hal Foster and T.J. Clark) has referred to as the “modern dream of modernism,” wherein the democratic design values of the movement like the Bauhaus have transitioned under capitalism to create a political economy that values sign over object. A system where a product is valued according to its packaging, and everything comes pre-packaged.

Ortiz-Apuy’s collages carefully splinter and juxtapose the raveled things we buy and sell, yet in a new video project that explores this push-and-pull of commodity culture: where smooth and visceral pleasure in spending a moment with that flat, beautiful glossy surface.

"Unboxing" videos on YouTube have been around practically out of proportion) hunting knife, fingers stroking their seams and edges in a manner that’s mostly didactic, yet almost smoothly glossy surface. In a feature on the phenomenon in The Garden of Earthly Delights, writer Mireille Silcoff likened the pleasure of watching unboxing to an uncharted form of deep neurological massage, a deeply embodied stimulant perhaps not unlike unboxing’s distant relative, ASMR videos.⁴ Yet, when engaged within Ortiz-Apuy’s topography of fragmented IKEA bodies and failed Bauhaus dreams, the thrill of unboxing seems to the strange ways in which our cherished products accumulate pleasures, sensations, aspirations, fantasies, fetishes—often in ways seemingly unrelated to production or monetary value. At the centre of The Garden of Earthly Delights sits a glossy vase, CNC-machined in smooth, organic curves. It looks at once like the tactile outcome of some of Ortiz-Apuy’s chosen video footage in the adjacent room: where hands push and squeeze at soft, viscous materials. Yet it also resembles the strange, similarly-toned structures in the central panel of Bosch’s painting—are they monuments, architectures, living things? Another deep-green plinth features a collection of 3D printed forms, pieces of fruit, found items and pre-Columbian fetish objects. Like much of Ortiz-Apuy’s work, these arrangements speak to his multi-layered approach to citation. If Rem Koolhaas and Hieronymus Bosch is his reference points, then so are Hannah Höch and Geoffrey Farmer, Fun Toys Collector and Marcel Duchamp. In particular, Adolf Loos lingers in the corners of The Garden of Earthly Delights: the turn-of-the-century Austrian architect who famously decried the ornate style of Art Nouveau, stating, “the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.”⁵ Loos’ equation of streamlined design and evolved society leaves the ornate in the world of the so-called ‘primitive’: a realm where our relationships to inanimate things are supposedly irrational, excessive, flooded with superstition and over-identification. Yet as Ortiz-Apuy’s work makes clear these forms of attachment ring true in all forms of design, ornate or sleek, contemporary or not. I feel a slight shiver as hands peer the protective film off the smooth black screen of an untouched iPhone? (YouTube views: 7,146,989), and it’s difficult to locate where the purely commercial interest in a new product ends and something visceral takes over.

"Junkspace is addictive, layered, and lightweight, not articulated in different parts but subdivided, quartered the way a carcass is torn apart—individual chunks severed from a universal condition.”⁶

⁴ Ibid., 174.
⁵ Ibid., 175.
⁸ "Autonomic Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR)”, or autonomous sensory meridian response, is a tingling, massage-like sensation triggered in some by certain audio stimuli, such as whispering. A massive online community has grown around ASMR.
⁹ Ibid., 176.
¹⁰ Ibid., 176.

Juan Ortiz-Apuy, The Garden of Earthly Delights Series, detail, hand-cut collage on foam board, 97 x 50 inch, 2016

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

10 Koolhaas, 176.
11 Ibid., 174.
12 Ibid., 175.
13 Ibid., 176.
14 Ibid., 176.
16 Koolhaas, 175-76.

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Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing art form. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44’s mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

Juan Ortiz-Apuy was born in Costa Rica in 1980 and lives and works in Montréal. His work has been exhibited across Canada and internationally. Recent exhibitions include The MacLaren Arts Centre, SPOROBOLE Contemporary Art Centre, Gallery Birch Libralato, ARTSPACE, Eastern Edge, A Space Gallery and Quebec City Biennial: Manif d’Art 7. In 2011 he was the recipient of the Halifax Regional Municipality Contemporary Visual Art Award. Ortiz-Apuy has a BFA from Concordia University, Montréal (2008), a Post-graduate Diploma from the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland (2009), and a MFA from NSCAD University, Halifax (2011). He recently completed a residency at the Vermont Studio Center, USA and has an upcoming exhibition at Museum London. Ortiz-Apuy is represented by Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran.

Daniella Sanader is a writer who lives in Toronto. In her work, she regularly explores associative and speculative modes for thinking and writing about contemporary art, ones that emphasize queer/feminist frameworks, messy feelings, and embodied experience. She holds an MA in Art History from McGill University, and has written essays and reviews for Canadian Art, C Magazine, Susan Hobbs Gallery, BlackFlash, Forest City Gallery, and many others. She has curated projects for Vtape and Oakville Galleries, and currently works at Gallery TPW in Toronto.