

CURRENT ISSUE | FALL 2014  
SPECIAL ISSUE: 30 YEARS



[SUBSCRIBE TO THE MAGAZINE](#)

//

[Reviews](#)

## Laura Kikauka: Garage-Sale Gold

POSTED April 12, 2012

BY [Jason Schiedel](#)



What defines a guilty pleasure? We stash them in the hidden closets of the soul: Air Supply and Justin Bieber, soap operas and trashy mags, lawn jockeys and monster trucks impatiently waiting for a secret tryst while we front for the neighbours, bosses and ladies who lunch. Guilty pleasures are *bad* for us, that's for sure. They make us into dumber, fatter, less sophisticated versions of our urbane selves. Classic guilty pleasures flourish in the soil of others who are fit to judge. They are social in nature, and shame is their tonic. On a deserted island with no one watching, they'd wither up and blow away.

[Laura Kikauka](#), whose art often consists of collected objects she arranges, alters and presents, has purged her pleasurable practice of all guilt. It's a major achievement when you consider the shame-fuelled model of our present culture. Fun has been deposed in place of ranking, competition and the desperate need to win. Witness the current state of our televised dreamscape. Its "reality" (conspicuous choice of words, eh?) consists of little more than the manufacturing of losers and winners; a repetitive, ritualized spectacle of humiliation and elimination with a climactic spurt of money and prizes.



Laura Kikauka "Strength Thru Embarrassment" 2012 Installation

view Courtesy the artist and MKG127

Right out of the gate, Kikauka neuters the race by wilfully stepping out of line with the times. The items she prefers to collect aren't big-ticket gewgaws but something abject in the eyes of the rich and fabulous: detritus, crap and yesterday's news. One night at the [Electric Eclectics](#) festival (an annual event she hosts with her partner [Gordon Monahan](#)) I spotted her looking radiant in a handmade gown constructed entirely from dollar-store bags! Who could have guessed Walter Benjamin's notion of the just-past could be this much doggone fun?

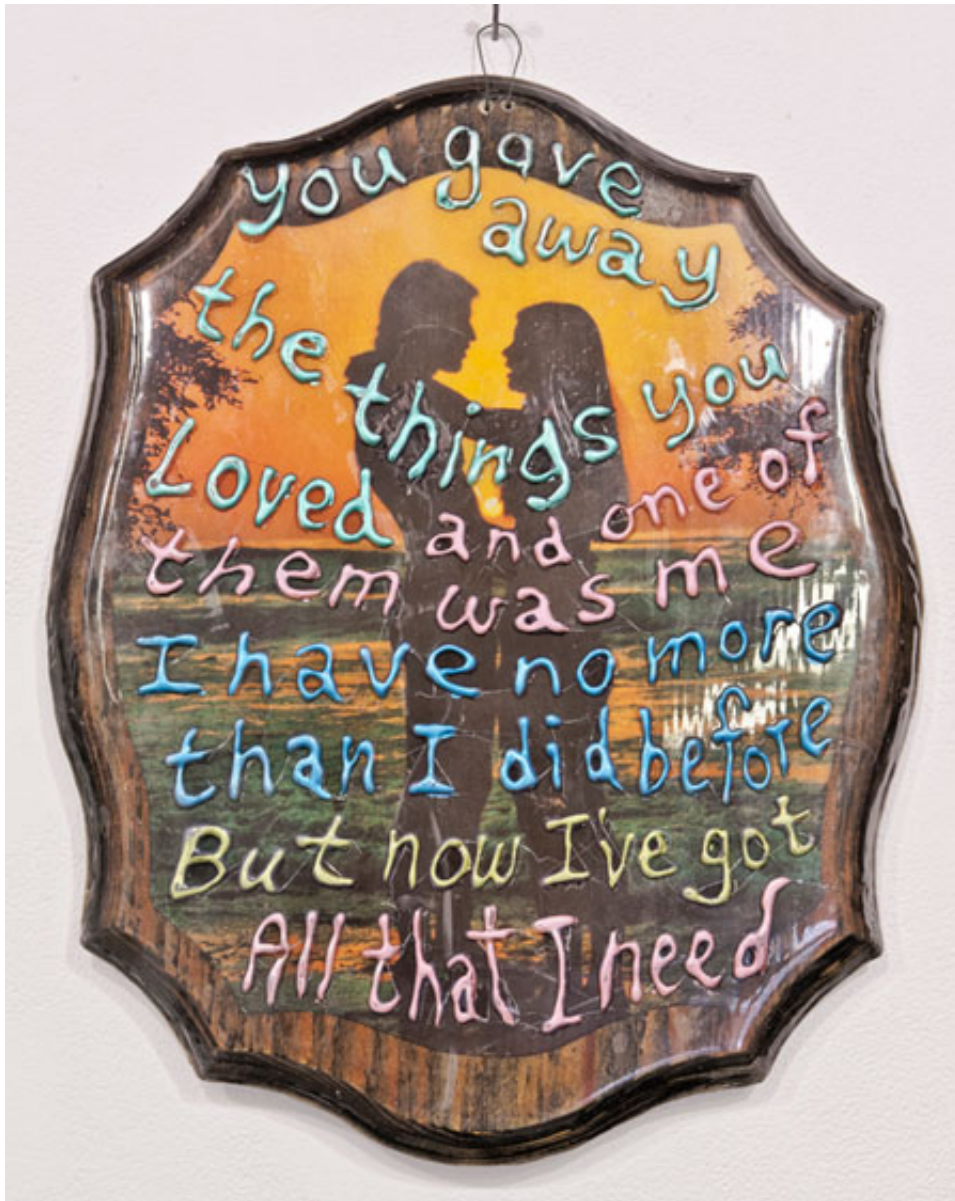
The conceptual heart of the floor-to-ceiling tsunami of imagery that filled her recent outing at [MKG127](#) pumped with two-stroke efficiency. On the intake, Laura collected works of art from thrift stores and garage sales, while simultaneously jotting down lyrics from popular songs that piqued her interest. For the output, she appended the fragmented lyrics directly onto the paintings, plaques and whatnots with a diverse array of formal approaches. Otherworldly collaborations materialized out of cast-off decor, rainbow-coloured foam letters, press type and ribbons of translucent acrylic receding like ectoplasm. Certain pairings had a whoopee cushion's curt eloquence. Some were delicious head-scratchers. Many danced a slippery tango that would have made Barthes and Magritte swoon.



Laura Kikauka *Strange* 2011 Courtesy the artist and MKG127

The pleasures of “[Strength Thru Embarrassment](#)” (this show’s brilliant title) were various and particular. There was the unabashed delight of chance encounters, those “aha!” moments when meaning shoots out of chaos like a flaming comet. There was the perverse hilarity of poetry and poesy washing up on the shores of Thomas Gainsborough and Pablo Picasso. Last but not least was the curiosity aroused by guessing games of lyrical provenance. Who penned that line anyway—was it Joni Mitchell, or Lynyrd Skynyrd?

Every afternoon that I perused the show, I listened to excited viewers claim this or that one as their favourite. But to rank them is to miss the point. “Strength Thru Embarrassment” shuffled the deck of a horizontal aesthetic democracy, tickling our highfalutin floodgates open to sublime depths. Laura Kikauka’s masterful matchmaking spins gold out of dirt and spit. Some of her pictures are goofy, others sad; but they’re all profound, immaculate conceptions. Try as others might to pick and choose, this surrogate mother has enough room in her heart for the whole monstrous bunch.



Laura Kikauka *You're So Monkey* 2011 Courtesy the artist and MKG127

### RELATED CONTENT

Reviewed 2012-04-12  
http://canadianart.ca/reviews/2012/04/12/laura-kikauka-mkg127-strength-thru-embarrassment/

most of back spaces created in the classic 1960s hand-edge painting style, featuring layered acrylic paint—a fastidious process of gradual reveal, not unlike the effect that results in a carefully maintained personal library. While there is no play and a hazy colour to the show, this is not Ryland's usual mixture of implicit references, but a placid proposition of literary love. [JIM BREUKELMAN](#)

#### Paul Butler

WRITER, TORONTO

It's an individual's sense of effortlessness among the signatures of art, Butler and curator as Winnipeg's Paul Butler has had. Butler has used the basic structure of the street workings, social networks and institutional apparatuses of the art world to create a mobile and respectful international presence. His *College Party* events are a variable which when an incident, so it came as a bit of a surprise to find that his latest body of work, shown at MKG127, embraced a kind of critical mapping of this country's "Gimme Some" photo series from winter 2007 to profile of the artists and artists on the local scene.

Methodically using tiny pieces of black reading tape to blot out all the people in the original photographs, Butler suggests what he sees as the art's ability and constructed, step-by-step nature of the article

Butler has long been concerned with art's negative advertising. Some of his best earlier work featured self-portraits affixed to magazine ads in a hand-painted, covering-over of famous names and gallery logos. These beautifully simple collages seemed to reinforce his distance from the locus of cultural power. In this latest work, however, he is no longer on the periphery looking outside from the door; it's now all perspective of a struggling emerging artist, but a far-off kind of awareness, so his critiques of champagne and galleries is less an even be in the detached observation of structural power and more like a peer review.

The strength of the show lies in Butler's ability to mobilize the often playful and spontaneous quality of collage to precisely critique the widespread fetishization of celebrity status and the tendency of art magazines to rank the glossy, personality-oriented nature of celebrity culture. There is a certain irony, however, in this collage emanating from someone whose own practice as a critic exists on a similar reading of the same and mechanics of the art world and the process that he. [MKG127](#)

#### Jim Breukelman

REPUBLIC GALLERY, HANNOVER

What Butler's inquiry touches on is de/playing, his Breukelman shows a series, because light on his photographic subjects. Most recently, in prints of what he calls "poetic environments," he has done this large

### Reviews