

EXHIBITION REVIEW
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Record Shop (2018). Installation view of exhibition. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid, courtesy MKG127, Toronto.

Record Shop

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DESPITE QUESTIONS surrounding the obsolescence of vinyl records, these iconic circular objects still maintain the curiosity of audiophiles, music fans, and contemporary artists alike. Museum exhibitions incorporating vinyl records generally emphasize the physical, sonic, and cultural properties of vinyl. *Record Shop* does this, too, with the added benefit of being able to purchase both high-end artworks and artists' multiples. What is most compelling about *Record Shop* is how a contemporary art exhibition could also evoke the experience of entering a record store. This juxtaposition between exhibition and retail shop brings to light the fact that both record shops and art galleries (as opposed to museums) are a space where commercial gains and artistic value

are consistently negotiated. Artists in this exhibition offer diverse approaches for engaging with vinyl culture, thus highlighting the materiality of vinyl, the economics of the music industry, and the status of records as a venerated collectable item.

The economy that drives the music industry—from sales, to “spins” and “rotations,” to various other Billboard statistics—is central to Dave Dymont’s *Top Ten* (2005). Dymont utilizes the materiality of the record to examine music economies by splicing proportional pie-shaped sections from the ten top selling records of all time (The Beatles, Michael Jackson, Pink Floyd, and others) according to the percentage of sales for each record and then reassembling the pieces. When played,



Record Shop (2018). Installation view of artists' multiples. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid, courtesy MKG127, Toronto.

the record would produce a fusion of audio samples based on the portion of each vinyl that was reconstituted. The auditory experience would then be directly dictated by the percentage of sales for each record and its physical composition. By cutting and pasting the vinyl record, not only does Dyment reproduce a visual manifestation of seemingly abstract data but he creates an original playable record by physically altering the materials—a method commonly used in DJ culture.

In *Milk Crate* (2010), Roula Partheniou similarly engages with the physicality involved with collecting

records by reducing this activity to its simplest form. A series of thin 12" x 12" slabs of MDF are painted with various bright colours to reference vinyl records. The slabs are positioned in a slightly larger purple box that evokes a milk crate. Using colourful paints and recognizable shapes, Partheniou invites viewers to look at collecting vinyl records as an object-oriented practice with a distinct aesthetic. *Milk Crate* embodies the shape and feeling of vinyl collecting—that records occupy space, are often stored on the floor, and function as a form of domestic design—and emphasizes the



Roula Partheniou, *Milk Crate* (2010). Acrylic paint on MDF.
Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid, courtesy MKG127, Toronto.

unexpected presence these objects hold. In crafting abstract versions of these familiar items, Partheniou contemplates the spatial and experiential characteristics of collecting records.

Sonny Assu's *Billy and the Chiefs: Potlatch House #1, 2 and 3* (2013) also plays on the recognizable aesthetic associated with vinyl records. Upon first viewing Assu's work, the thick circular objects appear to resemble records, but on closer inspection the disc-like objects reveal themselves to be elk-hide drums that invoke Northwest Coast potlatch celebrations, which were banned by settler governments in efforts to colonize Indigenous peoples and cultures. The traditional aboriginal aesthetic of dark black tones, circular shapes, and curved lines make the objects seem as if they are in motion, spinning like vinyl records on a turntable. DJ culture often serves as a tool for decolonization and resistance for Indigenous artists, with groups like A Tribe Called Red and the increasing presence of Indigenous musicians and artists in popular music. By subverting the viewer's perception through his reference to vinyl records and integrating items used in potlatch celebrations, Assu brings forth the vibrancy of Indigenous heritage that has in the past been silenced and suppressed.

Although *Record Shop* is an exhibition revolving around the vinyl record, *A Case for Sound: Nite Ride* (2009) by Marla Hlady is one of only two works in the exhibition that emits audio. Comprised of a series of smooth wooden boxes outfitted with handles, the work is intended to look like a portable record player or carrying case for vinyl records. The cases have large holes cut out of their sides to expose speakers that each produce unique pulsing soundscapes when tilted sideways. When the cases are returned to the upright position, the audio abruptly stops, simulating a skipping record. *A Case for Sound* references the aesthetic of the portable record player, but rather than utilizing records to create audio Hlady inserts an MP3 player inside each object. Even though vinyl records have not been made obsolete, they hold a different position in current music culture and economies. Hlady highlights the hybridity in musical formats found in contemporary modes of popular music consumption.

As mundane as vinyl seems, it serves as a cultural touchstone rich with the intertwinings of personal connections, collective understandings, economy value, and aesthetic power. Intersections between art and music offer an opportunity in which the familiar can be examined anew. The careful balance between commercial sales and artistic creativity in this exhibition highlights similarities between the music and art economies. *Record Shop*, however, avoids leaning too heavily on the potential sales of the artworks on display, instead opting to allow for a self-critical sentiment on capitalism and contemporary art galleries to emerge.

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Marla Hlady, *A Case for Sound: Nite Ride* (2009). Custom fabricated wood box, hardware, MP3 player, amplified speakers, sound, AAA batteries, motion switch, edition of 8. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid, courtesy MKG127, Toronto.