

# Laura Kikauka: Garage-Sale Gold

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by JASON SCHIEDEL



Laura Kikauka *Wise Eyes* 2011 Courtesy the artist and MKG127

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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

Right out of the gate, Kikauka neutered 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.

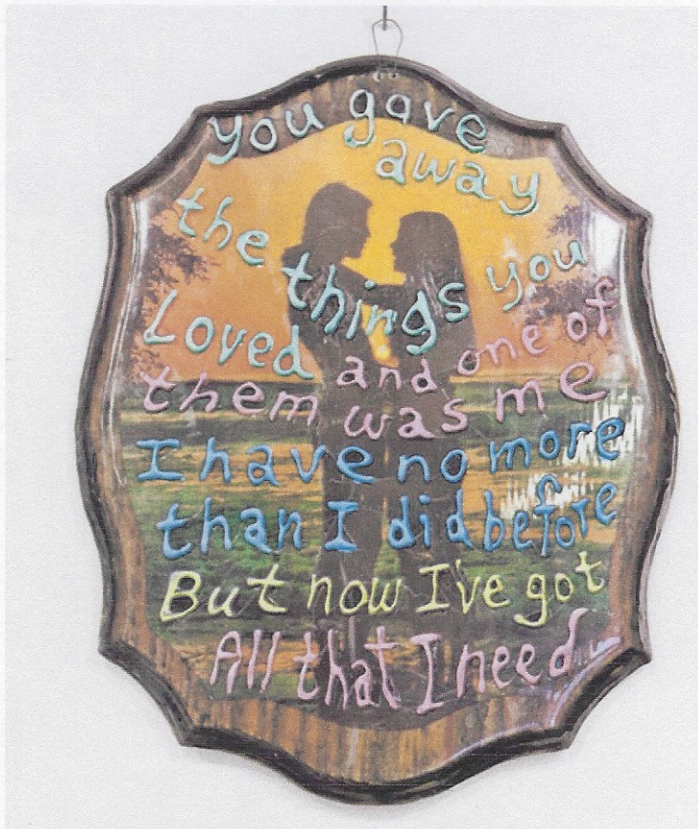


Laura Kikauka *Strange* 2011 Courtesy the artist and MKG127

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

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