



***Suspect Realities***  
**Seattle Art Fair 2018**  
**Claire Oliver Gallery**

It has become increasingly difficult to discern fact from fiction. Voyeurism is in, yet can we believe what we see? In today's digitized, Instagram world, nothing is sure; one always must distrust. Photoshop naturalizes the false. Any image can be manipulated, cropped, retouched, enhanced, any sound altered, any voice "Auto-Tuned" until no authenticity remains. Reality T.V. is artifice with predictable narrative, directed and scripted dialogue, and post-production editing that seamlessly delivers emotional attachment and pleasure in between strategically placed commercial breaks. In "CelebReality" everyone can vicariously share Warhol's 15 minutes of fame not so readily found in our work a day lives.

Collectively casting a satirical, skeptical, political, artistic eye on their surroundings, the four artists on view in "Suspect Reality" deploy highly skilled illusion, reversing the digital trend and working "against the grain" to advance another viewpoint on our current state. Their paintings, sculpture, stained glass and photography interrogate, critique, and deconstruct the deception of the real and the meanings and values at play in the artifice and fiction of our collective contemporary experience.

From a distance, Matt Bahen's paintings appear almost photographic in clarity yet as one draws near, the image disintegrates into a series of sculptural marks. The works themselves have an intrinsic dichotomy of surface and image; the thick and rough handling of the paint reinforces the brute nature of the subject and the conceptual agenda of the work. Through heavy paint and pronounced brushwork, these paintings possess an analog presence of the artists' hand; they accomplish a distinct separation from the photograph, which is conflated with the idea of journalistic truth.

Lauren Fensterstock's works combine chromed and rubberized shell work with mouth blown and cold worked glass, conceptually questioning the current "selfie" obsession and a possible link between this and past social obsessions. To navigate the intrigues of 16<sup>th</sup> century court life, Elizabeth I's astrologer John Dee obtained a black obsidian mirror carved by Aztecs from an early expedition to the New World. In a process called scrying Dee used this black handheld device to divine the future. Dee's mirror was seen as a magical contact point between present and future and the tangible and the metaphysical. Lauren Fensterstock's new body of work draws upon these diverse mirror histories to create a series of objects and installations that blend, upend, and poke fun at these precedents. Rendered entirely in black, Fensterstock's work casts a shadow blurring the logic of these seemingly distinct intellectual histories.

Laetitia Soulier conceives her hyper-realistic sculptures for the unique point of view of the camera; her 'sets' are built for the monocular perspective of the lens. Each small book, basket or hat box is constructed by the artist; 3D modeling nor Photoshop is ever used in creating any part of her work. The architecture of Soulier's spaces is at once vast and claustrophobic; each room not only offers a glimpse

of its recurrence elsewhere but is also endlessly divisible into its component parts. The viewer senses that the only limits to the system are those imposed by his or her own field of vision. The artist weaves together microcosm and macrocosm all the while leaving a space for human interaction confined within the sculpture.

With brilliant color and dazzling beauty, Schaechter seduces the viewer to look closely at her work. The artist states: "Beauty is what has always captured the viewer's attention and allows them to spend time with my work. Once involved, it is easier for them to read the content held just below the surface." By design, nothing in Schaechter's lightboxes allows for a straightforward narrative or a single meaning. Schaechter deliberately chooses images that are ambiguous enough to handle multiple viewer interpretations. Interested in the paradoxes of image-making and the tension between illusion and truth, the artist examines the notion that we can never gain the proper perspective necessary to gauge our current "reality" without completely disassociating ourselves through time or space. We can look to representations, i.e. works of art, to temporarily resolve this dilemma.

By subverting our expectations, suggesting multiple possibilities and taking what is false and treating it as fact, each artist here invites the viewer to fill in information found within their own personal experiences and question that which is assumed. The narrative itself is always at center stage, and the objects these artists create become the space where they are read and realized, made and broken. The works in "Suspect Realities" explore the meanings and values at play in the fiction and artifice of our modern world.