

Plastic on Paper

The images in this series document a relatively small selection of bags from a mound of plastic awaiting the recycling bin. Once they have served their original function, I reuse them for a variety of purposes; most recently, I have been using them to create art. This work is a reflection on these quotidian objects that permeate our everyday lives.

These plastic bags have been transformed; they have been emptied, flattened, and shaped into fluid forms that hover within a depthless space. At first glance, they may resemble magnified biomorphic forms or other strangely familiar organisms. Perhaps they bring to mind medical imagery—test results converted into visual data. On the other hand, they are not unlike X-rays that appear and disappear on monitors at airport terminals—singular subjects placed under surveillance. Their colors, which are employed to capture our attention and seduce us into purchasing products, position them within popular culture. In addition to these associations, if viewed from a less analytical or investigative perspective, these seemingly static records become ephemeral stains, fragile materials that defy gravitational forces and float above a milky white substance. These mundane objects illuminated from within by a radiant light turn out to be apparitions—visions that disappear as quickly as they come into view.

My intention is not to entirely disconnect these representations from their source, their true referent. They have been intentionally, but only temporarily camouflaged so that upon closer examination a magical metamorphosis will take place. The nebulous blobs have many connotations: historical and contemporary art, medical imagery, popular culture, and marketing strategies—digital traces that have been opened, so that they may be filled with a variety of interpretations. The glowing shapes may be instantly recognized for what they are, a byproduct of our culture of production, consumption, and waste. Yet with a blink of an eye, these plastic bags will once again become something much more beautiful than what they just were, much more intriguing than the objects themselves.

The mass-produced utilitarian objects simply serve as containers when nothing is printed on them. However, when words and logos are applied, their function dramatically shifts, and then they become devoured by another force—marketing. In many ways, we are conditioned to find joy, happiness, even self-fulfillment and self-worth in the experience of shopping. When we leave a store after purchasing this merchandise that is going to make our lives so much better, we carry this stuff home in a carefully designed bag—the iconic reference to the act of shopping. I am interested in their association with consumerism, our day-to-day lives, and ultimately, how they may serve as metaphors for larger aesthetic, environmental, or political concerns, among others.

Anyone who has watched the movie *American Beauty* realizes how something as mundane as a plastic bag caught in a whirlwind can be turned into something much more mesmerizing than how it is generally looked at and considered. This scene in the movie reveals the magical and mysterious transformation of a commonplace object into something worthy of contemplation, captured with emotion and sensitivity, re-packaged in order to create a fresh experience for the viewers, and lastly, to reveal new levels of meaning. These are my goals with the production of this work; and as an artist, it is what I continually strive toward.

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