

Vol. 133, Issue 4

September 28, 2009



Arts

Consumed on Canvas

By Tessa Perkins

An art exhibit is rarely associated with the term “ready-to-wear,” but with the atmosphere of a clothing store (complete with a rack of hanging canvases that one can browse through), the Eastwood Onley Gallery’s latest exhibit by Brent Ray Fraser, Prêt-a-Porter, defies convention. An Emily Carr graduate, Fraser’s work is described as a “fashion art exhibition,” one that “strut[s] the fine line between the catwalk and visual arts.” Using donated pieces of clothing and handbags by high-end designers including Armani, Chanel, Dolce and Gabanna, Hugo Boss, Prada, Versace, and Yves St. Laurent, the artist has transformed audiences’ perception of said goods: he sticks them onto a canvas, paints over them, and incorporates newspaper clippings and magazine cut-outs into his work.

Fraser began working on the series in June. As if to use a mass-production strategy, his studio became somewhat of a clothing factory, all in order to create approximately 200 pieces of art in the miniscule time span of a few months. Said studio is actually an old grain silo in Fort Langley which Fraser has now turned into his living space, furnished with a film studio downstairs and an octagonal space upstairs. This octagonal space allows him to paint in what is nearly a circle and work on multiple canvases at once.

The inspiration for this series of works comes from our consumer culture and the mass-produced goods that constantly surround us. “I have a love/hate relationship with consumer products and anything that is mass-produced, but I love to incorporate it into my art because of all the things it signifies,” Fraser explained to The Peak. Although these pieces focus on suit jackets and handbags, his love of using fashion in his art began with stripper heels. “I just found them really sexy.” After he began drawing stripper heels, a friend suggested that he do shoe drawings for different companies. Eventually, he ended up doing events for places like The Bay, where women would line up to have their shoes drawn by him.

In 2007, Louis Vuitton saw an article about Fraser in Flare Magazine, and they approached him to do a cross-country tour promoting their line of shoes. After this tour, he was at a loss for where to go next with his art, until one day when he was wearing a suit jacket while painting and he thought it might be fun to get paint all over the jacket, and then press it onto a canvas. This got him thinking about fashion and mass-produced consumer goods — by taking a page from Andy Warhol’s book, he could explore the idea of glorifying brands and consumer products. “I thought why not take it one step further and use the actual brand name product as the tool?” Fraser told The Peak.

Fraser’s love of Warhol’s work only began a few years ago when he saw a documentary on the artist and realized that Warhol was a clever businessman. “He knew how to make art that people wanted to see and what images appealed to them,” said Fraser. Indeed, it is easy to see a connection to Warhol’s work in this exhibit — any fan of Warhol will love what Fraser has done with these items of clothing.

Along with his painting and mixed-media works, Fraser is also a filmmaker. Producing short films in his silo-meets-studio, he does all the work from script writing to acting to editing himself. “It’s actually quite a narcissistic thing to do,” he joked — particularly since he filmed the creation of each piece of artwork and posted the videos on YouTube.

Fraser is very excited about this exhibit and plans to create seasonal artwork as a fashion house does seasonal collections of clothing. While fashion is something that is constantly changing, Fraser’s art will be in style for a long time.