

# ArtReview



Rick Lowe

The secrets of art as social engagement

Lutz Bacher *Accidental Tourist*  
*Greene Naftali Garage, New York From April 8*

Virtuosity can be downright corny – take the voice of Journey frontman Steve Perry, for instance. His polished vocal technique catapults simple pop songs into the territory of hopeless melodrama. Pseudonymous artist Lutz Bacher understands the danger of the overwrought aesthetic, and instead has cultivated a practice with slacker appeal. Having worked in the hippie capital of Berkeley from the 1970s until recently, Bacher makes art consisting largely of found objects or images that seem casually assembled from garage sales. And yet Bacher brings a certain poignancy to her work. From her meandering interviews to her paparazzi shots and cheesecake *Playboy* illustrations appended with zingy one-liners, she probes identity, sexuality and belonging.

Bacher is an apt choice to inaugurate Greene Naftali's raw garage space, sited on a quiet block of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where one is as likely to find stoop-sitting octogenarian Italian Americans as thirtysomething hipsters. *MEAT LOCKER (ORANGE)* (2016), a curtain of clear and neon-orange strips of PVC, equally commercial and festive, cloaks the entrance. The material rhymes formally with *EMPIRE OF THE SUN* (2013), a translucent plastic backdrop of a setting sun that is hung from the ceiling and bisects the space. There's a nostalgic quality to this work

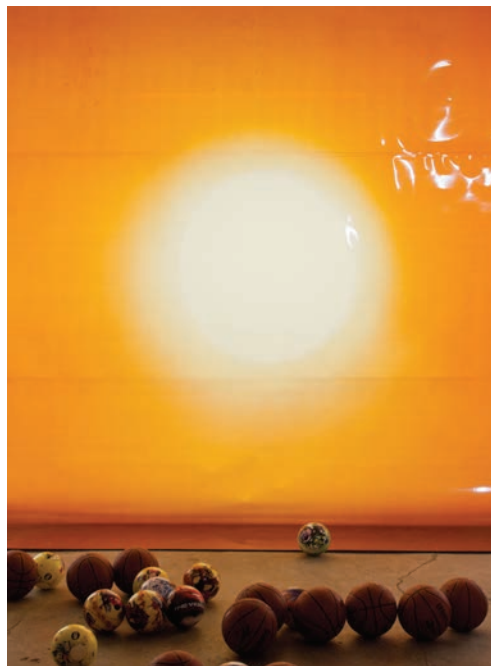
(which, like the exhibition itself, is titled after a novel that was made into a popular 1980s movie) and to the installation of standard Reebok basketballs and 'novelty' balls on the floor in front of it. There's something seedy about the found backdrop, too, which is held together with tape, its black ties on the vertical edges lying slack like unused BDSM gear. The novelty toys on the floor, for their part, are infected with crass commercialism, from a black basketball imprinted with an Angry Bird to glossy plastic spheres bearing images of characters like Snow White and Superman.

In her exhibition at Greene Naftali in 2015, Bacher paid a post-9/11 homage to Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), projecting a looped colour video of the Empire State Building onto Perspex panels, each anchored by sandbags. Here, on the far side of the sun backdrop, Bacher has installed several works that recall Warhol's fascination with cheap reflective materials during the 1960s. A loose pile of silver Mylar rests atop a small lofted space, built out for storage or a bed. One low-ceilinged space under the loft, lit by a single bulb, resembles a sad office. Bacher adorns it with two pieces of cheap rock wall and three nicked metal chairs in tones of copper, bronze, and silver, with a silver Mylar cushion spread across them. *GINGERMAN* (2014),

a holiday cookie come to life as a six-and-a-half-foot painted foam costume whose mouth is inexplicably stuffed with plastic wrap, looms ominously in an adjacent space under the loft. These works elicit contemplation on the psychological mechanism of projection, not to mention the spaces of everyday trauma, both professional and domestic.

*BURPLE* (2015–16) alludes to Bacher's hippie roots. Four Buddha Machines, a music device with several meditative channels inspired by Brian Eno's theories on generative music, sit on a dusty lavender table, flanked by six bright-orange stools topped with leather 'shag'. The gallery attendant had tuned them all to a drone channel, and they cycled in and out of harmony, filling the space with an eerie, ambient soundtrack. After leaving the show, I walked past the neighbourhood's schizophrenic architecture for a Saturday morning bagel – my weekly ritual as a neighbourhood resident. Ugly stucco and vinyl siding from the 1960s and 70s clashed with encroaching new condos. The old blue-collar homes had an undeniable appeal, much like Bacher's work, against the steel-and-glass constructions that have started to replace them. When I entered the bagel shop, the radio blared *Don't Stop Believin'*, Journey's greatest hit.

Wendy Vogel



*EMPIRE OF THE SUN*, 2013 (detail).  
Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York