



KELLY JAZVAC
PARK

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No promises, no demands

JON DAVIES

Advertising transforms the urban landscape, rendering the city skyline into a cheek-by-jowl bricolage of architecture and images. The two-dimensional and three-dimensional intertwine and spar for supremacy over our visual field. As printing technologies have evolved, advertising has colonized hitherto unimagined spaces, constantly adapting and mutating into new forms and textures. Vinyl advertising aptly embodies our image-saturated culture: a thin plastic film that gloms onto and reinscribes virtually any surface it touches. While some would argue that these enormous synthetic images blight the landscape, turning free surfaces and structures into vehicles of consumerist indoctrination, artist Kelly Jazvac brings a more nuanced view to the material. For her installation *Upgrade* (2007–2008) at the Toronto Sculpture Garden, for example, she applied printed vinyl to a humble Pontiac Sunfire to transform it—at least to a casual observer—into a Porsche 911, grafting ideas of camouflage and mimicry, competition and evolution from the realm of biology to twenty-first-century capitalism and the hunger for faster, sexier, better.

Jazvac is interested in surfaces and what they communicate, as well as the strange materiality of this vinyl substance when its purpose is thwarted. In most of Jazvac's work, vinyl loses its way—as well as its lustre—like a skin that has been shed. It lies crumpled on the floor or sleepily folded over itself against the wall, packed up and ready for landfill. Removed from a surface and discarded or hung up, the vinyl loses its intended function of selling fantasies through idealized colour images and literally turns in on itself, becoming introverted and introspective.



It seems to wallow in doubt, anxiety and even shame. Whatever this shiny plastic once signified is obscured, the material now mute. Reduced to a colourful plastic mass, no longer holding the promise of consumerist dreams, it haunts us with spectres of waste and desire.

If advertising vinyl is a familiar vestment for the contemporary city, its presence is unexpected in nature, which we typically aspire to protect from such indignities. Jazvac's exhibition for Oakville Galleries, *PARK*, takes as its point of departure the well-loved and manicured grounds of Gairloch Gardens, the Galleries' outpost on Lake Ontario. *PARK* playfully juxtaposes the shiny artificiality of the discarded vinyl with the Elysian vistas and pastoral atmosphere of the gardens. If we are indeed entering the Anthropocene—an epoch in which human activity has irrevocably shaped Earth's

Kelly Jazvac, *Found Object (PARK)*, 2013. Salvaged adhesive vinyl, wood, rope, and thread.
Courtesy of the artist; Diaz Contemporary, Toronto and Louis B. James, New York.
Photo: Dave Kemp.



ecosystems—then we can no longer reduce ideas of artificial and natural to a simple compare-and-contrast dichotomy. Instead, Jazvac's work grapples with urgent questions of perception (how we see) and value (what we make of what we see) regarding the accumulation of images and goods both in one's personal environment and within a global ecology. Her practice is driven by the international circulation of goods under globalization and of digital images—in all manifestations—in the age of the internet. She pursues the variegated mistranslations that occur as information takes different forms, such as when the binary code of a .jpg file becomes a printed image, or when that image (no longer useful) becomes a sculptural object, open to new meanings and affective investments.

In June of this year, for example, Jazvac travelled to Kamilo Beach, Hawaii, where she worked with geologist Patricia Corcoran, who has

Kelly Jazvac, *Fungible*, 2012. Salvaged adhesive vinyl, thread, adhesive, aluminum, and Velcro. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Dave Kemp.



proposed Plastiglomerate as a new category of rock formation. As the name suggests, Plastiglomerate results from the fusion of burned plastics with natural elements; it contains volcanic rock, coral and sand. A selection of these strangely beautiful Plastiglomerate rocks is on view in *PARK*.

The critic Boris Groys describes how an image

is transformed by different program languages, different software, different framings on the screen, different placement in an installation space, and so on. All this time, are we dealing with the same [image]? Is it the same copy of the same copy of the same original? The topology of today's networks of communication, generation, translation, and distribution of images is extremely heterogeneous. The images are constantly transformed, rewritten,

Kelly Jazvac, detail of *Plastiglomerate and Plastic Samples*, 2013. Conglomerate rocks gathered on Kamilo Beach, Hawaii, and ceramic stands. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



*reedited, and reprogrammed as they circulate through these networks—and with each step they are visually altered.*¹

Jazvac’s work emerges at the intersection of copy and original, past and future, and reflects the rapid changeability of these contexts and positions.

At the heart of *PARK* is a new wallpaper installation (*Park*, 2013) that enlarges an image produced during a commercial photo shoot that the artist undertook in Gairloch Gardens early in summer 2013. In preparation for the shoot, Jazvac produced coloured vinyl forms—“blobs,” as she calls them—that in some way channelled aspects of Gairloch’s highly designed and meticulously cultivated landscape. She then used a diverse array of the forms as “floats” on the surface of one of the ponds. Photographing the floating blobs, as well as their reflections in the murky brown water—which ripples in a very similar way to Jazvac’s vinyl pieces—she produced source

Kelly Jazvac, detail of *Park*, 2013. Printed wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist; Diaz Contemporary, Toronto and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



images for the indoor wallpaper installation. Not expecting to see strokes of artificial plastic colour rupturing the placid pond, we read the sculptural forms instead as matter out of place.² If parks are typically represented through images that offer idyllic, carefully staged proximity to the natural world, Jazvac is interested in disturbing the manicured facade with the “interference” of the humanmade, using an obvious artifice to reflect on a more subtle one. Staging a large-scale photo shoot in Gairloch Gardens, which required the same municipal permit that hundreds of brides fill out for their wedding pictures in the gardens each summer, Jazvac invested much time and energy to stage this scene. While the handmade is often looked to for respite from the deceptions of the virtual, Jazvac perversely and absurdly devotes her energies to a moment of exposed fakery.

Installation view of *Kelly Jazvac: PARK with Machines for Taming, 2012; Puff (paper version), 2011; and Salp, 2012*. Salvaged adhesive vinyl, adhesive and thumbtacks; printed wallpaper; and salvaged adhesive vinyl, steel and chip clips. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



The resulting installation is an uncanny doubling of the gardens, one that re-frames our view of them and draws attention to how the site is constructed and animated by the labours of landscapers and dog-walkers, high school grads and tourists.

Oakville Galleries at Gairloch Gardens has four gallery spaces, each equipped with window blinds that modulate the natural light and allow tightly controlled illumination of exhibitions. In taking over the space, Jazvac has thrown open all the blinds to create a witty visual interplay between the shapes and colours in the gardens and those on view in her artworks. These include not only the wallpaper installation but also a selection of recent stand-alone sculptural works and an intricate multi-part installation that draws on the still-mucky props employed in the

Kelly Jazvac, detail of *Park*, 2013. Printed wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist; Diaz Contemporary, Toronto and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Dave Kemp.



photo shoot (*MYA [Single Formmm]*, 2013). Whether natural or artificial, all the elements in Jazvac's project are bound up in an economy of fantasy and projection; the beautiful views onto the gardens from the galleries reveal the vista as a kind of advertisement. What is for sale is partly a specific lifestyle of leisure and contemplation permitted by the prosperity of Oakville, an affluent commuter suburb on the lakeshore west of Toronto.

Jazvac's dogged recycling of advertising vinyl reflects on the all-pervasive phenomenon of planned obsolescence, which originated as a postwar practice, where manufacturers fabricated products with a limited lifespan—owing to flimsy materials but also to ephemeral fashion trends—forcing the consumer to buy new versions of the same product again and again. In our era the lifespans of consumer goods

Kelly Jazvac, *MYA (Single Formmm)*, 2013. Salvaged adhesive vinyl, plastic, wood, foam, bamboo, and adhesive. Courtesy of the artist; Diaz Contemporary, Toronto and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



are determined by algorithms of expectation and desire—controlled by marketing departments—that are far more potent than the actual physical integrity of the products. The forces of spin have crafted a world in which value is unmoored from physical fact. Reflecting on the present, when the signs and symbols that we traffic in every day seem disconnected from tangible reality, artists like Jazvac seek to reacquaint us with images and, just as importantly, the materials they take shape in. In the process, she subverts how they typically function and gain meaning, both personally and collectively. The artist Iman Issa articulates this practice:

Could it be that, even when an image of a polar bear has replaced that of a fox, a renewed belief in forms can still be found in the unlikeliest of places? Is it not precisely here that a statue of a lion does indeed manage to recall

Installation view of *Kelly Jazvac: PARK with Untitled (Bird Video)*, 2008. Video, 3 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.



*a simple lion, and a flag no longer references ideas and symbols, but only its colors and fabric? Could it be that as the shapes, colors, and sounds of the statue, political poster, historical tale, and national anthem become the property of no one, they could similarly become the property of everyone?*³

By rendering symbolically loaded artifacts from capitalist media into oddly pleasurable “dumb” blobs — mystifying image glitches and colourful, shiny sculptures — Jazvac short-circuits the paths by which meaning and value are constructed in a consumer society. Challenging the top-down process designed to position us as consumers needing to fill a void, she pushes us to look anew — with relish and a critical mind — at how images and objects can perform.

Installation view of *Kelly Jazvac: PARK with Purple*, 2012. Salvaged adhesive vinyl and steel. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James, New York. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.





Previous page: Installation view of *Kelly Jazvac: PARK* with found wallpaper.

Kelly Jazvac, *Untitled (Dog Video)*, 2013. HD video, 3 minutes. Courtesy of the artist; Diaz Contemporary, Toronto and Louis B. James, New York.

Photos: Toni Hafkenscheid.

This electronic publication was produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Kelly Jazvac: PARK* curated by Jon Davies, Associate Curator, and presented at Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens from 15 September to 17 November 2013.

ESSAY NOTES

¹ Boris Groys, "The Politics of Installation," *e-flux journal* 2 (January 2009). Available at www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-installation/ (last accessed June 11, 2013).

² "Matter out of place" is British anthropologist Mary Douglas's definition of dirt from her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002 (1966), p. 44. ³ Iman Issa, "When Fox Becomes Polar Bear," *The Ungovernables: 2012 New Museum Triennial*. New York: Skira Rizzoli Publishing, 2012, p. 47.

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