

Erica Baum and Barb Choit

RAWSON PROJECTS

221 Madison Street

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Have you experienced inanimate surveillance—a shoe, a handbag sitting on a table, staring at you with a vaguely smug, unanswerable formalism? I have. Erica Baum and Barb Choit have, and with this exhibition they venture to reciprocate the gaze, in photographs whose deadpan reaches the under-sung, confident beauty that is true blandness.

Refreshingly, the premise of the show (part of a series by the gallery) is to display material that inspires the artists' current output proper. (Both Vancouver-based Choit and New York's Baum are better known for work adapting the sensibilities of Concrete poetry to photography and sculpture.) Their offerings, mostly the stuff of thrift stores, documented in different banal situations, give you the feeling that none is trying too hard to be art, some perhaps not trying at all. At center of the gallery, across from a single specimen of Baum's formal oeuvre (*Furnish*, from her "Naked Eye" series, 2015), is a row of her squarely shot documents of purses sitting on blue tissue paper—*Clutch*, *Strap*, *Pocketbook* (all 1996/2015), evoking forerunners of eBay portraiture. The shoes, more purposefully artful with a comic touch of mall-studio grace, are Choit's: *Shoe #1*, *Shoe #2*, *Shoe Diptych #1*, *Shoe Diptych #2* (all 2015). . . .

Uniting these two groups of works that feel as if they have just woken from a nap, feline in their not caring what you think of them, it is the thrifted-fake-flower arrangement *Centerpiece* (2015) that most demands attention in person. Sanctified in its absurdity by the artists' crucial decision to leave all the price stickers on, this altar to the plastic ornaments makes for a satisfying climax in the curatorial conceit itself: the praise of things that laugh at monumentalism.



Erica Baum, *Strap (Purse)*, 1996-2015, archival pigment print, 10 x 15".

— Abraham Adams