

VISUAL ART

Things Won't Love You Back

On Amber Eve Anderson's "Something Worth Doing" at Hamiltonian Gallery

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For over two years now, Americans have been spending more time at home with our thoughts and our things. According to census data, e-commerce increased by 43 percent in 2020 alone. If you live like me, you're surrounded by piles of discarded delivery boxes and objects that you hope will make you feel a little bit more at home in your home. But maybe you also have an eking suspicion that these objects are just the empty residue of consumer culture's stranglehold over your emotional shopping habits.

These twinned realities came back to me as I perused the pastel sculptures and prints on display in *Something Worth Doing*, Amber Eve Anderson's second and final solo show as part

of her fellowship at Hamiltonian Gallery. The primarily conceptual show includes an installation of assemblages of objects found and bought, digital prints, monoprints, and framed text. Collectively, they play with the viewer's relationship to things as it is framed and mediated through memory.



Anderson is adept at a kind of wistful yet cutting humor. The walls of Hamiltonian are lined with delicate, pastel and earth-toned monoprints of cardboard boxes. The floors are dotted with three rafts of similarly soft-hued foam mattress toppers stacked with assemblages of online purchases and inherited things. The mattress toppers themselves have gentle folding grooves that interplay neatly with careful, often color-coded arrangements of sweatshirts, vials of confetti, plastic bags, scented candles, candy-colored massage tools, peach paint swatches, and even a little tin of Old Bay. The effect is one of nostalgia—through things that, though stripped of their function, leave an impression of gentleness and comfort; everyday objects as if through a

soft-focus lens. These arrangements are subtle and pleasing, though on closer inspection, starkly funny.

The assemblages are accompanied by framed text of anonymous online product reviews which veer into the whimsical and personal. One such piece, a review of “Pine Tree Wrapping Paper,” ends fittingly, “If you’re like me, you may even save it after it’s been used for the associations it conjures. If only it were scented.” Indeed, each of the raft sculptures is part of the same work as one of the wall texts, all with their own bittersweet, ironic titles, drawn from the accompanying text. The aforementioned piece, for example, is called “If Only It Were Scented,” while the other two have equally poetic titles: “Wishing for Cottonwoods” and “Occasions for Something Useless.”





The monoprints have a tactile quality to them as well, the colored residue of cardboard on paper: the forgotten, throw-away thing leaving its mark. You want to take the whole show in with all of your senses—not just looking but breathing and touching, like the wrapping paper reviewer's wish: "if only it were scented." But all the while you're acutely aware that Anderson is winking at you impishly. Even the titles of the monoprints—"Amazon," "Chewy," and "Walmart," for example—make it evident that this is art for tricksters.



The twin themes of consumerism and memory wind their way through Anderson's larger body of work, and her second solo show at Hamiltonian finally brings the two together, although perhaps uneasily. Almost saccharine assemblages of doilies and dried flowers sit, for example, next to a half-opened cardboard delivery box, with enough text haphazardly taped over to read simply, "Ass / Handle with Care." The exhibition also includes two small (12 x 9-inch) digital prints of photo collages of package deliveries on doorsteps, entitled "Ordered" and "Fulfilled." The question here is in the second title: are we really fulfilled?

In her previous solo show as part of her Hamiltonian fellowship, *This is Who I Am Now*, Anderson addressed online marketing head-on, the work itself an archive of every Instagram ad she viewed over the course of a week. The images, largely of household goods, amounted to what Anderson describes in her artist's statement as "a self-portrait through the lens of targeted advertising." These were accompanied by AI-generated poetry from ad copy and a screen recording of a promotional video about Google's data storage methods and Anderson's own internet searches as "a way to

critique what is unknown when one is online.” In *Something Worth Doing*, her taunt is more subtle: she is asking the viewer to consider their emotional relationship to objects. How are we complicit in our own exploitation? What do our memories mean when coded through the filter of algorithmic marketing?

Anderson doesn't offer easy answers to these questions. Instead, she invites us to examine our own desires and how they are mediated through capitalism's exploitation of our very real, very somatic memories: soft foam, delicate feathering, muted tones, a photograph of the ocean, your grandmother's teacup, a hemp bracelet.





The show is on view at Hamiltonian
Gallery through June 25.

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Images courtesy of Hamiltonian
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