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### Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

We Got Here Under False Pretenses

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Taylor Chapin

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Professor Amy Adler  
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2022

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University of California San Diego

2022

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for all their help and guidance over these past three years. I am incredibly grateful for their continued insight and support in developing this body of work and its conceptual framework. I would also like to thank my family and my partner for their consistent love and encouragement in helping me to pursue what I love to do. I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the amazing teachers and mentors I've had over the years who have helped me to develop my voice and practice as an artist. Finally, I'd like to thank my cohort. Our commitment to creating a supportive and uplifting space for one another has been a much needed grounding space during this tenure. Without all of these communities, I would not be where I am today, and for that, I am immensely grateful.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

We Got Here Under False Pretenses

by

Taylor Chapin

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Monique Van Genderen, Chair

This paper explores the conceptual framework for the body of work featured in the thesis exhibition, *We Got Here Under False Pretenses*. It explores how the structures of the neoliberal free market manipulate the superficial construction of value under the constructs of branding and advertising. Framed through an investigation of the history of pattern, the work is situated within the context of capitalist cultural production as a product that is both critical and complicit with the current value structure.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

This body of work examines advertising, branding, superficiality, and the construction of value under the umbrella of American neoliberal capitalism. My work questions our mindless drive toward industrialized American consumerism, the contents of which fill and fetishize our interior spaces. I drape, wrap, and cover bodies and objects with various patterned fabrics to transform once recognizable forms into abstracted shapes, semi-composed inklings of what lies underneath. The additive layer of multiple brightly colored, patterned facades highlights the addictive structure of over-stimulation as a gesture towards the American tendency to champion superficial accumulation. It is this illusory quality of the veneer, complete with implied volume and depth, that bemuses and betrays the two dimensional space of the stretched canvas as the painted surface becomes an additional layer of the facade.

The obscuring of the form through covering creates multi-layered, illusory facades. Bodies and consumer goods are ensconced in pattern and color, emphasizing their inherent banality while simultaneously enshrining and transforming their visual structures of identification as a way of critiquing the perception of value. By continuing to warp value standards, some of the wrapped objects contain nothing other than stuffing. Through this extension of a deceit, the viewer is unable to know which covered objects might have commercial or societal value. They are left to merely guess blindly at what is real or not real and valuable or valueless. The allure of what lies underneath prompts intrinsic curiosity and desire purely based on the denial of access to the interiority. The possibility of potential value piques the senses through a cyclical structure of consumption because American society infers that one can never have enough. The quality of game-ifying what coverings do and do not hold value underneath their surface further emphasizes the push to distract the public through smoke and



mirrors, displays of achievement, and token success stories, as a ruse to maintain the status quo where financial and social capital remains out of reach for most Americans.

Bodies are wrapped in skin tight, patterned sheaths. The unique personhood of the fully covered figure transgresses into pattern and form, becoming an opaque aperture that prompts uncanny sensations. The distinctive features that construct human individuation are denied. In a society where people capitalize purely based on recognition and self-branding, the individuals represented in the work cannot gain or lose societal value without their unique signifiers of identification. The indiscernible identity explored in the paintings is antithetical to the American mantra of championing individualism.

The objectified body, so prominent in American advertising, is extracted as a means of manipulation through a sanitized (and very likely photoshopped) flattening of reality. The advertised body is so far removed from the lived bodily experience of the average American that it becomes its own commodified form while simultaneously pushing consumption of whatever goods that it's peddling, both literally and through a proposed value system of extreme idealization. This type of larger-than-life body is used to sell products and set an aspirational precedent - for both how the physical body should look and what we should wear, eat, drink, etc.. The wrapping of the body in this large-scale, painting format seeks to critique the predation of the advertised body by highlighting it as a manufactured empty vessel used to divert the attention of the American consumer. This intentionally drains the consumer of their mental, physical, and financial resources as they strive unsuccessfully towards the set aspirational precedent.

Paradoxically, it is a reaction against the typical advertised body by using anonymity as a nudge toward a collective, communal identity where the body is not exploited through classification and predetermined outcomes within a strict structure based on class, gender, and

race. In this way, it represents the fantasy of the liberated individual, allowed to experience true freedom. It challenges, by way of non-standard anonymity, the construct of identity tied to binding socio-economic markers: social security number, bank loan, mortgage payment, personal data, etc... Within this fantasy represented in the paintings, the incognito individual represented is transported to an alternate universe where in they can transverse fluidly in a psychedelic infinity of patterned space, free from the confines of the insurmountable list of responsibilities equated with being a productive and valued member of society.

Rooted in advertising, I seek to decontextualize the original advertising function of packaged, manufactured goods to highlight the pervasiveness of advertising as social and cultural signifiers by stripping the objects of their imbued signification as only outline and form is revealed. These consumer goods such as alcohol, candy, cookies, and various cheap home decor items are covered in fabric as a way of hiding their ability to be identified as a critique of branding and brand status. In this way, data can only be collected if data is revealed. I am denying the reveal as a commentary on the predatory practices often used by advertisers disallowing the collection of information from the painted surface other than subtle hints of shape and form. In this way, the paintings seek to deny the pervasive consumer algorithm. Through lack of a reveal, information of who and what is being depicted cannot be mined and cataloged because it cannot be objectively identified. This subverts the model of monetized data collection as one of the preeminent revenue streams for countless corporate behemoths. This form of 'tricking' the algorithm lies in opposition to itself as the paintings themselves become the objects of recognition and potentially monetized value. It is within this almost inescapable loop that the slippage lies. The work begins to embody the structure that it is critiquing and so becomes amusingly self-aware.

The obscuring of form through fabric seeks to represent the guise of the free market. The fabric can only temporarily mask the empty slogans, over-processed products, and objectified bodies that are being pushed on society as a means of deceptive distraction. The body also becomes a symbol of consumption. The themes addressed through the packaged products directly link to bodily consumption. The body is used in advertising as a way of selling products and setting perceived ideals. The advertised body is flattened and disembodied. The covering of the body in this painted format seeks to critique the predation of the advertised body as another empty vessel used to divert the attention of the American consumer. The allure of the painted surface concurrently attracts and repels through saturated colors, vivid patterning, and unexpected fabric pairings, bordering on bad taste, as it relates to the complicated interdependency of the neoliberal free market and the people living under it, evoking the idea “can’t live with it, can’t live without it”. The series questions what it means to consume and how consumption is monetized through an exploration of intentional ambiguity, to varying degrees, methodically deployed through painterly reproduction and repetition. The subliminal push to misdirect extends as the paintings themselves never fully reveal what is being covered, an ornately wrapped empty box, as a representation of the deceitful and inflated market values synonymous with current American culture.

## BACKGROUND

I grew up within a still life. My mother is a collector of everything from everywhere. She has been an untethered traveler of the world since she was in high school - collecting material memories over the decades. Still in possession of tapestries from the swap meets set up in the farm fields of Carlsbad where she grew up in the 1960 and 70s. More recently adding hand painted, ornately-decorated folding glass and metal screens from her trips to India and folk art made out of thousands of single grains of straw painted to depict pastoral scenes from artisans in Chiapas. This only begins to elucidate the contents of her home.

The house I grew up in is almost 100 years old. Its wooden exterior opens to an interior space of countless vignettes. Every surface, table, wall, mantle is thoughtfully covered in collections from her past, present, and future. Altars to art, shrines to pattern, and menageries of style clash in a perfectly inexplicable way where every piece feels at home amidst a smattering of artfully curated moments. The TV room for example - a velvet, gold couch sits atop zebra print carpeting with a pink-patterned tufted rug in between. A chandelier made out of yellow, red, and blue wooden beads hangs from the middle of the wood-paneled room. Framed family photos perch to the side of the couch upon built-in shelving. Art I made when I was a kid is hung amongst a collection of shoe figurines and art deco objects. Somewhere between all of this is a TV and a remote, which often requires a bit of searching. While there is so much to admire, observe, and be a part of while inside, the house never feels pristine or precarious to me. It feels lived-in and lived-through. There's dust on some of the surfaces. There's usually one of her two cats meticulously walking through a mine-field of delicate objects. The space feels warm and filled with personality and love - love equally for the nurturing space of home and for the expansivity of the world outside.

This is the visual environment I grew up in. I became perfectly accustomed to our home being a visual performance of disparate juxtapositions, unlikely aesthetic combinations, and elaborate detail. I find myself now in my own space, away from where I grew up, decorating in a similar way. A lot of the objects from my family home have been passed down to me as my mom is always in need of creating more space to make room for the next addition to her coveted collection. A space lovingly filled to the brim with objects and memories from all times in life, even lives that weren't my own, is a space where I feel comfortable and at home.

## PATTERNING

Patterning creates reconstructed fields of vision. Our world is made of elaborate schemas and systems that can all be boiled down to pattern. Patterning is the road map by which we make sense of any given form. Patterned forms come together and just as quickly fall apart. Fabric patterning is a complex system of logical systems printed, repeated, and re-repeated until it becomes a meditative expanse of design. I am drawn to the pattern because of its ability to speak so loudly while omitting so blatantly. The way a pattern is constructed gives away so much information - gives us a beat, a rhythm, a trend, a color palette, a design aesthetic, but in its ability to take center stage, it allows that which it is covering to hide behind its expansive and immersive world of repeating shapes and colors. Every pattern has a story, a history, a way of being in the world at different points in time and presenting in different ways.

Consider paisley. Paisley originated in the Middle East during the 16th and 17th centuries, subsequently gaining popularity in the west in the 18th and 19th century. Kashmir shawls from India were introduced to Scotland and England by way of the British East India Company, one of Britain's early endeavors leading to its colonial presence in India. Western Europe couldn't get enough of this eastern import. The once highly expensive to produce wool and silk Kashmir shawl reserved solely for eastern royalty became watered-down and mass-produced in western Europe due to the technological innovations and introduction of cheaper materials. Paisley shawls began to be manufactured at an industrial rate, allowing them to become available to middle class Europeans. By the late 19th century, England had almost completely co-opted the production and design of various paisley prints, marketing primarily to women until the design fell out of fashion (Stewart 95-99).

Making a voracious comeback in the 1960s in the United States, paisley came back in full force when American popular culture began to fetishize eastern culture and design. Paisley became synonymous with the psychedelic, anti-war culture of the time as many popular rock and roll bands incorporated paisley into their dress and design aesthetic, even Fender came out with a Telecaster covered in paisley. Prince paid tribute to the rock and roll history associated with paisley when he created his label Paisley Park Records in 1985. During the 1970s, paisley took a more practical application as blue collar workers wore paisley bandanas to keep dust out of their mouths and noses. Even then, this was not paisley's first appearance in the United States. George Washington wore a paisley bandana as a scarf during the late 1700s. Soldiers during World Wars I and II donned paisley bandanas with corresponding military and political indicators. Paisley bandanas are also concurrently symbols of the boy scouts, gang affiliations, and gay cruising codes (Stewart 95-99). Today the bandana takes on yet another meaning as its utility as a face covering to mitigate the spread of viral disease during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020. All of various facets of people and culture over hundreds of years are using the same patterning, in a variety of interactions and colors, to symbolize such vastly different ideologies and symbolic connotations.

The piece, *Rest Assured, You Are in Good Hands*, depicts a figure covered from head to toe in pink camouflage, lying across a vast paisley background. The vastness of the paisley background done in one-point perspective creates an undulating psychedelic space. Highly detailed, methodic repetition of the pattern highlights the structural make-up of the paisley print. Cast atop the teal, cobalt, maroon palette of the paisley lies a reclining figure, stretched to either edge of the frame, covered entirely in pink camouflage. These patterns together contain many possible narratives. The paisley may take on themes reminiscent of the 60s anti-war movement

as it relates to the camouflaged figure. The camouflage could also relate to this narrative as camouflage was worn subversively as a push for peace during the Vietnam Protest. The camouflage could also refer to the pop art movement as it was a print used often by iconic pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Alain Jacquet, Marilyn Lysohir, David Bower, and Adelle Lutz exploring ideas of "...the obliteration of self in society, protest against totalitarianism, and the alienation of mass media" (Stewart 115). The positioning of the camouflaged figure could also be traced to the art historical canon of the reclining female nude, or as a nod to sentiments expressed by Oscar Wilde, "Camouflage's plain face masks a very modern awareness that the visible world is construction, contingent, shaped in ways we can barely guess at" (Stewart 116). The mutable meanings of these prints independently, and in conjunction with one another, play into the idea of this unstable narrative, constantly shifting, ever elusive.

Many of the other patterns featured in this body of work demonstrate similar forms of mutability. Many designs take on various forms of the square. Squares, checks, and grids have come to make up so many different forms of patterning that come to be deployed in countless types of spaces, not limited to fabric. The square begins as a 'technical, uniform, a symbol of methodical thought' (Hampshire and Stephenson 006-007). Squares take up a vast space in the world of patterning from houndstooth to gingham to plaid. They have come to take on more literal indicators as signifiers of identity including uniforms and flags. The neutrality of the square has allowed it to be used as a space for board games and puzzles as well as taking on the digital space of pixelation and embodying the organizational structure of graph paper or the periodic table. Squares, checks, and grids are structures intrinsic to the form and functioning of many objects and processes.



Many forms of the square pop up throughout art history and reflect different schools of thought of given movements such as the transition towards modernism. “The square is a tool of abstraction, employed by Braque and Picasso during the Cubist period to emphasize the form and volume of their subjects. From Mackintosh to Mondrian, the Modernists rejected the romanticism and ornament of the 19th century in favor of the ‘form follow function’ logic of the square, the grid, and the cube, For them, squares and right angles came to represent a rejection of applied pattern and adornment in preference for rational mindedness, functionality, and human achievement” (Hampshire and Stephenson 006-007). Contrary to their association with orderliness and organization, squares are used counterintuitively to create optical effects and illusions such as the Hermann grid illusion, dazzle camouflage, and false perspectives (Hampshire and Stephenson 166-167). This betrayal of their rational order shows the square’s potential for subversion in a myriad of ways.

In the pieces, *Thank You for Joining Us Today* and *Still Life with Charles Shaw*, the square is on full display. The checkered print stretched across the body, featured in both of the paintings, creates a strange optical space. The orderliness of the check is distorted as its grid is pushed and pulled in various ways to cover the soft, curving form of the figure. The concurrent order and disorder embodied by the square, speaks to the ideas present in the work. The checkered pattern can refer to the precarious structure our current system is balancing on. It can speak to the perceived order and rationale of the free market when the market is so clearly distorted by a vastly out of balance system. The check is also a pattern for game boards and entertainment. As such, the check could represent the gamification present within our system where one has to play the system or play-into the system in order to be accepted as a member of society wherein one’s own body is often exploited as a form of entertainment or utility. In *Still*

*Life with Charles Shaw*, the checkered arm of a figure is reaching into the frame towards a wine bottle covered in black and white zig zags akin to a dazzle camouflage design. The manufactured value of a given object is on full display in the wine market. A bottle of wine's market value seems to work primarily as a signifier of conspicuous consumption. However, when the bottle is covered, it could just as well be a bottle of Rothschild as well as it could be a bottle of Two Buck Chuck. The hand caressing the bottle begins to touch on the concurrent fetishization and dissonance of such relationships, and the patterns at play begin to further elucidate this dichotomy.

Gingham embodies the feel of the homemade and the domestic. The first checked version of the print was produced in Manchester, England during the 18th century. Eventually arriving in the United States and gaining huge popularity stateside, manufacturing of the gingham textile made up a huge portion of the United States' Southern economy until the mid 20th century. A print unique in having no 'right or wrong side' due to the even spacing of coloring in warp and weft, it "shares qualities with the 'hygienic' stripe, in that it shows and hides dirt in equal measures" (Hampshire and Stephenson 026-027). A staple pattern of American quilting, patriotism, barbecuing, and square dancing, gingham represents the homemaker quality from the early western settlers to the 1950s housewife.

Harlequin print is a repeating pattern of contrasting diamonds or elongated squares standing on end. The pattern derives its name from the character of the Harlequin known to be lewd and deceitful while still managing to be likable with their chief goal to create confusion. Versions of this character are found in medieval France, Italian Commedia dell'Arte, and 18th century England. This festive, varied pattern popped up in Vaudeville in the 1940s, was donned by Freddy Mercury during performances in the 1970s, and has been used in collections by

fashion designers such as Vivienne Westwood in the 1980s and Oscar de la Renta in the early 2000s (Hampshire and Stephenson 056).

The stripe is another pattern with an intricate history of subversion and transgression. In medieval Europe, the striped cloth represented outcasts of many kinds from heretic figures to prisoners to prostitutes, to name only a few. During this time, those on the edges of society were required to wear at least one piece of striped clothing as a way of signaling to society that they deviated from 'normal' societal expectation so as to not be confused with 'respectable' citizens. Spots were another pattern of deviation of the time connotated with disorder, confusion, and degeneration. Spots were associated with leprosy and disease, both of which resulted in being banned from the social order.

As society rose out of the medieval ages the stripe began to broaden its association of meanings and was no longer considered entirely pejorative. In high European society, striped clothing began to designate a new type of social hierarchy as household staff of wealthy and royal families began to wear striped uniforms. Striped military uniforms and striped flags also began to be prominently circulated. During the American revolution, stripes acquired political and ideological status and wearing or donning the American flag showed support of the revolution. Around the same time, stripes also became synonymous with the French revolution. "To dress oneself in stripes is not only to offer proof of public spirit, but also to display one's adherence to certain values important to the latest ideological trend" (Pastoureau 51). Stripes became strong signifiers of political and social values.

As society shifted away from protestant moral code towards capitalist ethics and bourgeois values, stripes began to be a mainstay in western fashion, shedding much, but not all,

of their associations with deviancy. Stripes incorporated into bathing wear began to make the stripe synonymous with leisure culture. Also seen as a practical pattern, the frenzy of the lined pattern did well at concealing spots, making it ideal for children's wear. The stripe towed a symbolic line that few other fabrics did, allowing it to have an almost impossible broad range of social and cultural connotations. "...the boundary separating the good stripe from the bad stripe is often vague. On the one side, the sailor, the bather, the athlete, the clown, the child, on the other, the madman, the executioner, the prisoner, the criminal. Between the two, a whole range of characters who partake of both worlds and who have in common being located on the margins of society" (Pastoureau 80-81). Stripes manage particularly well to tow their own line, always landing somewhere in the unseen gray area.

The stripe is particularly keen at resisting enclosure. It creates its own form of disorder. The stripe shows and hides simultaneously. It is the figure and the substance, both finite and infinite, part and whole. Such opposition wholly contained creates a surface that appears unconfined, bordering on indistinguishability. "The pure stripe no longer stops the eye. It is too effervescent to do that. It clarifies and obscures the view, disturbs the mind, confuses the senses" (Pastoureau 91) The stripe lives in the in-between space directly created by its patterning. In its structure, the positive space can become the negative space and vice versa, creating an invigorating conundrum of obfuscation. The stripe, and all its various iterations, reiterates the theme of the work wherein no one symbolic significance is correct or incorrect. The mutability resists a didactic urge to categorize and allows for the facade to become a nuanced mirror for structural critique.

The stripe, in both form and function, has become a pervasive structure for artists to access as seen with the French conceptual artist Daniel Buren's ubiquitous use of the stripe.

Rooted in an institutional critique, Buren's work entangles and detangles the complex relationship between art and the structures within which art is framed. Beginning in the 1960's, "Buren reduced the visual elements in his work to the repetition of the simple 8.7-cm.wide stripe motif, a standard pattern for the awnings of bars and cafes in Europe" (Woodruff 92). Taking from his environment, the work began to take shape in the margins of everyday spaces, working in a fluctuating state between visibility and invisibility. Working in-situ, Buren's stripes highlight the structural and ideological framework of both public and institutional spaces. An otherwise commonplace pattern, Buren's signature stripes were used subversively as critical tools to address how space is used, perceived, and appropriated.

The use of screen-printed, patterned wallpaper in my exhibition elaborates as an additional layer of the cover-up while also propagating a form of institutional critique. The all over draped black and white zig-zagged pattern of the wallpaper transforms the gallery space, creating an illusory depth on top of a flat, impermeable space. It acts as an additional layer of over-stimulating adornment, repurposing yet another facade further addressing the surface as a shifting space of opacity/transparency. Covering the gallery wall subverts the categorical space of the white cube. The gallery wall as a space that is usually meant to fade away, instead is brought directly into the foreground, camouflaging the paintings hung on top instead of singling them out. The traditional white wall explicitly addresses the paintings as market objects where the work is meant to stand out as a commodity object; wherein this case, the paintings are competing with the wallpaper for viewers' attention, playing with the idea of what is meant to be on display.

Patterns' ability to shift meaning and significance through time and space represent the fluid nature of the signifier. No object is ever bound to being only one thing. Its meaning is open

for interpretation in the same way a pattern can be used to connote so many different things. The covered bodies and objects resist singular classification as it is against the nature of the pattern(s) to ever only mean one thing. While we strive to organize and glean meaning, didactic symbolism is elusive. This elusiveness is key to acknowledging the farce that is strict systems of value and identification. Value is always shifting as are the structures that signify value. The pattern and pattern pairings incite confusion and disorder while also adding new layers of meaning and/or ambiguity to surface and form.

## PACKAGE

Package takes the form of either a noun or a verb. As a noun it refers to 1. an object or group of objects wrapped in paper or plastic, or packed in a box or 2. a set of proposals or terms offered or agreed as a whole. As a verb it means 1. put into a box or wrapping, especially for sale or 2. present (someone or something) in a particular way, especially to make them more attractive. Our current society is obsessed with packaging. Our whole world is so far removed from nature and almost entirely ensconced in some form of packaging. We are even encouraged to package ourselves as unique individuals with distinct characteristics that would appeal to a broad swath of society. Everything and everyone is packaged. It is the packaging that creates the appeal. The package constructs and propagates the desire. Packaging pushes accumulation while, unsurprisingly, creating extreme amounts of waste. Products are packaged in multiple layers of covering as a way of signaling value, novelty, and labor. Once the packaging is removed, the object will eventually be consumed, used up, or follow a certain life expectancy perpetuating the cycle of buying new packages. The package, whether physical or referential, is a facade that attempts to signal certain values or give off social signifiers pertaining to class and wealth. Without this structure, the underpinnings of our system of manufacturing, production, and marketability would no longer be able to exist in its current form.

## MASQUERADE

To mask is to intentionally change identity. It is a presentation of falseness. To pretend to be something else or someone else indulges itself in the desire to escape the known pretenses of the expectations associated with the original form of existence. A masquerade is a performance that can be either public or private. We play pretend well into adulthood whether it is a conscious choice or not. Masking is a barrier, a physical or metaphorical facade of protection against revealing a truthful form. The performance of the mask initiates a stage that is set to intentionally deceive. The lust of the reveal is only present in the imagined desire projected onto the masked. The play is in the fantasy. There is an anxiety and avoidance so as to protect from being let down. We think we want the full reveal, but perhaps we do not. Maybe that is partially why we continue to play in the capitalists playground masquerading as docile, contributing members of society because to take the mask off would unearth the deep and unending fears of facing the mortality of both ourselves and our current structure. The bodies and objects remain in full masquerade as an acknowledgement of the current system wherein the solutions to the deep structural problem remain unanswered. They are dressed in concurrent critique and complicity, opting to partake just one more time before taking off their masks.



## DRAPE

To drape something is to lay a fabric or flexible material over a given object or surface and let it take the loose form of what's below. Drapery softly caresses the shape of the other. The drape becomes an abstracted shape, semi-composed inklings of what lies underneath. It is this illusory quality of implied volume and depth that bemuses and betrays the two-dimensional space of the stretched canvas. Painted drapery is in opposing motion to the stretching of canvas. Stretched canvas is taut and smooth; a fold or a crease in a traditionally stretched canvas would read as an error of novice craftsmanship. In a way, the stretched canvas gives an indication of the form of the stretcher bar it tightly folds over, tension evenly spread across the surface. A drape is limp, relaxed, and uneven. The formations of drape and stretch push and pull in opposition to each other. Fabric is functioning as both an illusory painted representation and as the literal physicality of the surface on which the illusion performs. Rigidity and ease play together as a furthering of the countless dichotomies that lay bare in the cracked structure of the modern American consumer market. Just as the stretched drape is a non-sequitur so might the modern foundation of the free market wherein we are told to believe that freewill reigns supreme.

## PRODUCTION OF CULTURE

This series of cover-ups presents itself both in reaction and in complicity to the theoretical structure of the culture industry, a term coined by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer and Adorno propose popular culture is created by a factory-like machine that intentionally produces standardized entertainment in a variety of forms. This manipulation into sameness is used malevolently to force the masses into being docile and passive producers and consumers. Horkheimer and Adorno state that “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness” (Adorno and Horkheimer 94). This culturally produced sameness can be drawn to a number of parallels in this body of work starting with the all-over covering of objects and bodies. The coverings disallow distinction between the various covered materials, creating a strange uniformity that could be considered trance-like.

The all-over styling creates a new level of sameness that is in opposition to the original functioning of that which is covered. This distorts the culture of mass production where images and iconography are intentionally crafted to be easy to consume. The methodical repetition of pattern over the surface of the canvas may at first suggest easily digestible content, but it also evokes a certain uneasiness because there is no clear path to categorize and identify the covered objects and individuals being represented. The meditative daze created by repeated patterning quells the viewer's need for visual stimulation while simultaneously rejecting the content underneath, content that, in its original form, is mass produced. The paintings pretend as themselves to be another object of overstimulation, but, in fact, they are intentionally co-opting this voice to simultaneously mirror and critique the empty promises, blatant misdirections, and overinflated values so pervasive in a society governed by capitalist mass production. The

critique at work in this body of paintings can effectively slide under the radar as it presents itself within the commercial space of the gallery and/or institution as the paintings become their own commodity objects. This allows for a wide viewership wherein the critique of manufactured value can hide self-consciously in plain sight. This, in turn, highlights the insincerity of production under the control of the culture industry and the adjacent misgivings related to commercial aspects of the art world. Covering is intentionally deployed to highlight the dangerous lack of meaningful content and manufactured value in popular culture as it's controlled under the structures of capitalism and the subsequent consumer culture.

The covered content of the paintings boldly posture in reaction to the culture industry's desire to present itself as a genuine space that allows for the production and consumption of authentic and interesting cultural goods - while in reality, this authenticity is a manufactured facade. The push by the culture industry to engage in blatant virtue signaling is prompted by fear of being found out as merely an imitator that intentionally uses deception to continue to fulfill the goals of capitalism. The unabashed denial of branding/advertising in the work highlights the dire nature of the current moment as the most recent iteration of neoliberal capitalism is no longer able to quell the people as we begin to question value and authenticity through provocation. The misguided appeals to get the consumer to trust in corporate America and the American government again reiterates how out of touch those in power are. The cracks in the facade are slowly but surely beginning to reveal an extremely dark and dystopian underbelly, systemic within our current structure. Through the extreme attention to the facade in this body of paintings, perhaps the underpinnings of our current precarity are counterintuitively revealed.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno elaborates on this idea. He states, "That art, something mimetic, is possible in the midst of rationality, and that it employs its means, is a

response to the faulty irrationality of the rational world as an over administered world” (Adorno 53). In the highly bureaucratized current world, a bevy of irrationality exists in a society that pretends and promotes itself as highly rational. Art seeks to oppose this irrationality. Through mimesis and rationality, art can counteract the current moment and shed light on the questionable goals of the culture industry. This series of paintings co-opts the aesthetic of sameness and repetition embedded within the culture industry to highlight the irrationality and perilous nature of our current structure. In further accordance with this idea, Adorno writes, “Capitalist society hides and disavows precisely this irrationality, and in contrast to this, art represents truth in a double sense: It maintains the image of its aim, which has been obscured by rationality, and it convicts the status quo of its irrationality and absurdity” (Adorno 54). The effect of these visual cover-ups is performed through this absurdity. However, through such absurdity, it illuminates the irrationality of the status quo.

The issues of our current structure will not be solved by cover-up after cover-up. Sooner or later, it will collapse under all this weight. Those in power can only sweep so much under the rug before the forms of that which are hidden are all too visible. In this way, the work doubles as both a product and a critique of the current issues of production within the culture industry. It seeks to highlight truth by evoking untruth. The intentionally deceptive coverings represented in this series of paintings are deployed to shine a light through the very process of opaquely covering up. This doubling results in a calculated critique of current social, political, and economic structure in the United States. The facade and its intentionally distracting adornments often reveal more than they hide.

The idiom to sweep it under the rug, demonstrates the desire to conceal an issue quickly rather than taking more in depth measures to remedy the underlying problem. That which is

hidden can only remain concealed for so long before its form is evident underneath, or bits and pieces start peeking out from the borders of the symbolic rug. The consumer objects I am covering represent the irrational structure of value identification. Most branded objects' identities are manufactured through popular culture, and most of these objects have little to no intrinsic value. These objects represent the unending void of consumption that plagues American consumers. The marketing ploy to push consumers to perpetually buy more and more under the false pretenses that it will add immeasurable value to one's life. This mantra is a facade in the same way that the symbolic rug is also a facade. The rug acts as a form of ornamentation, obscuring what is hidden underneath.

The idea of sweeping it under the rug can be tied into the ideas discussed by philosopher Jacques Derrida in *The Truth of Painting*. Derrida states "The drapery on statues, which simultaneously adorns and veils their nudity, is hors d'oeuvre clinging to the work's edges as to the body represented, but-so the argument goes-not a part of the representative whole" (Derrida 22). The rug, as well as this series of paintings, can be seen as the liminal space that both physically and conceptually masks that which is underneath, bringing up questions of representation. This represents the metaphorical un-framing and reframing of the speculative dissection of manufactured value. The act of hiding re-contextualizes the meaning of that which is being hidden. The objects and figures are counterintuitively given more intrigue as the act of concealment begets more attention to their otherwise overlooked form. The objects and figures in the paintings become something other than themselves, as they take on the identity of the patterned fabric that is covering them.

The different designs of various patterns pose as a space that celebrates individuality and freedom of choice. The amount of endless choices of coverings pretends to provide freedom

while, in the end, it is merely the same symbols, shapes, and colors rerouted in various orientations. The consumer is tricked into thinking that they have autonomy and that they have choice when it comes to their means of production and consumption. This, again, is merely a facade. “The unified standard of value consists in the level of conspicuous production, the amount of investment put on show. The budgeted differences of value in the culture industry have nothing to do with actual difference, with the meaning of the product itself” (Hockheimer and Adorno 97). The mirage of competition is further deployed through a bevy of producers creating a variety of options for similar products. This further tricks the consumer into believing in their autonomy as a discerning consumer, when, in reality, there is little to discern when most options fall under a disturbingly concealed degree of similarity. This idea is represented in the themes explored in the work where all goods are boiled down to the same value/valueless form through the act of covering. The variety in pattern and color pushes both the viewer/consumer to believe there is a level of choice in how to consume, however, while the visual imagery varies, the various patterns and ambiguous forms could be easily interchangeable from one painting to the next, resulting again in only one option. This, coincidentally, stands in paradox to the fact that each individual painting is a unique, one-of-a-kind piece, further complicating this cyclical relationship.

The act of re-contextualizing the various consumers and consumables sheds new light onto that which is being hidden and not discussed as it pertains to the current structure of capitalism. The sensuously rendered patterns are counterintuitively given more intrigue as the act of posing as a new iteration of the facade draws more attention to their otherwise unexceptional form hidden underneath the wrapping whether it be candy, chips, booze, or merely stuffing. The hidden nature of the content now takes on a revealing identity as we are

provoked to question the mythic truth of that which is underneath.

The allure of the covered bodies and objects are disembodied by a haunting vacancy, but at the same time, the work also takes on a new form of attraction through meticulous attention to detail, design, and form questioning the multiple layers of marketing and advertising that drives a system of endless consumption. The visual symbolism of the denial is markedly stronger as the various taught surfaces are interrupted by varying other types of coverings, creating an illusionistic space that continues to reify the fears of what would happen if we really pulled the curtains back on our current system. The stretching, covering, and drapery across this series of paintings seek to access the in-between space to expose the foibles of capitalist production exacerbated by inflated value and rigged competition.

## CONCLUSION

All this may just be a facade to allow the work to indulge in the pure pleasure of representational painting. This work seeks to lie in this duplicitous middle ground. I am indulging in color, form, pattern, and repetition while also commenting on the power of taking away the imbued value of consumer goods. The covered bodies and objects lose their marketing and advertising power that has been crafted for them by those that control the market structures. If they cannot be recognized, they cannot be bought and sold.

Philosopher Umberto Eco berates the hyperreality of American culture where, in a visit to the United States, he observes that ‘The “completely real” becomes identified with the “completely fake” ’ (Eco 7). This idea can be paralleled with this series of paintings. These works unabashedly pretend, as a masquerade of a “completely fake” copy of the “completely real”. In its over-the-top aesthetic, the realness of that which it is copying through painting could be as real/unreal as the original represented because market value can not be equated with a qualified truth.

While this work seeks to critique the current iteration of late stage capitalism, it may in fact further validate the imbalances of the market. It indulges in painterly sensibilities that bask in opulence of pattern, reflection, and object collection. It indulges in its opulences merely because it can. There is little distinction between real and manufactures valued with the end result, creating an additional layer of foible - a cover-up of its own making. This subjective space reifies the cyclical and almost inescapable nature of the current system within which the work is functioning.



The covered forms shown in this work represent the beacon of consumption celebrated and deployed by American capitalism, pushing the idea that object accumulation is the patriotic things to do. The reality of capitalism is more in line with unfair competition and further stratification of socioeconomic classes. Hyper accumulation only benefits a select few at the top of the ladder. While capitalism promises that economic participation will have a trickle down effect, it often does not. This series of work critiques the effectiveness of marketing and advertising by taking away the objects identity. It takes it a step further by replacing the visual modality with bright and alluring patterning. The patterning takes a dark twist as it evokes the idea of the cover up, and how covering-up is a means of distraction as original truth of its unaltered state has been permanently denied to the viewer.

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