

# *VANITAS OBSOLESCENTUM*

An Exhibition of Images

By

Lianne Wing Yan Ho, B.Sc., Montreal, Quebec, 2008,

A MRP Exhibition

presented to Ryerson University+

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Fashion

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2016 ©Lianne Ho 2016

#### AUTHOR'S DECLARATION FOR ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF A MRP

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* is a comment on the obsolescence of contemporary commodity. It draws from prominent theories of obsolescence and appropriates 17th century Dutch Vanitas paintings. This paper begins by addressing themes relevant to the conceptual development of the series, including theories of obsolescence as presented by Packard, Papanek and Slade, the relationship of Dutch Golden Age society to contemporary North American society, Dutch Vanitas paintings, and appropriation of the Vanitas genre in contemporary art history and within this series. It provides a rationale for the use of holography as medium to express concepts of transience and hyperreality. This paper concludes with a discussion of the specifics of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*, including the symbolism and meaning of each piece within the series.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Grahame Lynch and Susan Barnwell who were my first and second readers for this Major Research Paper. Dr. Emanuel Istrate and Josiah Sinclair deserve recognition for their facilitation of the creation of this series. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my friends and family; without their support, I would not have been able to cross this significant bridge in my life. Thank you to Catherine Wong, Arthur Ho, Shu Sang Ho, Lancelyn Rayman-Watters, Jan Petrykowski, Maria Stern, Myriam Couturier, Christian Rutherford, & Jeffrey Deng.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	pg 7
Theories of Obsolescence	pg 10
Relationship of Dutch Golden Age Society to Contemporary North American Society	pg 12
Dutch Vanity Painting	pg 15
Appropriation and <i>Vanitas Obsolescentum</i>	pg 18
Hologram: Obsolescence & Hyperreality	pg 27
Specifics of the Series	pg 29
Bibliography	pg 39

## List of Figures

Vanitas 1	pg 29
Vanitas 2	pg 32
Vanitas 3	pg 34

## **INTRODUCTION**

“Things are not static, inanimate objects. They are entities in constant animation, steadily marching from the time of their birth toward the landfill, the incinerator, or the recycling station either to be condemned to eons of slow decomposition, rapid reduction to ash, or pulverization and reappearance in modified form. It is only for a brief pause that they are in contact with humans...*By reducing product life, mechanisms of contrived durability and planned obsolescence directly contribute to the speed with which objects go in and out of our lives.* Once discarded and outside the home, the object loses value becoming no more a possession of the individual or the family, but that of the city, the waste management system and society.” (Boradkar, 202)

This excerpt from *Designing Things: A Critical Introduction to the Culture of Objects* by Prasad Boradkar speaks to a ubiquitous phenomenon occurring on a mass scale in virtually any contemporary developed society. This brief pause, this small window of time in which we as consumers are in contact with our consumables has been further truncated by mechanisms of contrived obsolescence. Giles Slade, a theorist whose work involves research on this particular topic identifies obsolescence as the “touchstone of American consciousness”. (5) It is the notion of the obsolescence and transience of material things today that forms the conceptual crux of this series. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* is a comment on contemporary commodity culture. It draws from prominent theories of obsolescence and appropriates 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas paintings to provoke contemplation and critical thought towards the phenomenon of obsolescence.

The notion of obsolescence has attracted the attention of a variety of thinkers. Foremost among them are Vance Packard, Victor Papanek and Giles Slade. Understanding that the disuse

of objects in our commodity culture is caused by a variety of factors, each theorist developed a taxonomy of obsolescence. Interestingly, conceptual congruency exists across the authors' individual classifications. Three modes of obsolescence emerge from a cross-examination of their frameworks: obsolescence of contrived material failure, that of constant technological advancement, and that which is a function of psychological fatigue driven by stylistic changes.

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* appropriates 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Vanity paintings. That is, the series borrows the imagery and conceptual foundations of the genre. In doing so, it also transposes the cultural and historical context of the Dutch Golden Age onto itself. It is therefore important to understand this context in relationship to that of contemporary North America, the milieu in which *Vanitas Obsolescentum* has been created. Dutch Golden Age society bears resemblance to contemporary North American society in that it was a modern economy (Priem, 9), in fact, the first economy that operated on the premise of capitalism. (Goldkoop and Zandvliet, 116) However, it differed from contemporary North American society in that it possessed an abundance of wealth with a limited scope of loci in which to expend it. (Bryson,99) Conversely, contemporary North American society is mired in debt with an abundance of loci in which to expend capital, in other words, it is characterized by product oversupply (Slade, 9). Comparing 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas paintings to the images of *Vanitas Obsolescentum* is much like comparing old and new age portraits of capitalism.

The genre of Vanitas paintings emerged from a context of immense wealth. The Vanitas was a cautionary genre of painting, warning its audience of the vanity of worldly things and the inevitable demise of human beings (Haak, 74). The paintings depicted carefully arranged worldly things chosen expressly for their symbolic value. (Haak, 54) Symbols significant to this series are the skull, seashell, and flowers.



As appropriation was critical to the development of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*, so were ideas surrounding appropriation. Of note are John Welchman's definition, Donald Kuspit's notions about relocation of context, and Ernst Gombrich's ideas about transmuted motif versus faithful copying.

Also critical to the creation of this series was a consideration of the work preceding it that appropriates the Vanitas genre. There are many such pieces, and they can be categorized into three typologies: pieces that recall Vanitas composition and subject matter, pieces that invoke the Vanitas sentiments of human mortality and material transience but instead employ other visual devices to convey these notions, and pieces that convey Vanitas sentiments but also comment on the contemporary relationship to commodity and commodity culture. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* situates itself in the first and last categories but differentiates itself from the canon in terms of its address of theories of obsolescence and its use of holography.

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* was rendered in holographic form for two reasons. First, holography possesses a mirage-like quality that has been used to convey the transient and obsolescent qualities of contemporary commodity; secondly, the medium embodies the quality of hyperreality, a critical characteristic of the Dutch vanity paintings. (Berger, 6)

The resulting series is a triptych in which each image features an arrangement of objects carefully selected for its demonstration of a particular mode of obsolescence, as well as its significance with respect to the historical development of that mode of obsolescence. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* intends to make starkly explicit the imminence of obsolescence of contemporary commodity that is a function of overproduction due to post-industrial capitalism. It aims to provoke thought about the validity of obsolescence, its implications, and its solutions. Finally, it seeks to elicit reflection about contemporary consumptive habits.

## **1. THEORIES OF OBSOLESCENCE**

The notion of obsolescence has existed since the Industrial Revolution. Since then, several theorists have tackled this idea, notable among them, Packard, Papanek and Slade, all of whom share significant conceptual congruencies in their classifications of obsolescence.

One of the earliest critics of the notion of obsolescence was Vance Packard. In the 1950s and 60s, with America entering its second decade of the Cold War, the economy slowing, the emergence of a critical attitude towards capitalism and industrial society, the Vietnam war, and increased environmental damage (Whitely, 23), Packard published 3 seminal books critical of American consumerism: *The Status Seekers*, *The Waste Makers* and *The Hidden Persuaders*. (Slade, 160) In *The Wastemakers*, Packard identifies three modes of obsolescence: obsolescence of function, quality, and desirability. (Slade, 161) Obsolescence of function refers to the disuse of an existing product through the introduction of a new product that outperforms the former. Obsolescence of quality refers to the disuse of a product because it is designed to break down or wear out at a time not too distant from that of its manufacture. Obsolescence of desirability refers to the disuse of a product that is still sound in terms of quality or performance but becomes tired in our minds because of styling or other superficial changes that make it appear less desirable. (Slade, 161)

A contemporary of Packard and a theorist working in a similar milieu, Victor Papanek was also a critic of obsolescence. The author was staunchly opposed to expendability, warning that “throwing away furniture, transportation, clothing, and appliances may soon lead us to feel that marriages are throw away items as well and that on a global scale countries and indeed

entire subcontinents, are disposable like Kleenex...that which we throw away, we fail to value” (Whiteley, 23) *In Design for the Real World*, Papanek also identifies three modes of obsolescence: technological, material, and artificial. (Boradkar, 185) He defined technological obsolescence as the replacement of a product when a better, more elegant product is discovered. His material obsolescence is simply the natural wearing out of the product, and artificial obsolescence is the death making of a product through either substandard materials or the irreplacability and or irreparability of significant parts. (Papanek, 34)

In the 2006 book *Made to Break*, Giles Slade argues that deliberate obsolescence is a uniquely American invention and identifies 3 modes: technological, planned, and psychological. (Slade, 4) Technological obsolescence is the result of technological innovation. (Slade, 4) Planned obsolescence refers to disuse that emerges from artificially limiting the durability of a manufactured good. (Slade, 5) Psychological obsolescence is borne from the application of style changes to manipulate consumers into repetitive purchases. (Slade, 5)

An examination of all three theoretical frameworks elucidates significant conceptual consistency. While Packard, Papanek and Slade used slightly different terms, Packard’s functional obsolescence and the definitions of technological obsolescence developed by Papanek and Slade can refer to the same phenomena. Likewise, obsolescence of quality, artificial obsolescence and planned obsolescence share the same conceptual foundation. Finally, obsolescence of desirability, and psychological obsolescence are also conceptually congruent. These three concepts of obsolescence, obsolescence of technological advancement, contrived material failure, and psychological fatigue brought about by stylistic changes, formed the conceptual basis of the images within *Vanitas Obsolescentum*, the specifics of which will be elaborated upon in following sections.

## **2. RELATIONSHIP OF DUTCH GOLDEN AGE CULTURE TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURE**

Similarities and differences can be drawn between the societies of the Dutch Golden Age and contemporary North America. They bear similarity in that both can be classified as modern capitalist economies. A key difference is that while the former possessed an abundance of wealth and a limited scope of loci in which to place it, the latter possesses enormous debt and an abundance of loci in which to place its capital.

Dutch Golden Age society bears similarity to contemporary North American society in that it was a modern economy structured around capitalism. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands possessed the first modern economy. (Priem, 9) Critical to its conversion to this economic model was the important role it played in global trade. At this time, Antwerp had become the nexus of East and West trade. From this fortuitous geographical positioning formed the United East India trade Company (VOC), a conglomerate comprised of private initiatives and state interventions. (Goldkoop and Zandvliet, 110) The VOC had a global reach, with trading posts throughout Europe and Asia. (Goldkoop and Zandvliet, 117). It acquired capital by means of share subscriptions, an unprecedented practice. Share capitalism as a concept was borne of the Dutch Golden Age. (Goldkoop and Zandvliet, 116) This notion has become hyper-realized in contemporary developed societies, especially those of North America, or more pointedly, American society. Martin Wolf, Financial Times senior economic columnist, argues that modern economies participate in “global financial capitalism”. (Tabb, 44) Capitalism has now reached a hyperextended state, whereby capital procured to exploit labour is no longer all that profitable,

and capitalists are forced to seek profits through financial activities in and of themselves. (Kettell, 26) In 2004 the corporate profits of the financial sector of the US economy totaled \$300 billion, which is approximately 40% of all domestic corporate profits. This is in comparison to the 2% of all domestic corporate profits they made up 40 years earlier. (Tabb, 44) Dutch Golden Age society and contemporary North American society resemble one another in that both societies were structured around capitalism.

Conversely, the two cultures differed in terms of wealth and the availability of loci for the expenditure of capital. Between 1608 and the 1660s, during the success of the East India Trading Company, the Netherlands became the first European society to experience wealth oversupply. However, as a pre-industrial nation, it did not possess the capacity to absorb surplus wealth through consumption in its general economy. Nor did it possess an established tradition of court life, like that of Versailles or Japan. (Bryson, 99) In contrast, contemporary North American society is faced with wealth undersupply and product oversupply. Kettell argues that the “prosperity of the world economy rests on an ever-rising mountain of American debt.” (42) Particularly relevant to this discussion is the way in which consumer credit, and in turn, consumer debt, has risen significantly over the last 40 years in Canada and the US. (MacGee, 3) Bankruptcy filings were seven times higher in the 2000s than they were in the late 1970s in these two countries. (MacGee, 6) North American debt, or wealth undersupply, is coupled with an oversupply of goods. The Industrial Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century resulted in high quality production and performance in Europe and, particularly germane to this discussion, North America. The ability to manufacture goods reliably and efficiently led to the description of overproduction as “America’s most troubling social evil.” (Cooper, 42) Similarly Giles Slade argues that as the economy shifted from one that was man-powered to machine-powered in the

late 19<sup>th</sup> century, manufacturers realized they could produce more goods than feasibly distributed or consumed, which became the impetus for developing strategies of contrived obsolescence.

(Slade, 9) Kettell argues that goods oversupply is not only a function of the Industrial Revolution but a result of Capitalism itself. He purports that the natural trajectory of capitalism is to generate a mass of commodities in excess of consumptive limits of the market. (26) In fact Kettell identifies both goods overproduction and severe debt as a function of the capitalist system. With the easy production of goods, the discovery of consumption limits by low wage labourers, and the unwillingness of capitalists to consume in the name of accumulation, overproduction is a naturally occurring phenomenon in this system. As a result, the exploitation of labour towards the production of goods becomes less profitable, forcing capitalists to expand the scale of their borrowing to produce other goods, thus contributing to the obsolescence phenomenon. In such a scenario, governments adopt looser economic policies, entrenching both the corporate world and consumers in more debt so as to maintain “economic stability”, to keep producers producing and consumers consuming. (Kettell, 26) Thus, wealth undersupply and goods oversupply is a fact of contemporary capitalism and of particular relevance to this paper, North American society. Dutch Golden Age society differed from contemporary North American society in that while the former possessed an abundance of wealth and a limited scope of loci for its expenditure, the latter possesses severe debt and an abundance of loci in which to expend its wealth.

Similarities and differences exist between the societies of the Dutch Golden Age and contemporary North America. Similarity lies in the capitalist economic system that both cultures adopted. Difference lies in their wealth and the availability of loci for the expenditure of capital, which can be attributed to the different stages in the progression of industrialization and capitalism achieved within the two cultures. Dutch Golden Age society experienced an

abundance of wealth and a limited scope of loci in which to expend it, and contemporary North American society experiences severe debt and an abundance of loci for expenditure. This abundance, or in other words, product oversupply, of North American society is the impetus for contrived obsolescence, whereby producers manipulate an audience into consuming more than is necessary. These strategies of manipulation are the conceptual crux of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*.

### **3. DUTCH VANITY PAINTING**

It was in the time and place in which modern capitalism was born, that a genre of art warning against the perils and emptiness of material goods, and the vanity of consumerism also emerged. This section will provide the historical context of the *vanitas* genre, discuss its semiotics, and review significant motifs and symbols.

Vanitas paintings emerged from the context of the Dutch Golden Age in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the Netherlands became the first European society to experience a massive abundance of wealth. It was a commercial empire deriving immense wealth from trade, a near monopoly on European shipping, colonies in the East and West Indies, and the success of its banks and stock exchange. However, the society lacked a way to absorb its surplus wealth. On the one hand, as a pre-industrial society it did not possess the machinery to integrate consumption into its general economy, and on the other, it lacked a tradition of court life, an avenue through which societies such as those of Japan and France could channel surplus wealth. Bryson suggests that it was for this lack of locus for expenditure that morality vis-a-vis wealth occupied a place of such prominence during Dutch economic ascendancy. This ethos is evident in Dutch painting, or more specifically, Dutch Vanitas painting. (99) Aside from lacking a locus for surplus wealth, the

moralizing aspects and suggestions of temperance in Dutch Vanitas painting can be drawn to the fact that Dutch Vanitas painting emerged out of Leyden, a university town which was also the stronghold of Calvinism – a protestant theological system that placed great stress on the moral aspects of life and strongly opposed the accumulation of worldly things. (Bergstrom, 158)

Vanitas paintings were images that expressed the inevitable demise of human beings and earthly possessions. (Haak, 74) They were designed to elicit reflection about life's brevity, human frailty and the vanity of worldly things from its viewer. (Bergstrom, 155) These images were realistic renderings of objects arranged meticulously by their artists and chosen carefully for their symbolic value. (Haak, 54) Bergstrom argues that these objects depicted in Vanitas compositions can be categorized into three groups. The first group contains symbols of earthly existence. These include objects which: (a) denote knowledge as represented by books, scientific instruments, material and tools of the various arts and sciences, (b) signify wealth and power as exemplified by purses, deeds, settlements, jewellery, and (c) are emblematic of taste and pleasure as signified by goblets, pipes, musical instruments, playing cards and dice. The second group is comprised of symbols representing the transience of human life such as: skulls, skeletons, instruments of time, candle sticks, and oil lamps, soap bubbles and flowers. The third group contains symbols of resurrection to eternal life, for instance: leaves of corn and springs of laurel or ivy. (Bergstrom, 154)

Several symbols are particularly relevant to *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. They are, in order of discussion: skulls, seas shells, and flowers.

The skull was and is a product of a person's death, and in 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings it unquestionably signified the end of life when rendered amongst an array of other Vanitas



objects. The skull has resonance because it is personal; “it could be one’s own” (Kelly, 20). In contemplating the skull the viewer is meant to consider his future and past.( Kelly, 20)

Like a skull, a seashell is the casing leftover from the end of life. As such, they too were a symbol of demise. These objects became Vanitas symbols because of their rarity, collectability, fragility, and that fact that they once contained a living thing. (Kelly, 24)

Flowers, in the context of 17<sup>th</sup> century, often represented transience. A relationship was drawn between the shortness of flowers blooms and the shortness of human life. Faded or fallen petals, flowers with spots of decay especially hinted at the brevity of life. This symbolism can be traced to the 1709 publication *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa, who described the rose as “a true emblem of the frailty of sublunary things”. (Kelly, 23)

Crystal glasses and porcelain conveyed the notion that “human lives are filled with purposeless things and activities” from the “empty” to the “frivolous”. (Kelly 25) The fragility of these artifacts made them apt symbols of life’s transience, a relationship again drawn by Cesare Ripa in *Iconologia*, who espoused that, “truly are mankind’s hopes a fragile glass, and life is therefore also short.” (Kelly, 26) When this kind of artifact was combined with a skull or a candle it became a Vanitas symbol. (Kelly, 26)

Dutch Vanity paintings emerged from a context of Dutch economic ascendancy. The message of the vanity of material things likely emerged from the fact that the society had an economic surplus but lacked loci for its expenditure, as well as from Calvinist influence. These images were designed to elicit reflection about life’s brevity, man’s frailty and the ephemerality of worldly things. Vanity paintings depicted careful representations of objects belonging to three different categories: the first, symbols of earthly existence, the second, symbols of life’s

transience, and the third, symbols of resurrection to eternal life. Emblems particularly relevant to *Vanitas Obsolescentum* include the skull, seashell and flowers. They are rendered into the images that comprise this series, evoking their 17<sup>th</sup> century meaning and in turn transposing them onto this contemporary series.

#### **4.APPROPRIATION & VANITAS OBSOLESCENTUM**

The appropriation of 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas painting is a central device employed in *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. Critical to the development of the series were ideas about appropriation developed by John Welchman, Donald Kuspit, and Ernst Gombrich.

John Welchman in *Art After Appropriation* defines appropriation as the “relocation, annexation or theft of cultural properties—whether objects ideas or notations—associated with the rise of European colonialism and global capital.” (1) He argues that it is supported by the emergence of disciplines such as anthropology, museology, and epistemologies of description, collecting, comparison, and evaluation. (1) In *Vanitas Obsolescentum* the concepts of the imminence of mortality, the brevity of life, and material transience embedded in Vanitas painting and its related symbols are borrowed and reused in the expression of ideas about commodity, obsolescence and the implications of capitalist culture.

Appropriation relocates culture, and as Donald Kuspit argues, central to this transposition is the relocation of context. This context may be national, ethnic, gendered, class-based, (Welchman, 35) and by extension, historical. The gesture of taking not only applies to objects images or events, but also to their associated milieu. (Welchman, 35) *Vanitas Obsolescentum* relocates the historical, economic, and social conditions of Dutch Golden Age culture and

juxtaposes them against contemporary North American culture. It is in the parallels and differences between the Golden Age society and contemporary North American society that the significance of *Vanitas Obsolescentum* becomes apparent. It is important to recall that the Vanitas still life genre emerged from the context of the Dutch Golden Age, and that it was a cautionary genre, warning its viewers of the vanity of worldly things in a context of burgeoning capitalism and immense wealth (Bergstrom, 155). Through appropriation, *Vanitas Obsolescentum* sends a cautionary warning about the transience and obsolescence of material things in the context of hyper-global-capitalism and immense debt. It comments on the ephemerality of worldly things, but a hyper-ephemerality, one created by manufacturers as a result of the Industrial Revolution and mass capitalism. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* is a hyperextension of the Vanitas genre; comparing 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanity paintings to the images of *Vanitas Obsolescentum* is analogous to comparing old and new portraits of capitalism.

Also relevant to this discussion about *Vanitas Obsolescentum* are Ernst Gombrich's ideas about transmuted motif versus faithful copying, creative versus pseudo creative appropriation, and creative intuition versus passive identification of tradition (Brilliant and Kinney, 247). Gombrich argues that for the creative appropriator, the motif is a living experience that has externalized itself in the shape of an expression." Kuspit succinctly expresses Gombrich's idea by distinguishing between the re-living and re-feeling of the experience expressed in the motif by the creative appropriator and the spiritless reading of the letter of the motif by the pseudo-creative appropriator. The creative appropriator breathes new life into a dead motif while a pseudo appropriator is a "necrophiliac of form". (Brilliant and Kinney, 247) The notion of creative appropriation versus pseudo-appropriation was critical to the considerations made in the creation of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. While initial iterations of the piece included paintings that

directly borrowed the compositions of extant 17th century Vanitas paintings, the final iteration of the series instead employs a medium outside of painting that embodies the notion of transience. And while the final iteration borrows symbols used in the Vanitas genre like skulls and flowers, it does not slavishly mimic the form of specific vanity paintings. This borrowing of ideas is re-contextualized against the imaging of contemporary objects particularly relevant to the notion of contemporary commodity obsolescence.

Welchman's definition of appropriation, Kuspit's notions about the transference of context operating in parallel to the transference of object, image or event vis-a-vis appropriation and Ernst Gombrich's distinction between transmuted motif and faithful copying played significant roles in decision making in the production of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*.

### **EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATION OF THE VANITAS GENRE**

Since the emergence of Vanitas painting in the Dutch Golden Age, artists across multiple generations have appropriated the genre, proving it a fertile and timelessly relevant theme. Notable, however, is the surge in number of contemporary artists engaging with it. John Ravenal relates the renewed interest in the Vanitas genre to the fact that a new millennium has encouraged artists to reflect on the past and future of the human condition. This reflection, he argues, seems especially apt in face of civil and global warfare, increasing polarization between rich and poor, and environmental destruction. (14) Michael Petry ascribes the contemporary interest in Vanitas paintings to a desire for a subtler representation of death in face of the ubiquitous, sensationalized images of death produced by the news media. (18) Appropriation of the genre can be organized into three typologies: pieces that recall still life composition and

subject matter, pieces that speak to the Vanitas sentiment but instead employ other visual devices to convey this notion, and pieces that convey the Vanitas sentiment but also comment on the contemporary relationship to commodity and commodity culture. It is in this first and last domain that *Vanitas Obsolescentum* situates itself. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* also consciously differentiates itself from the corpus of work extant, specifically in terms of its address of typologies of obsolescence and its use of holography.

### **Pieces that recall still life composition and subject matter**

A variety of contemporary artists have appropriated the Vanitas genre by retaining the integrity of the still life composition and subject matter. The works of these artists can be further subdivided into pieces that are in keeping with the traditional Vanitas medium, painting, and those that venture outside this mode. Examples of the former can be found in the work of David Ligare, Audrey Flack, Aaron Bohrod, Serge Charchoune, and Georgia O'Keefe. Examples of the latter can be found in the work of Shirana Shahbazi, Sarah Elise Hall, Piotre Uklanski, Paul Hazelton, Adam Fuss and Sam Taylor Wood.

David Ligare's *Still Life with Mexican Pastries and Skull* appropriates Vanitas paintings in terms of composition, subject matter and medium. Painted in oil on canvas, the work features a skull and an array of baked goods. The artist furthers the Vanitas genre by changing the way the objects featured are traditionally framed. In this piece the extents of the backdrop are pictured, in contrast to 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas paintings which do not reveal the staging of the still life arrangement. Further, the objects are placed outdoors, which is a subversion of the dark-lit

Vanitas paintings of the Golden Age. (Kelly, 108) The painting has a traditional Vanitas intention, which is to convey that “even with plenty of cake to eat, we will die”. (108)

Audrey Flack’s *Wheel of Fortune* calls on traditional Vanitas paintings in terms of composition, subject matter and medium. Painted as oil over acrylic on canvas, the piece features Vanitas symbols such as a skull, mirror, an hourglass and a die. Into this array the artist incorporated new symbols such as a lipstick, a compact, Christmas bulbs, costume jewelry, a calendar sheet, and a playing card on which is inscribed the word fortune. The piece alludes to the turning fortunes of life. (Kelly, 98)

Aaron Bohrod’s *Anatomy Lesson* appropriates traditional Vanitas paintings in terms of composition, subject matter, and medium. Painted in oil on canvas, the piece features a ripped portion of an engraving from Vesalius’s *1543 Anatomy*. In the foreground is a skull with a peanut clenched in its teeth, a split apple, a blue ribbon and a scrap from the *New York Times*, weighed down by the skull. The scrap reads ‘Future Brides’, a hook for the artist’s intent. The “Anatomy Lesson” is that our bodies are borrowed, a point made explicit by the American bridal custom to have something old (the apple), something new (*The New York Times*), something borrowed (our bodies) and something blue (the ribbon). (Kelly, 96)

Serge Charchoune’s *Abstraction* appropriates Vanitas paintings in terms of composition, subjects matter and medium. Rendered in gouache on paper, the piece is a cubist’s rendition of Vanitas symbols. Playing cards, a pipe, a piece of friend, a bottle, a bowl, a load of bread and a plant’s leaves are depicted. The piece is part of the tradition amongst Cubists who thought that 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas symbols would be good subjects for their “re-ordered reality”. (Kelly, 90)

Lastly, Georgia O'Keefe's *It was a Man and a Pot* appropriates 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas paintings in terms of composition, subject matter and medium. The piece features the back of a skull enclosed by black ceramic pot. The piece is a comment on human frailty as most Vanitas paintings are, but holds special significance in consideration of the fact that it was painted at the onset of WWII. The shattered pot can be interpreted as a symbol of human making and technology, while the skull, which is engulfed by the pot, obviously represents frail humanity. (Kelly, 94)

Other artists have maintained the subject matter and compositional qualities of the Vanitas painting but have instead selected a medium outside of painting to generate their images. Shirana Shahbazi's *Stilleven-33-2009* employs photography to render in absolute precision a skull, a case of flowers and rotting fruit. (Petry, 237) Sarah Elise Hall's *Temporal* employs Positron Emission Tomography to image a skeleton, which the artist then renders in paint. (Petry, 238) Piotre Uklanski's *Untitled (Monsieur Francois Pinault, President of Artemis)* uses X-rays to create a psychedelic image of skull and cross bones. (Petry, 240) Paul Hazelton creates precariously fragile sculptures of a skull from dust in *Death Duster*. (Petry, 251) Adam Fuss' *Untitled* is a daguerrotype of a skull that has a surface reflective enough to at once make apparent the viewer's image and that of the skull. (Petry, 252) Sam Taylor Wood's *Still Life* is a restaging of seventeenth century Vanitas paintings on video. The artist captured fruit across three weeks and compressed the process of decay into four minutes of film. Using contemporary technology the artist further the tradition of the Vanitas by visually capturing what the medium of painting could only suggest—physical demise over time. (Kelley, 114)

**Pieces that convey the Vanitas sentiment but employ other visual devices**

Other contemporary artists have appropriated the Vanitas genre by conveying life's fragility and the transience of material things but do so by employing visual devices outside of the Vanitas visual language. These artists include Roland Flexner & Marc Quinn.

Roland Flexner's *Wisdom and Destiny* draws on the Vanitas theme and maxim, *Homo Bulla*, "man's life is a bubble". The artist creates an image by blowing a bubble made of India ink and soap onto paper. The result is a record of the burst, unique like a human life, a consequence of a fragile state like a human life. (Kelley, 116)

Marc Quinn's *Spring (Sunflower) II* attempts to freeze time by preserving pristine sunflower blooms in silicon. The result is an artifact that sits at the intersection between, in the artist's words, "pure image and pure matter". It underscores the Vanitas notion of the futility of escaping death as the flowers have in a way been preserved in vain—they do not show the physical signs of decay but they are also unquestionably dead. (Petty, 38)

**Pieces that convey the Vanitas sentiment but also comment on the contemporary relationship to commodity and contemporary capitalist culture.**

Lastly, some artists have chosen to convey Vanitas themes but also comment on the human relationship to commodity and capitalist consumer culture. These artists include Jac Leirner, Tony Feher, James White, Peter Abrams and Damien Hirst.



Jac Leirner uses everyday materials to underscore their connection to our lives. In *Blue Phase*, she uses devalued Brazilian bank notes to convey the caprice of power and wealth. (Ravenal, 20)

Similarly, Tony Feher uses everyday objects to convey ideas about decay and renewal. (Ravenal, 21) In *Suture*, he collects discarded water bottles and rearranges them in hanging formations using cord and hooks. The water bottles are filled with water dyed red, suggestive of bodily fluids. The result is a piece that strongly expresses the fragility of life and mortality while raising issue with the excesses of waste production.

James White paints everyday objects from photographs to depict the banality of everyday existence. *Burger Box* pictures a water bottle sitting atop a Styrofoam box. (Petry, 139)

Similarly, Peter Abrahams photographs everyday objects with a deliberateness of Old Master paintings. These compositions question the histories of the depicted objects, raising issue with the cheap foreign labour used to manufacture them. (Petry, 140)

Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* is a human skull cast in platinum and set with 8,601 diamonds. The work is purported to represent a victory over death, but one that proves to be futile, as attempts to conquer death with material wealth ultimately end in demise. (Petry, 233)

### **How Vanitas Obsolescentum differentiates itself:**

While *Vanitas Obsolescentum* belongs to the canon of the Vanitas, it also consciously distinguishes itself from the work that precedes it in its deployment of Dutch Vanitas

iconography to engage ideas about obsolescence. It also distinguishes itself in that it employs an uncharted medium in this genre—holography.

Whereas many of the contemporary works appropriating Vanitas paintings speak to the imminence of human mortality, this series appropriates Vanitas paintings to raise issue with the mortality of commodity and to to communicate ideas about commodity obsolescence.

Conversely, many artists have explored aspects of our throwaway culture, specifically obsolescence, but few have employed the Vanitas genre towards this end.

The vanitas genre has been appropriated in a variety of media including photography, Positron Emission Tomography, x-ray technology, dust, daguerreotype, video, ink, and silicon to name a few. However, the use of holography is unprecedented and thus a significant way in which *Vanitas Obsolescentum* differentiates itself from the canon.

Throughout the course of contemporary art history many artists have appropriated the Vanitas genre. Their works can be organized into three typologies: pieces that recall still life composition and subject matter, pieces that speak to Vanitas themes but instead employ other visual devices to convey them, and pieces that convey Vanitas themes but also comment on the contemporary relationship to commodity and commodity culture. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* situates itself in the first and last categories. However, the series deliberately differentiates itself from the work that precedes it, specifically in terms of it address of typologies of obsolescence and its use of holography.

## **5. HOLOGRAM: OBSCOLESCENCE AND HYPERREALITY**

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* employs the holographic medium to convey the obsolescent and transient nature of contemporary commodity and to embody the quality of hyperreality, a critical characteristic of the Dutch vanity paintings it appropriates.

Holography was chosen to express the obsolescent and transient nature of contemporary commodity. Art critic Edward Lucie Smith observed that ‘holographic art was disconcerting...three dimensional holographic images were disturbingly there but not there’ (Johnston, 225). The ephemerality of the medium parallels the ephemerality of contemporary commodity. The medium expresses quite aptly Boradkar’s sentiment that:

“Things are not static, inanimate objects. They are entities in constant animation, steadily marching from the time of their birth toward the landfill, the incinerator, or the recycling station either to be condemned to eons of slow decomposition, rapid reduction to ash, or pulverization and reappearance in modified form. *It is only for a brief pause that they are in contact with humans.*” (Boradkar, 202)

So, when disposable flatware, fashion objects, and technological devices are rendered in holographic form, their images appearing and disappearing as one moves from one vantage point to the next, they become reminders of the obsolescence and transience of material things.

As *Vanitas Obsolescentum* appropriates Dutch Vanitas paintings, it was appropriate to select a medium that embodied a key characteristic of this genre—hyperreality. This quality refers to a realism exaggerated to the point of artifice. In Henry Berger’s essay *Hyperreality and Truthiness*, the author cites Umberto Eco’s description of still lifes, that is, their possession of a condition similar to that of Disneyland, Marineland, Hearst Castle and the like—hyperreality.

The genre, the author argues, possesses a quality Stephen Colbert calls “truthiness”—“What you want the facts to be as opposed to what they are.” (Berger, 6) Vanitas paintings were masters of Colbertian mischief. By being committed to the truthiness of realism, they showcased their showcasing. (Berger, 6) Furthering this idea of hyperreality, in another essay, *Nature Mourant: The Fictiveness of Dutch Realism*, Berger argues that the power of realism in Dutch still lifes is a result of the genre’s counterfactuality. (35) Similarly, Svetlana Alpers argues that Dutch still life exhibits purposeful contrivance rather than accurate transcription. (Berger, 147) Celeste Brusati furthers these similar ideas by suggesting that artists used the skill of illusionist artifice to stress the ephemerality of objects. (Brusati, 157) The author goes on to analyze Willem Kalf’s pictures of the 1650s and 60s, and purports that the representational artifice of his pictures induce the beholder to experience the painted objects as intangible and in turn, effect “reflection upon the moral implications of the attachments to them.” (Brusati, 157) Meaning in Vanitas paintings emerge not only from symbolic associations, but from the meaning the viewer draws from the way the images have been rendered. (Brusati, 157) These ideas brought forth from Berger, Eco, Colbert, Alpers, and Brusati speak to the importance of hyperreality towards the production of meaning in 17th century Dutch Vanitas painting. Hyperreality was effected in Vanitas paintings to induce reflection about the ephemerality of objects and moral implications of attachment to objects. In view of these notions, holography was chosen to render the images comprising *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. Holography has a mirage-like quality; it creates a three dimensional illusion, a hyperreal image much like Dutch Vanitas painting. It is an extension of the hyperreal quality in Dutch Vanitas painting; its use is an apt gesture in view of the series’ reference to and appropriation of the Vanitas genre and its intent to elicit reflection on the transience and obsolescence of material things.

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* utilizes the holographic medium to express the imminence of obsolescence of contemporary commodity and to embody the quality of hyperreality that is an attribute of the Dutch Vanity paintings it appropriates..This application of hyperreality thus has the same intent as that of Vanitas paintings, which is to evoke reflection on the ephemerality of material things.

## **6.SPECIFICS OF THE SERIES**

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* is a triptych in which each of its constituent images is devoted to conveying a specific mode of obsolescence as theorized by Packard, Papanek and Slade. The series draws on the symbolism and meaning of seventeenth century Dutch Vanitas painting whilst imaging objects from everyday modern life to discuss notions of obsolescence in contemporary commodity culture. This section will explore the symbolism and meaning of the images within the triptych of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*, as well as explore the rationale behind the use of the holographic medium.

Fig. 1: Vanitas I



*Vanitas I* engages the ideas of obsolescence due to technological advancement. Here, obsolete devices are rendered. Pictured are a defunct laptop, a digital camera, two generations of Blackberry cellphones, an iPhone and an mp3 player. Also pictured are two Vanitas symbols, a skull and dried flowers. As mentioned earlier in the section about Dutch Vanity painting, the skull, in 17<sup>th</sup> century terms, was synonymous with death, and is meant to elicit a reflection upon one's future and past. Flowers in 17<sup>th</sup> century terms represented transience, and in the words of Cesare Ripa, "a true emblem of the frailty of sublunary things." (Kelly, 23) This array of objects

is meant to provoke consideration of the very imminent and ubiquitous death of technological devices. The skull suggests the mortality of the objects depicted as well as a reflection of the waste that one leaves behind after a life has been lived. The flowers are a comment on the transience of technological devices, as well as life itself.

The array of outdated technology was imaged to show the pervasiveness of technological obsolescence in everyday contemporary life. Slade explains that the ubiquity of this type of obsolescence is a product of the exponentially growing power of integrated circuits, a component essential to the miniaturization of digital devices. Since the invention of the integrated circuit in the 1960s (192), its subsequent upgrades and their use by the Apollo moon mission by NASA , which effectively dropped prices of production (193), the level of complexity of the integrated circuit has increased by a factor of 2 per year in relation to its minimum cost (196).

Technological obsolescence is largely a result of the exponentially growing power of integrated circuits. However, Raymond Kurzweil, winner of the prestigious National Medal of Technology, has observed that the law of exponential growth within integrated circuits, Moore's Law, is a part of a century-long exponential growth of computing in general. Computers today are 100 million times more powerful for the same unit cost compared to half a century ago (Slade, 197) The objects imaged in *Vanitas I* were imaged in consideration of the exponentially growing power of computing and in turn, technology.

The dangers of excess technological waste produced by a consumer in the duration of his or her lifespan was a consideration in determining the visualized contents of this piece. In 2005, 50, 000 tons of obsolete cell phones were "retired". (Slade, 264) In the words of Slade, "We are at the precipice of an insurmountable e-waste storage problem." (264) Cellphones built to last 5 years are discarded after 18 months of use. This product, along with other technological devices,



is creating unmanageable waste. This waste is often sent to third world countries illegally where they are the constituents of a dangerous industry of material extraction. (Slade, 280) The components in e-waste contain high levels of permanent biological toxins (PBTs) including arsenic, antimony, beryllium, cadmium, lead, nickel and zinc. When e-waste is burned to extract materials, pollutants are released into the atmosphere, creating disastrous health consequences for those in the industry and globally. When buried in a landfill, PBTs leech into the groundwater, poisoning it. (Slade, 261)

Finally, the rendering of the image in holographic form reinforces the notion of obsolescence and transience. These technological devices are with us as privately owned commodities for a small fraction of time of their existence. Like the visibility of the image of these devices in *Vanitas I*, our ownership of these products and experience of them as functional products is momentary. The viewer is encouraged to think about the ubiquity of technological obsolescence, the consequences of creating masses of e-waste within his or her lifetime, and the imminence of technological obsolescence.



Fig. 2: Vanitas 2



*Vanitas 2* engages the idea of obsolescence due to contrived material failure. Here, objects which are made to fail within a short time after their purchase are rendered. Pictured are take-out containers, styrofoam plates, a plastic water bottle, and plastic cups. Consistent with the first and second images within the triptych, two Vanitas symbols accompany these commodities: a skull and a shell. The skull is synonymous with death, a provocateur of reflection about one's past and future. The shell is similarly a vestige of a life lived. This array of objects is intended to conjure consideration of the imminence and ubiquity of functional obsolescence of contemporary commodities. The skull suggests the imminent mortality of the objects depicted as well as the waste that one leaves behind post-mortem. The shell is suggestive of how these objects depicted

are life's vestiges, and allusive to the transience of the active use of these objects, the fragility of their active lives.

Disposable flatware was chosen with deliberate intention. Among the first mass applications of functional obsolescence was the manufacture of disposable cutlery and dishware made by the company Standard Packaging. Specializing in "Dispensables" the company tripled its sales in four years to emerge as a hundred-million-dollar corporation. The enterprise manufactured trays that could be cooked, bags that could be boiled, and bowls and other eating utensils made to be discarded to eliminate dishwashing. Its CEO exclaimed happily at one point, "Everything that we make is thrown away." A fortune was made as the craving for convenience swept the nation in the 1960s (Packard, 45) Disposable flatware was imaged in *Vanitas 2* in consideration of the legacy of Standard Packaging.

Finally, the rendering of the image in holographic form reinforces the notion of obsolescence. Like the visibility of these images of these disposable consumables in *Vanitas 2*, our ownership and active use of these products is designed to be time-limited. The viewer is encouraged to think about the ubiquity of functional obsolescence in our consumer culture, the consequences of using products that are discarded almost as soon as they are acquired, and the imminence of contrived material obsolescence in many contemporary commodities.

Figure 3: Vanitas 3



*Vanitas 3* engages the idea of obsolescence due to psychological fatigue induced by stylistic changes. Here, obsolete fashion commodities are rendered. Pictured are shoes and a barely discernable purse from luxury labels. Again, two Vanitas symbols accompany these commodities: a skull and a shell. The skull is synonymous with death, and meant to elicit a reflection upon one's future and past. Similarly, the shell is the vestigial casing left over at the end of life. This array of objects is meant to elicit consideration of the imminence and ubiquity of desirability, artificial, and psychological obsolescence of contemporary commodities. The skull suggests the mortality of the objects depicted as well as the waste that one leaves behind after a life lived. The shell is suggestive of how these objects are the vestigial casings of a life, as well

as the transience and fragility of the time in which these objects were filled and activated by a living being.

The fashion objects chosen for display are particularly aestheticized objects with highly specific styles. This was done to underscore how manufacturers deliberately use style and new “looks” of products to generate more sales. A seminal example of styling obsolescence was the Peacock Revolution, the manipulation of the Men’s fashion industry to extricate it from what the executive director of the National Fashion Preview of Men’s Apparel called a “lack of obsolescence.” (Slade, 167) In 1950 the American Institute of Men’s and Boy’s Wear implemented a multimillion-dollar campaign to “make men pay more attention to stylishness in their clothing.” (Slade, 168) In addition to campaigns that convinced consumers of the importance of style, this period of time saw the emergence of a kaleidoscope of men’s styles. Psychological obsolescence vis-a-vis the American menswear industry was a two-pronged strategy that involved changing styles and making the public style conscious. Fashion objects were imaged in *Vanitas 3* in consideration of the Peacock Revolution.

Finally, the rendering of the image in holographic form reinforces the notion of obsolescence and transience. Fashion objects are often coveted and highly desirable objects for a brief moment, that is, until the next season. Once unfashionable, they are often discarded. Like the visibility of the images of these fashion objects in *Vanitas 3*, our ownership of these products and experience of them as desirable products is designed to be time-limited. The viewer is encouraged to think about the rampancy of style obsolescence, the consequences of acquiring objects that continually fall out of vogue, and the imminence of psychological obsolescence of contemporary commodity.

## **CONCLUSION**

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* makes explicit the ubiquitous obsolescence of contemporary commodity that is a result of post-industrial capitalism. Its intention is to provoke thought about the validity of obsolescence, its implications, its solutions and reflection about consumptive habits.

This series engages these ideas by addressing theories of obsolescence. *Vanitas Obsolescentum* depicts three typologies of obsolescence that were conceptually consistent across theoretical frameworks developed by Packard, Papanek and Slade. They were: obsolescence of technological advancement, contrived material failure, and psychological fatigue brought about by stylistic changes.

The series also addresses obsolescence of commodity by appropriating 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas paintings to express the transience of material things, a major theme of the historical genre. As the Dutch Golden Age was the birthplace of the capitalist economic system (Goldkoop and Zandvliet, 116), appropriation of this genre was apt in that comparing vanity paintings to images from *Vanitas Obsolescentum* would be analogous to comparing old and new portraits of capitalism.

More specifically, *Vanitas Obsolescentum* addressed obsolescence through the Vanitas genre by deploying the symbols used in this kind of painting. Vanitas paintings were cautionary images warning of the emptiness and transience of material goods (Haak, 74). They featured carefully arranged material goods, each chosen for their symbolic value. (Haak, 54) Many of these symbols, such as the skull, shell, and wilting flower, were deployed in *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. This had the purpose of evoking the Vanitas genre and expressing ideas about transience and mortality associated with these motifs.



Choices with respect to expression of the series were inflected by theories of appropriation. Significant among them were Donald Kuspit's ideas about relocation of appropriation, and Ernst Gombrich's ideas about transmuted motif versus faithful copying. The former asserts that appropriation necessitates a transference of not only image or idea but the context, whether national, ethnic, gendered, etc. associated with it. (Welchman, 35) Thus, heavy consideration was given to the aptness of the transference of the Dutch Golden Age and its meaning to *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. The latter differentiates between two kinds of appropriation, transmuted motif versus faithful copying, and identifies the first as more successful. Consideration was given to this idea in generating the images of *Vanitas Obsolescentum*. The series created new images while referencing an older tradition instead of obsequiously imitating an extant Vanitas painting.

Each image in the triptych features an array of objects carefully selected for its expression of a mode of obsolescence. Moreover, the objects were chosen in view of their significance vis-à-vis the historical development of the specific mode of obsolescence they referred to. Plastic utensils and settings were used in view of the legacy of Stanpak, the first disposable utensil company, technological devices with integrated circuits were imaged to underscore the significance of the invention of integrated circuits as a causal force behind rapid technological obsolescence. Finally, fashionable shoes were chosen to specifically reference the Peacock Revolution, a marketing campaign which stressed the importance of new styles in clothing to hasten obsolescence and turn larger profits.

*Vanitas Obsolescentum* addresses obsolescence through the medium in which it was created. Holography conveys the transient and obsolescent quality of contemporary commodity through its mirage-like qualities, and its reference to the quality of hyperreality of 17<sup>th</sup> century

Dutch Vanitas paintings. In both historical and contemporary contexts, hyperreal rendering techniques were employed to induce reflection about the ephemerality of objects and the moral implications of attachment to these objects.

Through its direct reference to theories of obsolescence, its appropriation of Vanitas paintings in terms of historic context, symbolic motif, and hyperreality, and finally by means of the qualities inherent to its medium, *Vanitas Obsolescentum* conveys ideas about the transience and obsolescence of contemporary commodity. It draws attention to the vanity of commodity, provokes thought about the waste created throughout one's short lifetime, and raises questions with respect to the validity of obsolescence, its costs and benefits, its solutions. This thinking can further extrapolate to ideas about the pitfalls of capitalism itself. As Kettell who draws from Marx argues, capitalism inherently leads to overproduction, exploitation of labour, decreasing profits from exploitation of labour, expansion of capitalist activities to purely financial activity, expansion of lending in the form of credit to capitalists and consumers alike, which further exacerbates the issue of overproduction (Kettell, 26), and in turn, contrived obsolescence. By engaging with a common consumer experience of obsolescence with everyday things, *Vanitas Obsolescentum* raises issue with the economic system that produces this ubiquitous phenomenon.

## **Bibliography**

Berger Jr., Harry. *Caterpillars : Reflections on Seventeenth-century Dutch Still-life Painting*. New York : Fordham University Press, 2011.

Bergström, Ingvar. *Dutch Still-life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*. London : Faber and Faber, 1956.

Boradkar, Prasad. *Designing Things: A Critical Introduction to the Culture of Objects*. New York: Berg, 2010.

Brusati, Celeste. *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Bryson, Norman, *Looking at the Overlooked : Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. London : Reaktion Books, 2001.

Cooper, Tim. *Longer Lasting Products: Alternatives to the Throwaway Society*. Gower Pub, 2010.



Goedkoop, Hans and Zandvliet, Kees. *The Dutch Golden Age : Gateway to Our Modern World*. Zutphen : Walburg Pers, 2012.

Haak, Bob. *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. London : Thames and Hudson, 1984.

Johnston, Sean F. "A Cultural History of the Hologram." *Leonardo* 41.3 (2008): 223-9.

Kelly III, Raymond J. *To Be, or Not to Be: Four Hundred Years of Vanitas Painting*. Flint: Flint Institute of Arts, 2006.

Kettell, Steven. "Circuits of Capital and Overproduction: A Marxist Analysis of the Present World Economic Crisis." *Review of Radical Political Economics* 38.1 (2006): 24-44.

Kiers, Judikje and Tissink, Fieke. *The Golden Age of Dutch Art: Painting, Sculpture, Decorative Art*. London : Thames and Hudson, 2000.

MacGee, James, and C.D. Howe Institute. *The Rise in Consumer Credit and Bankruptcy: Cause for Concern?*. no. 346; C.D. Howe Institute, 2012.

Packard, Vance. *Hidden Persuaders*. New York : D. McKay Co., 1957.

Packard, Vance, *Waste Makers*. New York : D. McKay, 1960.

Papanek, Victor. *Design for the Real World : Human Ecology and Social Change*. Toronto : Bantam Books, 1973.

Petry, Michael. *Nature Morte : Contemporary Artists Reinvigorate the Still-life Tradition*. New York : Thames & Hudson, 2013.

Priem, Ruud. *Rembrandt and the Golden Age of Dutch art : Treasures from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*. Portland: Portland Art Museum, 2007.

Priem , Ruud. *Vermeer, Rembrandt and the Golden Age of Dutch Art: Masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2009.

Ravenal, John B. *Vanitas : Meditations on Life and Death in Contemporary Art*. Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2000.

Rosenberg, Jakob and Slive, Seymour and ter Kuile, E.H.. *Dutch Art and Architecture, 1600 to 1800*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.

Slade, Giles. *Made to Break : Technology and Obsolescence in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Tabb, William K. "Four Crises of the Contemporary World Capitalist System." *Monthly Review* 60.5 (2008): 43-59.

Welchman, John. *Art after Appropriation : essays on art in the 1990s*. Amsterdam : G+B Arts International, 2001.

Whiteley, Nigel. "*Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s.*" *Oxford Art Journal* 10.2 (1987): 3-27. Web.