

Alivia Zivich: *Fat Hacker*
Cave, Detroit, November 2014

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a super fragile callous mystic hexed by halitosis.

So reads a “punch line” that arcs across the surface of Alivia Zivich’s piece *Natural Flavor with Other Natural Flavor* (all works 2014). The text just slightly overlaps, and lingers next to, a photograph of a plump red plant—a pepper perhaps—with an anthropomorphic head-nub and fayly raised, arm-like appendage. The entire piece is hung so that it spills over the edge of the wall. So floating, the components (frame, surface, subject, speech) layer and slip; the piece is funny, non-sensical.

Similar combinations of imagery and language dot *Fat Hacker*, Zivich’s solo exhibition at Cave, an artist run exhibition space in Detroit. These elements have been taken, read, and overheard by Zivich—an archive of the world encountered in all of its banality and levity. In *The Customer is Always Right*, a photograph shows a clipping of the slogan tacked up in a workspace, face-mounted to an acrylic sheet that is covered with dripped, sprayed, and spattered paint. The application of the paint is vague; it oscillates between appearing intentional, off-handed, and inconsequential (the residue of some other process). In *Mad*, a one-word snippet of text is excerpted; Zivich shared that the typography was drawn from a printed quote of Norman Bates’s famous line “We all go a little bit mad sometimes.” Blown up, it floats against a bed sheet hand-painted with pixilated forms that make up a mandala-like pattern. Both the clipping and the word in the two aforementioned pieces were found in an abandoned print shop. This inkling of a pre-digital/post-industrial time warp is a subtle underpinning in the show, with other tidbits of language pointing towards economic vagaries:

“FINANCIAL PEACE” hugs an image of a grocery store aisle and shopping-cart bound child with a bag over its head.

“GLOBAL APOLOGY / you can’t get this brand here” shares and acrylic sheet with a circle made with thickly applied strokes of translucent, olive green paint (the material and the shape connect back to Zivich’s activities as a co-founder, with Nate Young, of the lathe-cutting label AA Records).

Throughout the exhibition, thinness is a critical element. All the works include white bed sheets and/or clear acrylic, which reveal/blend into the substrates and walls behind. The cheapness and “blankness” of these materials makes them feel light, floating, with a sort of tedious freshness. As quick as this spare materiality might seem, something slower creeps through; the work has a way of burrowing in your brain. Zivich’s pared down elements seem unmoored, detached. Something about this emptying out, this clarity makes them “catchy” (a swift delivery, with lingering recall). Hours/days/weeks later, in moments of absent reflection, that chubby vegetable pops to mind. In this way Zivich parlays to the viewer something of her original encounter and mental processing.

Several works in the show consist only of black, hand-painted figures and shapes on the sheets. *Frosty Shopper* looks like a standing figure adorned in psychedelic or ceremonial costume. In *Native Funk & Flash* a strange thing (flower? insect?) hovers above a sleek tentacle, which makes another appearance in *The Unlikely Event*, pulling away from (or advancing towards?) a large orb with a small, pointy nick. Such perplexing imagery makes Zivich’s work disarming.

In her recent solo show *Bottomless* at Night Club in Chicago, Zivich employed many of the same materials and strategies: photographs of fruit, food, and everyday objects, snippets of funny language, and black paint on white sheets. The titles of both shows evoke endless consumption; but in both instances that dark undertone is very delicate. Night Club’s domestic setting (the exhibition space is a small room in a lived-in apartment) gave it a personal feeling, and the sheets were treated more as architectural elements than surfaces. Cave’s barren industrial space, worn concrete floor, and cinder block walls lent a colder cast, and a distance at which the work feels more resolved.

The pieces in *Fat Hacker* may come across as obscure... but such are the objects and experiences of life and thought (softened though they are by unmindfulness). There is poetry to Zivich’s bareness. Things aren’t meaningless *per se*, but the possibility that they might be is oddly pleasant.

- Rose Bouthillier