

JAYNE H BAUM

Contemporary Photography and Fine Art

Everyday Necessity: New Work by Guy Laramée and Bastienne Schmidt

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Gallery artists **Guy Laramée** and **Bastienne Schmidt** have each been producing new series of work under lockdown at their respective studios in Montreal and Long Island. Taking as their starting point everyday household objects that have taken on a new resonance in the context of the current pandemic, the artists have each formulated unique responses to the events convulsing our world—as well as finding renewed meaning in the routine of daily studio practice.

Guy Laramée's ***Toilet Paper Diary Volcanoes*** is a new series created as a quarantine diary; the artist has been producing a daily sculpture made from a roll of toilet paper, each of the pieces intricately carved and painted in the form of a volcanic mountain. The works depict volcanoes in varying states of activity: from dormant vegetation-lined slopes, ominously smoking craters, through full-blown Vesuvius. Each work is accompanied by a haiku-like subtitle that offers a counterpoint to the sculpture, creating a space for reflection on the anxieties caused by our current predicament. Since the Romantic era, the sublime destructive power of volcanoes has held a fascination for artists: though terrifying, they present an opportunity to reconsider the vanity of human endeavors in the face of nature's power (and thus offer the possibility for change). The *Toilet Paper Diary Volcanoes* can be viewed on multiple levels: *momento mori*; emblems of bottled-up environmental anxieties; or analogies for the explosion of creativity the artist has experienced in pursuing this daily project.

Bastienne Schmidt's ***Everyday Objects in Pandemic Times*** is a series of watercolor paintings of household objects and consumer products that have taken on a renewed significance in light of our a new reality. The artist has been producing a painting a day, documenting cleaning products such as Clorox bottles and Lysol wipes, newly elusive necessities like toilet paper, as well as such commonplaces of the American kitchen as Heinz Ketchup, Oreos, and Skippy peanut butter. Schmidt has gradually expanded her catalogue outward to encompass books with newly resonant titles (*Brave New World*, *The Idiot*), and now-symbolically loaded ephemera of family life such as a deflated soccer ball. The artist presents these objects objectively against a white background, rendered with detail and an inquisitive neutrality: an archaeology of a rapidly-morphing present we are struggling to understand. Reflecting a broader tendency within her practice of grouping and organizing objects according to non-scientific patterns, with *Everyday Objects in Pandemic Times*, Schmidt presents an open-ended lexicon, a Rorschach test of the pandemic mindset.

Both artists attest to the power and value of the daily practice of art in coming to terms with a world turned on its head. Schmidt speaks of the Zen-like state of focus that producing the watercolors daily has given her. Laramée, meanwhile, sharing his thoughts on the meaning of the artist's studio just prior to the shutdown, observed with prescience:

"I guess this is what we call 'home', a place where you stop thinking about externals, a place that brings you back to the most fundamental intimacy, face to face with yourself."