

ART | Austen Leah Rosenfeld | 13 November, 2015

## artist libby black makes paper louis vuitton bags and chanel rollerskates

A studio visit with the incomparable Libby Black, whose handmade logo-heavy sculptures make us think deeply about consumer culture.



When I visit Libby Black in her studio on a quiet street in Berkeley, CA, she is wearing jeans, a denim shirt, and a denim jacket. “I’m pretty basic,” she says, noting that her current outfit probably came from Gap or J.Crew. But don’t be fooled by Black’s appearance--she’s an artist whose work deals with ideas of excessiveness, status, labels, consumption, and desire. Black is known for her handmade replicas of designer products. She’s created a Louis Vuitton gym, Goyard/Chanel roller skates, and an entire replica of a Kate Spade store for a 2005 show at Yerba Buena. She also recently swam from Alcatraz to San Francisco.

Black’s new work has been featuring other elements--still life flowers, books, real and fantasy items from her life. Newspapers and shoeboxes are recurring motifs (“My mom had 51 pairs”). Until tomorrow, Black has a show up at New York’s Joshua Liner Gallery called There’s No Place Like Home, which features a recreation of her son’s tie (real) and a replica of a Vivienne Westwood trunk (fantasy). On the walls of her studio hang the covers of 1960s erotic lesbian novels with titles like Perfume and Pain, plus fashion spreads pulled from magazines. We chatted about excessiveness, desire, and how Louis Vuitton has asked her to stop making work.

### **What are your thoughts about the San Francisco art scene and how it’s changing?**

I think it’s really sad. I teach a grad class and I said to them the other day, ‘There has to be one place where you guys can live,’ because they tell me about their rents and that they’re not going to stay around here. It’s disheartening to me that a lot of the culture here is really shifting. But there’s a lot of great nonprofit stuff here that’s accessible for people. This is where I want to be. I want the weather, the produce, I want to be with liberal people even though they’re crazy sometimes.

### **Tell me about your current show up in New York right now.**

So I make things out of paper, hot glue and paint. I also do drawings and paintings. Some things I own, some things I don’t own, it’s fantasy and reality. I remake everything out of paper. All of this stuff is a portrait but there’s no person. It’s like remixing an old song to make it contemporary and bring it to people’s attention.

### **Why does Louis Vuitton always feature in your work? What in particular about the brand intrigues you?**

I remember when I was younger, driving in Florida with my parents and my mom was looking for the guy on the side of the road with the blanket and bags. That was a big thing for her, to find this fake bag. Now she's older and has a real bag and a fake Louis Vuitton checkbook that she got. So I thought it was funny: this real bag she could afford, and the fake one, and does it even matter anymore? Those experiences really informed my earlier work.

### **Do you desire things like Louis Vuitton bags?**

I wanted one. I don't so much anymore. When I wanted one, I made it out of paper and it fulfilled that need for me. If I had a real one I couldn't quite go there to use it. I'm just like, 'Oh you'll get it dirty.' When I made the bag I was like, 'It's not really about the bag, it's about experiencing the store and how you're treated, the whole 9 yards.' Making these out of paper is a way to talk about making a façade. We're accessorizing, these things can fall apart. Although the sculptures won't fall apart it alludes to not a solid material.

### **What's your interest in Janis Joplin? She also appears frequently in your work.**

I've always been interested in Janis. I wrote papers about her in high school. She didn't really fit in but she had this great talent, she was really insecure and she was an addict. I did a series of addict drawings, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Janis. It's kind of crazy, addiction.

### **So you're interested in both consumer addiction and drug addiction.**

When I first started doing this, the economy crashed and [it didn't feel right to make] this [luxury] stuff anymore. When I moved to Berkeley, I started using bumper stickers because everyone here has something to say. When I did the addicts I was like, 'What am I doing?' This is about excessiveness, it's about labels.

### **Are you an excessive person?**

I'm a pretty basic person in terms of how I live, the only excessive thing is food. I want to buy nice food. I go to the store and I'm like, 'Jesus, I just spent 200 bucks on kale.' I like shoes but I won't spend over \$250 on a pair of shoes.



### **Why are you interested in fashion?**

I'm interested in fashion conceptually. I love Vivienne Westwood and her protest thing. I loved when Karl Lagerfeld did the whole store thing. It was more about the set, the props.

### **Do you think we'd all be better off if we didn't desire things?**

I was talking to someone the other day about when you have that need to go shopping because you want to fulfill something inside you. I still have that need. I think it's OK to want. With the Louis Vuitton store, people would come in and say 'I hate Louis Vuitton' and leave, then people would come in who didn't like it but could enter it through my work, and then there were people who had the purse and love it and wanted to buy the sculpture. I'm very uncomfortable in the Louis Vuitton store but I can totally appreciate something beautiful. Vuitton has twice now tried to stop me from making my stuff. They called me down to their store and I was like, 'Oh my god, they're going to ask me to do a window display!' I was so young and stupid. I just kept making it. I had a little [legal] thing with J. Crew but Jenna Lyons actually ended up buying the piece. I talked to her on the phone and nearly fell over.

