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JONATHAN BERGER: *THE STORE*

CONTRIBUTORS: Syed Majid Ali, Eric Angus, Anonymous, BODE, Charles Burchfield, Carbondale Clay Center, James Castle, Comme des Garçons, Cara Croninger, Damien Davis, Vaginal Davis, Dirt Floor Studios, The Eames Office, Etienne Feijns, Glenwood Springs Mountain Valley Weavers, Green River Project, Alisa Grifo, Lee Hale, Trygve Harris/Enfleurage, Hornvarefabrikken, Hustle Forward, Peter Ivy, Reina Katzenberger, Sister Corita Kent, KIOSK, Kite House Magoji, Katrina Lapenne, Leekan Designs, Little Rickie, Mamo, Yuki Matsuo, Ross Menez/Salvor, Modern West Florals Co, Ted Muehling, Isamu Noguchi, Mr. Okumura, Bob Olson, Permanent Collection, Steve Presser, Sajeev Puri, Meri Rachna, Ramdasha, Phillip Retzsky, Marco Romeny, Betty Roytburd, Paula Rubenstein, Rue St. Denis, Sabbathday Lake Shakers, Dean Sameshima, Dosia Sanford, Peter Schumann, Biba Schutz, Bobby Sharp, Pierfrancesco Solimene, Michael Stipe, Trae Story, Ting's Gift Shop, Julie Tolentino, Walter Van Beirendonck, Various Projects, Ko Verzuu, Jonathan Williams, and Yamabikoya.

Aspen Art Museum

The Store is a total reimagining of the Aspen Art Museum's shop by American artist Jonathan Berger. At once an exhibition, meeting point, archive, and place of commerce, it includes more than 350 objects combining found, made, old, new, one-of-a-kind, mass-produced, raw and ephemeral materials—that which is widely acknowledged as art or design and that which is not. Some objects are not for sale, and others are priced from free to \$50,000.

The Store is inspired primarily by the artist's own first-hand experiences working and shopping in downtown New York in the 1990s. Despite their different wares and clientele, the many idiosyncratic and ultimately unclassifiable stores shared deeply personal expressions of self on the part of their proprietors as well as a unique specialization of endeavor that inspired Berger as an artist and led him to create this project.

Berger's personal selection of new, antique, and dead stock items from varying makers, regions, and time periods brings together jewelry, textiles, toys, furniture, ephemera, fragrances, ceramics, glassware, and household objects, as well as folk art and contemporary art. He has also facilitated a series of specially produced projects and exclusive products, including collaborations with Mountain Valley Weavers, clothing label BODE, fragrance company Enfleurage, musician

Ramdasha, and artist Julie Tolentino, all of which further *The Store's* mission as a generative creative venture.

The Store's distinctly democratic philosophy and approach extends into Berger's conception and design of the shop floor. Items are displayed in various scenarios, including within turn-of-the-century metal and glass cases lit contrastingly by contemporary plastic lampshades, on dead stock 1960s modular shelving produced by the Tomado company in Holland, as well as hanging from the ceiling, arranged on the floor, and tacked to sections of cork wall. Through conflating radically different modes of display across time, context, and function, Berger creates an environment where objects are able to coexist as we know them while also forming new primary identities based on bringing different characteristics to the fore, including color, form, material, and historical and cultural significance. When considered as an installation, Berger's vignettes or arrangements of these objects also allow them to form unlikely relationships with one another, further complicating and expanding our understanding and appreciation of what they are. These and other exhibition design strategies aim to flatten aesthetic hierarchies, using the museum context to question how display contributes to our attribution of value. Simultaneously, the project questions attitudes towards so-called "low-level" commerce in opposition to boutique or "luxury" experiences.

At any one time, one of the display cases will be dedicated to the history of a particular store that has inspired Berger, creating an archival exhibition within the larger project, which furthers broader ways of thinking about the creative potential and cultural impact of the store format. Among these archival exhibitions is the history of legendary dead stock clothier Rue St. Denis, as well as that of legendary New York store Little Rickie (1984–2019) and its owner Phillip Retzky, who personally employed the artist in the late 1990s, and Ting's Gift Shop, founded in 1958 by Tam Ting, which continues to operate to this day in its original location in New York City's Chinatown.

"There was a phenomenon of eccentric stores run by artists or just interesting unusual people in NYC pretty consistently through the 80s and 90s. I hesitate to classify or quantify them in relation to 'art' because they just were what they were—pure personal expressions of imagination and creativity. You always had the sense that the only thing the proprietor, or the person doing it, could do in life successfully was to establish, own, and operate their hyper-specialized business. They could try to work in an office, but they would get fired. Or they could try to do something else and maybe could pull it off, but they'd be miserable. Instead, they were living their best life doing

this incredibly specific thing, which would never have occurred to you, in general, let alone as a profession or type of store. Despite being seemingly niche, somehow these stores were vital to the lives of the many types of customers they had in the many communities in which they existed. They weren't necessary in a way that was apparent or easy to explain, but they were essential businesses.

I want anyone to be able to come into *The Store* at the AAM, connect with something they find, and take it out of the exhibition space and into their life. I hope that *The Store* can model a kind of democracy similar to the stores that inspired me. There are different kinds of currency, worth, and value at work in the AAM store. You may form a connection with something and buy it because it's expensive and luxurious, or alternately because it's a steal of a deal. Or you might fall in love with something a little more or a little less than you intended to spend, where the currency and value isn't money, but magic."

– Jonathan Berger

Jonathan Berger (b. 1980, lives and works in New York)

ABOUT THE ASPEN ART MUSEUM

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 1979, the Aspen Art Museum is a thriving and globally engaged non-collecting contemporary art museum. Following the 2014 opening of the museum's facility designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Shigeru Ban, the AAM enjoys increased attendance, renewed civic interaction, and international media attention. In July 2017, the AAM was one of ten institutions to receive the United States' National Medal for Museum and Library Services for its educational outreach to rural communities in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley and its fostering of learning partnerships with civic and cultural partners within a 100-mile radius of the museum's Aspen location.

Aspen Art Museum
637 East Hyman Avenue
Aspen, Colorado 81611

aspenartmuseum.org
(970) 925-8050

Hours
Tuesday–Sunday, 10 AM–6 PM
Closed Mondays

Objects from the *The Store* are available at the AAM or online at thestore.aspenartmuseum.org.

Admission to the AAM is free courtesy of Amy and John Phelan.

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