

Dylan Languell: *Great Value*  
Jeff Bailey Gallery  
127 Warren Street, Hudson, NY  
July 9 – August 7, 2016



Dylan Languell, *Great Value*, installation view

Dylan Languell told me once about his interest in the life-work, in tombs and troves. He spoke of the votive offerings of ancient cultures in the same breath as Mark Twain's autobiography, left unedited at some 5,000 pages. A lust for the collection and the serial can be felt in Languell's own work, which has involved the curing and folding of housepaints, the meticulous synchronization of music boxes, and large-scale iron-on quiltworks in friendship beads, some of which glow in the dark. These treasures are the type to cover every wall and fill every shelf. They might bring to mind an encyclopedia's pages of color plates—every shipwreck in order of depth, every crown from the Pope's to Napoleon's.

For a recent series, Languell has gathered a large quantity of snack bags, fishing them out of trash bins or from the side of the road. After microwaving, this material becomes malleable enough for combination into figures not quite one foot in height. They are called *kachinas*, after those created by the Hopi tribe and other Pueblo peoples in what is now the southwestern United States of America. The original kachina dolls were educational devices, instructing young women in the spirits that controlled rains, harvests, and other fortunes.

Throughout the twentieth century, these figures developed more naturalistic proportions and poses in response to white consumer interest in Native American craftwork. They were

often made from cottonwood root, painted with dyes derived from corn smut and other high plains agricultural products, some of which can be found among the ingredients listed on Languell's materials in partially hydrogenated or high fructose varieties.

His kachinas were assembled for exhibition last year at Jeff Bailey Gallery in Hudson, NY, under the title *Great Value*, also the name of Wal-Mart's generic line of household goods. The dolls stood in tight trios atop towers of whitewashed automobile tires, a rough-and-ready concession to gallery decorum. The faked desert-worshipping flair of Sun Chips, Veggie Harvest, and Frito-Lay stays baked into these idols, and Languell plays cunningly with their existing graphic surfaces, allowing certain elements to shrivel and others to stretch. The puckers and folds recall Shrinky Dinks of childhoods past and invisible rays of not-so-fictive futures.

In Pueblo traditions, the doll is a miniature of the divine spirit it depicts, twice removed. Nearer still are the kachina dancers, masked performers who portray the Kachinas for ceremonial purposes. In this sense, any representation of a Kachina is always an impoverished copy. The originals are meant to have walked among the people until they retreated (under threat of foreign violence or homegrown apathy, depending on your histories) to the underworld. To this tradition of duplication and reenactment, Languell offers another appeal to the vestigial power of proxies, set in the metallic flesh of our most thoughtless disposals.

— Maxwell Paparella