SUE JOHNSON
HOME OF FUTURE THINGS
September 16 – November 11, 2016

The Martha and Robert Fogelman Galleries of Contemporary Art
Featuring works by the artist Sue Johnson (b. 1957, San Francisco, CA), this exhibition considers the cyclical nature of mass consumption. Included are Johnson’s small-scale works on paper as well as floor-to-ceiling vinyl panels and decals that transform the gallery into the interior of an ideal, modern home. As the exhibition title suggests, Johnson envisions a world in which the home is nostalgic and familiar, yet also reduced to an empty space simply existing to house various things.

Johnson’s work makes various art historical allusions, ranging from ancient Greek mosaics and 17th-century Dutch still-life paintings to Dada and Pop collages. Despite spanning a vast expanse of time and place, these references share a common fascination with commodities and excess that Johnson remixes through a 21st-century lens. Specifically, her work is rooted in the Dutch still-life tradition of *vanitas*—images displaying symbolic objects that encourage the viewer to consider the transience of life. Her process intentionally blurs the boundaries between the real and imagined, historical and timeless, hand-painted and digital. What results is an immersive environment constantly toying with our perceptions.

The exhibition opens with works on paper from Johnson’s series *Designs for Imaginary Shelves* (2011-13). Unlike the shelves depicted elsewhere in the exhibition, these are distinct in their emptiness, as well as their fanciful designs. Inspired by a Chinese-style, red lacquer circular shelf owned by Johnson’s Swedish grandfather and given to her as a child, these imaginary shelves are designs for building a modern cabinet of curiosities waiting to be filled.

The almost ascetic simplicity of these works contrasts with the visual overload of Johnson’s *Ready-Made Dream* (2013), an installation comprised of vinyl panels representing different rooms of a mid-century home that wrap the perimeter of the gallery. Johnson creates these scenes by digitally collaging images of objects sourced from popular magazines with elements she paints by hand. Her flattening of these distinctions creates a trompe-l’oeil effect in which the viewer is tricked into thinking what she is viewing is real and three-dimensional. Referencing Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, Johnson presents a larger-than-life, prefabricated version of the “American Dream” built on the insatiable desire to consume. As one approaches the panels, the seemingly real objects and rooms begin to dissolve with varying degrees of pixelation. The inclusion of actual objects in the installation such as an avocado-green telephone and a paint-by-numbers painting next to ostensibly real “flooring” and “rug” decals that the artist created for the exhibition further confuses the distinction between reality and illusion.

While the bulk of Johnson’s imagery references the booming consumer culture of the post-WWII period, the exhibition itself serves as a contemporary *vanitas*—an all-encompassing tableau that contemplates our continued obsession with material objects. The artist clips images from vintage magazines dense with advertisements selling the various products deemed essential for creating the ideal American home. In this process, Johnson has amassed an extensive collection of material purchased from websites such as eBay, thereby giving new life to old commerce.
DESIGNS FOR IMAGINARY SHELVES (2011-13)

Sojourn in Venice (Yellow), 2012
Watercolor and pencil on paper
9 x 12 in.

Entertainment Cabinet No. 2 (Let’s Make A Deal), 2013
Gouache and pencil on paper
20 x 16 in.

Sojourn in Venice (after Anthony Caro at Peggy Guggenheim Collection), 2012-13
Watercolor and pencil on paper
9 x 12 in.

OBJECTS

Anonymous, American Heritage 3D2, mid-20th century
Paint-by-numbers still-life painting | 16 x 12 in.
Collection of the artist

Avocado wall-mounted telephone with extra long cord, ca. 1970s
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist

DECALS

Unswept Floor, 2016
Vinyl floor decal | 36 x 60 in.

Shag Lawn, 2016
Vinyl floor decal | 48 in. diameter

Construction Zone, 2016
Vinyl floor decal | 48 x 48 in.
**Selections from READY-MADE DREAM, 2013**

**Here and There Room Divider:** Just What is it that Makes Yesterday’s Homes so Similar, so Appealing?, 2013

Print on vinyl | 115 x 75 in.

1. The new shape of a lemon
2. The shape of processed cheese food
3. The shape of mayonnaise
4. The shape of ketchup
5. The shape of something valuable
6. The shape of something ideal

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**Mod-style Hearth, 2013**

Print on vinyl | 115 x 184 in.

1. Generic abstract sculpture
2. Shadow of generic abstract sculpture
3. Overturned striped bag of popcorn
4. Transformation of trees into logs, side view
5. Transformation of trees into logs, end view
6. Mid-century modern gravel art, marketed as the “Provincial” still life
7. Mid-century modern gravel art, marketed as the “Colonial” still life
8. Blue-and-white Chinese bowl
9. Nautilus shell
10. Rooster
11. Reproduction of a watercolor reproduction by Sue Johnson of Wave (1943-44) by British sculptor, Barbara Hepworth
12. Overall room “look” based on historical sources

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1. Here and There Room Divider openly recreates the look of mass-produced plastic dollhouse furniture manufactured by Louis Marx and Company. Marx furniture was cast in a single color, and featured details of everyday objects as if placed on surfaces in a real house.
2. Title is an allusion to the now iconic 1956 collage by British pop artist, Richard Hamilton, Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?
3. Marx produced what is called the “Rooster Ranch House” with lift-off roof that featured a rooster silhouette on the outside chimney.
4. For more room design ideas like this one see the Marx New Split Level Dollhouse #4861, and Better Homes & Gardens Decorating Books (Des Moines: Meredith Publishing Company, 1956) pages 16 and 208.
**Picture Window Looking West, 2013**

Print on vinyl | 115 x 115 in.


2. Wood paneling as subject

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**Early Sunday Morning in the Kitchen**, 2013

Print on vinyl | 115 x 376 in.

1. Title intended as a reference to Edward Hopper’s painting from 1930, *Early Sunday Morning*.
3. Reference to Sue Johnson’s previous archival project, The New Ark Preservation Project, in which cultural objects are sealed in Food Saver brand sealing bags. The project’s collection categories include: 1) animals wearing clothes, 2) things that look like other things, and 3) fake food items.
4. Also available as wrapping paper.

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1. Reproduction of a reproduction of a George Nelson-style ball clock
2. Reproduction of a reproduction of an Aunt Jemima clock
3. Those that, at a distance, resemble collectible cookie jars (from an old auction catalog)
4. Streamlined (mixer, there’s another in the warehouse for when this one doesn’t work anymore)
5. Cleanliness (spray disinfectant and covered trash can)
6. Abundance (refrigerator, fully-stocked)
7. Space-Age (built-in see-thru double oven with control panel)
8. Convenience (electric can-opener)
9. More Abundance (stack of pancakes with syrup)
10. Appealing New Gadget (electric skillet)
11. Pre-Modern Way (washing dishes by hand)
12. Hygienic Modern Labor-Saver (dishwasher)
13. Economical Efficiency (meal-sealing-type device)
14. Cheerful Color (turquoise stove and oven combo)
15. “Souvenir” wallpaper pattern
Land of Plenty, 2013
Print on vinyl | 115 x 187 in.

1. Time-keeping mutant cat
2. Metal TV tray showcasing Coca-Cola products, circa 1962
3. Salt & pepper shaker in the shape of a wood grain TV set
4. Smiling Pancakes (friend of Smiling Coffee Pot)
5. Hamburger being helped by macaroni
6. Salisbury Steak dinner
7. Big steak
8. Fancy gelatin
9. Soup & sandwich combo
10. Meatloaf slathered in ketchup
11. Atomic-style vessel
12. Half-sandwich with bacon
13. No-brand ketchup
14. "Mod-Automat" wallpaper pattern

An acknowledgment of the importance of Belgian artist, Rene Magritte and his 1928-29 oil on canvas painting, La trahison des images (English: The Treachery of Images) that consists of a painted pipe under which the artist wrote "Ceci n’est pas une pipe" (English: This is not a pipe.)

Self-explanatory. Though, we can add this picture was taken in Harding, New Jersey, where the family lived in a split-level house. Over the mantle is a black-and-white painting of Monterey, California, which was a favorite family painting since they had just recently relocated from California to New Jersey.
The Forest Room, 2013
(Left Wall)
Print on vinyl | 115 x 115 in.

1. Wooden sign of the American Dream
2. Decorative wooden tennis rackets
3. Modern dartboard
4. Wooden red spring horse
5. Wooden duck decoy
6. Non-wooden kayak, hanging
7. Wooden paneling, diagonally installed

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Room with a View of Infinity, 2013

Print on vinyl | 115 x 115 in.

1. Reproduction of a watercolor painting by Sue Johnson that reproduces Endless Column by Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) from 1918.
2. Luxurious deep-pile carpet
3. Black-and-white picture of an Eames-era lounge chair and footrest
4. Repeat motif (cross sections of two types of wood found in an out-of-date encyclopedia) used to create the wallpaper pattern, "Woody."