

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

## A Still Life of a World that Is Never Still

By Howard Hurst,  
September 20, 2012

How many hours do you spend a day looking at cat pictures on the internet? The fact is our already media saturated lives are constantly becoming more image dependent. We shape much of our experience based upon the associations and decisions we make on the internet. Whether we are seeking information or shopping on eBay it is no secret that we rely more and more on stock images. It is this reality that informs artist Kate Steciw. Her current exhibition *Boundless Hyper* is on view at Toomer Labzda Gallery in the Lower East Side.

Her three large scale multimedia pieces are drawn from the boundless flood of imagery we are exposed to on a daily basis. The artist began her hyper-complex digital collages from her experience as a photo retoucher. As she helps to populate the web with pixel perfect commercial images during the day it is her immersion into this image heavy world that spurns her artistic practice.

The artist mines pictures from her exploration of the internet and stock image databases. Each of her pieces are titled for the list of search terms from which she gleans her sources. The artist embraces

below  
*Boundless Hyper, Installation View*



the highly polished aesthetic of the digital marketplace. In each of her works we see the bright hues and glossy finish that accompany the promised pleasures of commerce. For all the references to popular culture it would be easy to make the connection to the legacy of pop art however the work balances on the thin line between painterly formalism and conceptual commentary. Rather than embracing the thin pleasure of the commercial world, the artist's work seeks to blend the disparate narratives and expose the fragmented, often visually schizophrenic nature of our overly stimulated existence. She weaves a tapestry of images, drawing from the intuitive advertising on sites like Amazon or Google. Other decisions encompass the personal. By inserting herself into the preexisting systems of information that govern images in the various databanks of the internet, the artist renders the highly intentional universe of the screen into a mesh of conflicting narratives.

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"Live, Laugh, Love #3" (2012), 14" x 12" x 11",  
Customized Metal Wall Art



Unrelated images blend and collide. It is the push and pull between the digital relic of our online detritus and the formal possibilities of Photoshop that throw this work into tension. Alchemy is a tricky business, one usually associated with rendering lead into gold. Steciw transmutes the base materials of every day e-drudgery into a reality caught somewhere between free association visual poetry and the photo based communication that seems to dominate our digital reality. Spun around in a vortex where content arm wrestles itself, we are denied as much as we are given.

Perhaps the most visually compelling work in her current exhibition is "Apply, Applications, Auto, Automotive, Burn, Cancer, Copper, Diameter, Fire, Flame, Frame, Metal, Mayhem, Pipe, Red, Roiling, Rolling, Safe, Safety, Solid, Strip, Tape, Trap, Trappings" (2012) is a tour de force of honesty and negation. Her alphabetically ordered search terms form a framework of basic understanding. As much as they allow us entry into the surface of her work they provide a level of latency that denies us understanding. Each decision sparkles as if a synapse burning itself out of memory. By scrambling and pushing the information in her digital files to their utmost limits Kate Steciw seems to forge an additional level of meaning based in a realm of pure abstraction, beyond the literalism of our everyday visual culture.

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"Apply, Applications, Auto, Automotive, Burn, Cancer, Copper, Diameter, Fire, Flame, Frame, Metal, Mayhem, Pipe, Red, Roiling, Rolling, Safe, Safety, Solid, Strip, Tape, Trap, Trappings" (2012), 60"x44 , C-print, oak frame, mixed media.



In "Live, Laugh, Love #3" (2012), the artist's sculptural contribution to the exhibition, she appropriates the domestic, text based wire sculptures that adorn yuppie apartments and ambitious dorm rooms everywhere. These faux motivational non-arts are contorted beyond recognition, rent as if a guard rail pried from the highway and mangled by some sort of monster. The result is as if Alexander Calder got into a fight with a gift shop owner and decided to fuck some shit up.

Steciw does not limit the conflict at work in her art to the flatness of her printed surface. Rupturing the plexiglas confines of her frame as if a computer screen, she bedecks them with the detritus of internet shopping carts. These finishing touches have an off color charm. They seem to relish their lack of finish, an ironic turn for images that seem to revel in their own over saturation. It is this contradiction and lack of direction in Steciw's art more than any final conclusion that seems to reflect the reality of our laptop generation.