

INERTIA

WENDY WHITE – UNTITLED/MIAMI

Free Beer Tomorrow by Wendy White

On View now at Untitled Art Fair Miami, December 6- 8, 2019. Friday and Saturday 11am-7pm, Sun-day 11am-5pm presented by Shulamit Nazarian



I've followed your work for a long time and it's been interesting to see how your work has shifted from depicting a certain culture, to actually *employing* the materials of a culture, like jeans. How did you arrive at that stage?

Basically, the 2016 election happened and I didn't want to go back into my studio and just make a painting, because what's the point? I wanted to make something *from* something—to start with something that had a built in history. It seemed like a moment that couldn't be depicted. It needed to be *described*.

Jeans were invented during the Gold Rush. So, to me, denim embodies the original pioneer bullshit that some people still subscribe to — a sort of get-rich-quick ideal rooted in stealing things from the Earth. It's also about the myth of masculinity as related to durability, safety and strength. Yeah, there are pleasing colors and hearts and rainbows, but there are choices behind each material. I've punctuated the space with shiny black sculptures that are in a way very ominous. We're embroiled in a moment when artists should have a pulse. I believe we should be translating what's happening. Other people will always have their heads in the sand but artists need to be alive and reacting. A lot of people just want to ride it out or pretend it's not happening. I don't want to do that.



Americana, sports culture, and masculinity are understood in such a specific way in the US. How do you feel your work is interpreted internationally as opposed to in the US?

It feels like we're way more woke to some stuff here. Right now in Europe, pure abstract painting is still a thing. I mean, what the fuck? It's complacency and escapism and it's cyclical. The first time I had a show in Germany, I got a review that looked really long and dense and important, but it was in German so I had to use Google translate. It turned out it was all about *me* and how I looked. It was like, "...here she is with her high tops and baseball hats." It positioned me as a sort of synthetic American based on my appearance.

I think people confuse, especially with women, our look or our biography with what the work's about. That's all wrapped up in masculinity and the power structure. They don't do that with men. Male artists just accrue authenticity points while women — all of us: athletes, artists — are just supposed to be happy with any crumbs not already devoured by the myth of male genius. I mean, in the U.S. we have a president who is a diabolical dangerous moron all because we just couldn't unify around a qualified woman. That says it all.

You've designed the lounge here at Untitled, How do you feel now that people are inhabiting the space?

It's so great! I've always loved seeing people moving in front of art. I feel like I made something that's art, yet organic and accessible.

It's about empty promises, the American dream, the myths we were sold. There are pages from vintage National Parks books that I drew on then printed on neoprene, the material of yoga mats and wetsuits. There are faux calfskin rugs. The denim is real, but because it's such a familiar material, we kind of separate ourselves from what it represents culturally and historically. It just *feels* comfortable. The faux-wood paneling is a nod to a 70s basement or rec room, or those auto body shops that always had girly calendars and Farah Fawcett posters but were off-limits to actual women. It's about all those male-centric spaces that women aren't allowed in. It's a recasting of those spaces. So it's hilarious that men are lounging all over it, too, resting their heads on the bleach-splattered butt pillows. I love that.

The title "Free Beer Tomorrow" is about how we never seem to get shit today; we always have to be patient. Sort of like "the future is female." It's like hey, here's a cute t-shirt to appease your crazy demands. Fuck that. So it's about chasing dreams and the reality of the emptiness of it all. Ultimately, though, it's also about the optimism that comes with being alive and wanting to make art or do a good job or have a family, or friends, or a beer. Things barely get better on the micro-level, but there's hope.



Are the jeans for the jofa collected?

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I buy the jeans second hand so I can choose the right brands and styles and washes. I couldn't exactly put out a craigslist ad saying, *dear white men: send me your bootcut Wranglers and Lees, the bigger the better!* But big jeans are ideal because you get more surface area. Once the man is out of them, you get a nice big swath of fabric to make something new out of. I lay them out and construct the compositions like paintings, as if the legs are brush strokes. It's very direct.



As someone who has achieved a certain level of success, you also seem like someone who is radical and pushes against cultural expectations. How do you stay in touch with your creativity in light of the external forces?

I try to be intuitive and in the moment. People will tell you that every time you do or say something edgy, that it's a risk. Women have told me that they are scared to speak out for fear of losing stature, but that's exactly the fear they *want* you to have. I decided a long time ago that I'd rather risk so-called "stature" within a power structure that is flawed than to make things I don't believe in. The reward is that it eventually attracts other, more interesting people. The art world is very conservative. Conforming to the established system just perpetuates the cycle. If you're scared of losing stuff, you just keep making the same things. So a lot of what people do and don't do is dictated by fear. It's so boring. I mean, seriously, do you want to be on your deathbed saying gee, I'm really glad I didn't speak out about that infraction that happened right in front of my face? Or I'm so glad I didn't make that thing that was different than the other stuff I made? You can be a good artist and person without having to be a doormat.

In your opinion, what's the best way to be an effective participant in the art community, locally or otherwise, and what does that mean to you?

There's a million art communities all orbiting around each other at the same time. There are also lots of forces actively working against real creativity. So artist-to-artist relationships are the most precious thing we have. There are some wonderful people in the art world — wonderful gallerists, some of whom I am lucky enough to work with, great curators — but artists are the content providers. No one shares our job nor truly understands it. We're the unit that, if we stick together, can't be broken. I believe in holding that unit together and not letting it be about this other, outside thing. To that end, I try to support

women and artists who are marginalized. I try to recommend women for things whenever possible. It's not that there aren't many male artists that I love and respect, but I make a concerted effort to recommend and bring up other women. I also try to stay open, to not be a snob, and to never take myself too seriously — because let's be real, we're all just out here making weird shit.

Wendy White,
Free Beer Tomorrow, 2019

A site-specific installation by Wendy White inviting us to reconsider, recast, and reinvent the myth of the American sublime.

Unwind with a drink on custom furniture made from repurposed men's jeans flayed, bleached and collaged to form a new fabric for a new era.

Gaze upon scenes of the American West printed on giant sheets of neoprene set against rustic paneling reminiscent of vintage rec rooms, bars, and auto body shops.

Stroll across mint green floors where faux calfskin rugs offer synthetic sunsets below pixelated hearts and dripping rainbows.

As the blinking sign reminds us, Free Beer Tomorrow is an empty promise like the rainbow's end or an untouched expanse of land just out of reach yet full of endless potential.

Hand-carved wood paneling, repurposed distressed denim, upholstery foam and wood custom furniture, digital prints on neoprene, hand painted faux calfskin rugs, paper cigarettes, custom floor paint, LED sign, live plants
Dimensions variable

Presented by the Artist and Shulamit Nazarian **B** (23)