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Review Pippa Garner at Redling Fine Art: Vehicles for clever satire

By **Christopher Knight**

Art Critic

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Pippa Garner has satire down pat. That's no mean feat, given the slipperiness of the literary genre.

At Redling Fine Art, two new mixed-media assemblages join a selection of older works — sculptures, short videos and pencil drawings. In a vein more recently mined by artists such as Jim Shaw and Jeffrey Vallance, they wreak havoc on folksy American ideals like ingenuity and open-mindedness.

"Shirtstorm" is a circular mandala composed of two-dozen handmade, sloganeering T-shirts — the kind for sale at Hollywood's Walk of Fame or on the Venice Boardwalk. Recording expressive, mostly prurient outbursts of vulgar annoyance at life's little nuisances, the T-shirt wall-graphic is a colorful, very witty map of our current spiritual universe.

"Crowd Shroud" is a mixed-up sedan chair — a hired conveyance once used to carry aristocrats through crowded London streets while sequestered from the rabble. Garner's box, however, with its two-way mirrored windows, is built atop a wheelchair.

This campy apparatus wryly skewers its legacy as aristocratic passenger disability. Yet it also suggests potential liberation through independent locomotion. In the 1960s Garner studied in the automotive design program at Pasadena's Art Center College, and car culture has been her frequent subject ever since.

In the short videos, Garner gets her deadpan on, playing multiple roles with just the right measure of earnestness and folly. In one, advocating the virtue of self-marriage, she plays both bride and groom in split-screen. In another, she sends up TV's domestic design shows that promise better life through lackluster redecoration schemes.

Her primary contribution to trends in domestic products is the homemade Personal Utility Drone — or PUD — a clunky home-missile unlikely to get off the ground except in the artist's fervid imagination. As inventive American consumption demands, your PUD is accompanied by a guarantee of instant obsolescence. Good design aims toward the future, she advises, but keep in mind that the future never arrives.

Detailed Pop drawings from the late 1970s through the 1990s are like outtakes from the back of old Mad magazine and Archie comic books, where sea monkeys, X-ray specs and mail-order hypnotism lessons were on offer. (The drawings are signed Phil Garner, her name prior to her transition to Pippa.) Drawings tout a men's hair fashion that advocates letting sideburns grow long enough to braid — “pig-burns,” she calls them — and propose the construction of trailer parks, which are big gardens planted on flatbed trailer-trucks that can be driven to overbuilt urban neighborhoods to provide some greenery.

Garner has an ear for life's mundane madness, which she turns against itself to throw things into high relief. More Horace than Juvenal, her insightful humor is arch rather than piercing.

Redling Fine Arts, 6757 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. Through June 3; closed Sundays and Mondays. (323) 460-2046, www.redlingfineart.com

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