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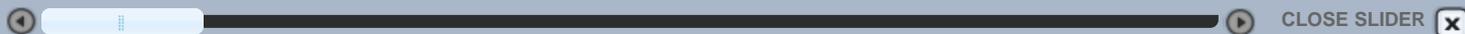
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November 4, 2013

David B. Jang and Reconstituting the Commonplace

Meher McArthur

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Asian Accents: This article is part of an ongoing series that explores the diverse range of artistic influences from Asia in the arts and culture of Southern California.

The narrow metal slats of one set of window blinds open while another set closes, then closes again as its neighbor opens. To a gentle swishing sound, the blinds appear to be performing a dance, communicating movements to each other via some sort of mechanical magic. I peer through the openings of David B. Jang's installation "Subjectivity Value" attempting to catch a view of the other side of the blind before it disappears again. Walking through the "rooms" shaped by the walls of blinds, I am mesmerized by the blinking motion of these moving metal walls, how they transform the space and light by expanding and contracting, revealing and concealing. I also notice a transformation of my own perspective. These window blinds -- at home, just a device to keep out the daylight -- are no longer functional, utilitarian objects. In this installation, Jang has elevated them into playful, poetic and provocative works of art that force us to look in new ways at our commonplace household things.

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"Exercise" by David B. Jang, 2013, Vacuum sealer, chip bag and custom circuit board, 40

For Korean-born David B. Jang, the re-appropriation and reconstitution of everyday objects and industrial cast-offs is at the core of his artistic endeavors. Using these materials themselves as his artistic language, Jang makes powerful statements about contemporary life. His inventive approach to materials is exemplified by his new series "High Capacities," several of which are on view at the Los Angeles Art Association's Gallery 825 until November 8. As with "Subjectivity Value," the works express circularity in the life of the objects, shift attention away from the product itself -- such as Coke cans, window blinds or plastic tubing -- to the process and the consumer. "David is an incredibly focused artist with great artistic ingenuity and the technical skills to bring his ideas to life," says Peter Mays, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Art Association and its premiere exhibition venue, Gallery 825. "Whenever we plan an exhibition of his work at the gallery, his creations always exceed our expectations."

One of his most ingenious kinetic installations is "Value," a wall-mounted work that comprises a row of four chip bags attached to vacuum sealers controlled by a circuit board. Each bag appears to breathe softly as the air is sucked out and then allowed in again, evoking the expansion and contraction of our own lungs during light exercise. Perhaps too, the labored breathing of these plastic chip bags is implying a suffocation of body, mind and spirit in a culture that is increasingly characterized by junk food, plastic packaging and mechanical devices.



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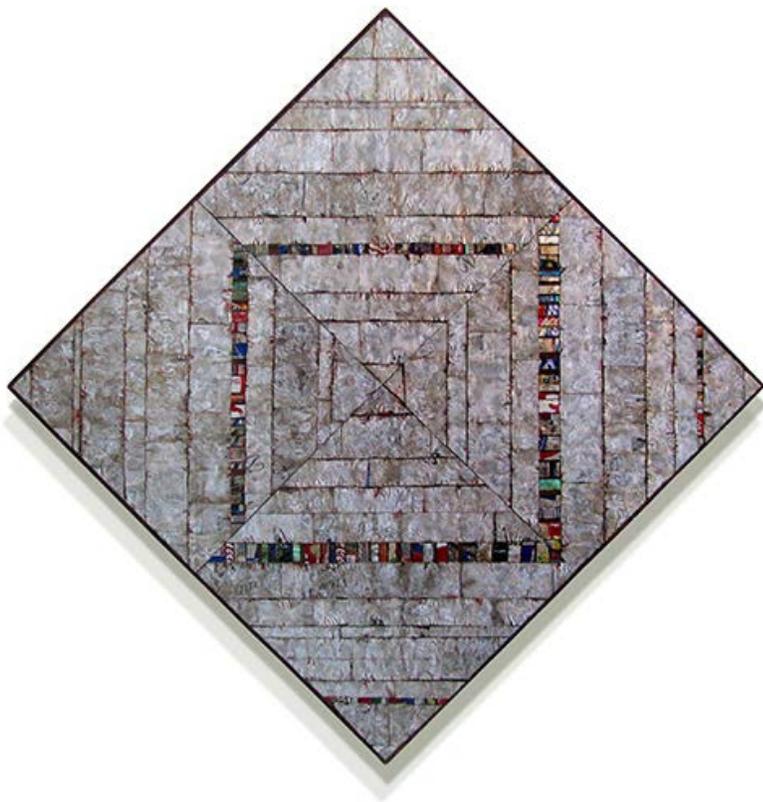
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"Spectacle" by David B. Jang, 2013, Swimming tube, trash can, PVC pipe, air pump and custom circuit board, 115

In his playful kinetic sculpture "Spectacle," a long plastic drainpipe is mounted on a metal trash can and ringed by several colorful children's swimming tubes. To what sounds like the roar of a vacuum cleaner hidden somewhere inside the construction, the swimming tubes inflate, rising up much of the length of the pipe, embracing the tube in a three-dimensional plastic rainbow. Though the piece is whimsical in its form, its message seems more serious: the noise, the trash can, the rings of engulfing plastic can be read as a reminder us of how consumerism is itself consuming much of contemporary culture.



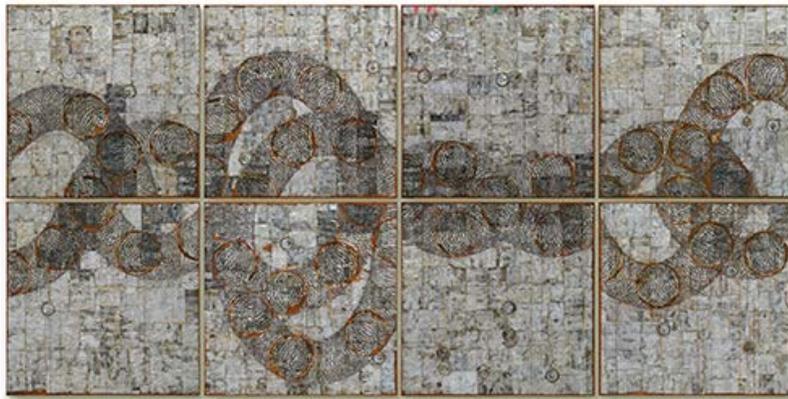
"Unity" by David B. Jang, 2013, aluminum cans, wood, oil and stain, 68

Fortunately, Jang is by no means dark and desperate. The beauty, ingenuity and playfulness in his work offer us hope that we need not be controlled by the materials of our lives. Indeed, by speaking their language and re-purposing the trash cans, junk food packaging and factory cast-offs into works of art, Jang presents the possibility of transcending our material world and rediscovering our spiritual selves. This is particularly apparent in his wall-mounted pieces crafted out of aluminum beverage cans. Works such as Unity possess the intricate beauty and geometric forms of a Buddhist mandala, an artistic representation of an enlightened realm. For this work, Jang cut out small squares and strips from discarded aluminum cans and applied them with geometric precision to build up a powerful concentric pattern that draws us deep into its center. The Coca Cola, Fanta and other logos, shrunk down into a small but dynamic element, do little to upset the meditative calm of the composition.



"Subjectivity Value" by David B. Jang, 2013, window blinds, steel, electric motor and custom made circuit board, 87

In works like Unity, Jang's goal is to "deconstruct, re-program and re-constitute industrial and commercial cast-offs to reveal new relationships." Jang says of his work: "I introduce new and unexpected material so that an even broader diversity can be unified; old forms are broken in order that new and tighter modes of unification might be introduced." In all of his recent work, we witness a new relationship forming, one in which Jang brings the materials of our everyday lives back under control, defining them before they can define us. At the same time, he grants the materials respect and a more meaningful, long-lasting -- not disposable -- existence and role in our lives. We do not simply consume them; we contemplate them. They no longer control us; they complement us. In his able hands, Jang transforms the commonplace -- a can, a pipe, a set of blinds -- into a common place where the material and spiritual can co-exist.



"Emerge" by David B. Jang, 2012, Aluminum cans, wood, wax, oil and stain, 72

David B. Jang's *High Capacities* series can be seen at [Gallery 825](#) until November 8, 2013. He will be at the gallery on November 6 at 7pm for *Conversations with the Artists*. His work will also be on view at the [Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery](#) from November 3 through January 5, 2014. All his works can be seen on his [website](#).

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Top Image: "Replicate Substance" by David B. Jang, 2012, Lamp shield and steel, 124" x 72" x 134" | Courtesy of the artist



About the Author

Originally from the UK, Meher McArthur is a freelance Asian art historian, author and educator based in Los Angeles. Her current exhibition *Folding Paper: The Infinite Possibilities of Origami* is touring the US until the end of 20... [MORE](#) ▶



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