

Dennis Balk

## JENNIFER BOLANDE, AN INVITATION...

First, there are these Bolande objects, put together components really, mostly familiar, not in the sense of gallery familiar, but from the street or from a friend's apartment, or garage, maybe the storage of a retail store. Looking at these things the tendency is to glance over most of it as things already understood, they're handsome but what are they doing here, stacked up like this. All the references and associations, the glut of distractions begin to flood in. Then there is the other veneer to these things, an unfamiliarity, a skewing to the very same objects, this is not quickly understood, the sure becomes unsure, it doesn't even have the familiarity of the artist's hand. There's also a picture, a photograph, and oddly, it's a picture of what I'm looking at. This changes it, it pulls in a particular frame of focus. An invitation, maybe a suggestion, the viewing shifts away from just seeing and calculating these objects, and it's now clearly about this process I myself am in, this process of considering.

The white-ghetto-chic glamour of the late 80s East Village for me was rough and depressing. I lived on 6th and B. It was a tough time, having just moved in from Venice Beach, didn't know yet how to get my bearings and get myself set up. Building after building burned out or half torn down. I saw a kid walking down the street not too far ahead, get the back of his head caved in by another kid with a two by four. Open fires, etc. There were a few storefront galleries that dug in and put up shows, and to call these galleries outposts, is really accurate. The good ones weren't mimicking the recent conceptual aesthetics, they moved past pictures. These artists and artist dealers favored strategies over expression, intellect over the damaged genius persona and emerge they did, from the burned out ruins of SOHO. I remember the night of the Koons Rabbit debut and the moment when a distraught art lover ripped the toilet seat off Meyer Vaisman's "The Whole Public Thing". These were the headiest of days, where a renewed earnestness and ambition ran deep into the status of the object. This work didn't look like art,

it wasn't art. It was something else, something we hadn't yet seen or considered. Jennifer came up through this New York. Alongside the commodity work, her work had a different quality of purpose, a bit tighter focus, a new opportunity. The piece *Conjunction Assemblage*, 1988, understands the construction and randomness of our attention. And it's here we get the invitation. The objects and the surfaces become something to do with culture, something we know, but not really. The picture shifts the attention to the process of looking. That's culture too, something we're trained to know, but not really, as the work takes you gently by the hand, walks you out into the open landscape past the elaborate grey busy buzz of activity, and once there, you're prompted to turn around. And there it is, the point-to-point process you just experienced, the grided out culmination of all the agreements, concessions and pre-determinations that were your comprehension. Those are the steps you just went through to get to where you are right now, looking at those steps. Stay there for a little while and look at that part of the object.

In Jennifer's work, the fundamental operative is that the object is the thing it says it is, without the dependent references of elsewhere. It's not discursive retaliation. Her compositions are necessarily straight on in a way that diverts the process of looking from becoming a disconnected dive into the habitual aesthetic or the prosey mental space of ambiguity and embellishment. That level of glee isn't part of this. The objects and printed pieces are clearly calculated but not with a cold conceptualists formula. There is a soft generosity to the work, this connects back to the artist, and this is also part of the invitation. In the breadth of her practice, in the numerous works this invitation takes different forms of presence and announcement. Over many years of exhibition and studio practice she has constructed an inventory of approaches and a vocabulary she can draw upon to elicit further associations

and connections, some point out to the world, and some point back into the body of her work. Those gather steam and but not as a private language. Bolande's terrain is the cultural landscape of pictures and objects, the primary sets of cultural, straight on significance that communicate and inform our shared knowledge and identities, always revealing passage into a broader sub-terrain where at play are the emotional physics and transient adhesives that connect objects to a fluidity of meaning. Here, we discover a connection, share a sympathy with what we had previously not thought or seen. The everyday objects, the taken-for-granted variety, suddenly now are creating a different language we can read and follow, the trip is the revelation, a world we didn't know to look for. The truth of the process, without the messy involvement of truth.

At strategic points in her 80s work Jennifer introduced variations on the drawn landscape of some previous sublime other world, squarely from the Romanticists lexicon. These images, understood as indices of an historical dreamtime, still have the effect of the portal function, window to the unseen world, indicating another aspect of the invitation- to step in. Here, in the manner of their presentation, the swapped out band logo, the draped and crumpled inkjet, and the pedestrian signboard, all indicators of cultural process and production we begin to realize how the invitation part of the program ends and the process of the work has already begun. Jennifer's landscapes open to unacknowledged forces, just not the unseen fictions and unspoken ill deeds from the gods and monsters that challenge our morality. The forces at work here are the unacknowledged deep rifts within the base vocabulary of object-presence and cultural identity, the drift that sluggishly attaches and reattaches whole areas of cultural meaning onto objects and representations. Not

the conclusion of analysis but back again to the invitation, the opportunities found within our own mental facility as a player in the same dream potential of our own "Natural Landscape" where the mysteries and subtly of phenomena are called up as an unexpected and often astounding "it was right there all the time" glimpse into the perfect movement underneath the terrain of cultural logic.

As a frequent visitor to Jennifer's studios over the years in Manhattan and Joshua Tree, the conversations were on the order of a magician's technician, constructing the slight of hand and discovering the process at the same time. She was never interested in calculating the pop mute object of personal reflection, or configuring a debatable statement of condition. Her objectives were perfecting the playwright's formula, beginning with the object that announces itself as a chunk of the world, to then facilitate the travel within the work, the channels and possibilities, the tender calculation that allows the viewer to discover on their own what is necessary. The activity of her work is the opportunities in the work. A Bolande piece in a sense begins outside the gallery with the obvious objects we barley see. Inside, the work deflates the studied expectations and in the process we pass through a Chandleresque world of language spies and material witnesses, cerebral allies and adversaries always concerned to implicate the viewer as part of the action. Where a Bolande work finally resides is open business. The invitation in the work continues back out into the open air and sunlight where the relations between things have a suspicious altered quality, inseparable from our analysis. As Rachael says to Deckard in Blade Runner, "I'm not part of the business, I am the business".