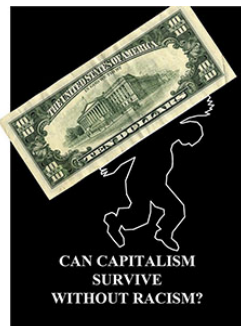


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OUTSIDE LA: Katya Grokhovsky

Smack Mellon, New York

by (<https://artillerymag.com/author/frances/>) Annabel Keenan
(<https://artillerymag.com/byline/annabel-keenan/>) | Apr 20, 2021



Katya Grokhovsky, FANTASYLAND, 2021.

Katya Grokhovsky is an artist and curator who explores the expectations of the American dream and the lived experiences of immigration to the US. Originally from Ukraine, Grokhovsky founded The Immigrant Artist Biennial, which launched last year despite many pandemic-related setbacks. In her current show at the New York-based nonprofit and exhibition space Smack Mellon, Grokhovsky created a wild installation of colors, textures and shapes called *FANTASYLAND*. Playing off of the themes of happiness, high hopes and naïve joy associated with Disneyland, Grokhovsky

confronts the slow deflation of dreams as the shiny façade of living in America starts to deteriorate.

Grokhovsky uses a variety of mediums to make large assemblages with colorful objects such as giant plush toys, inflatable beach balls, parachutes and neon signs. *FANTASYLAND* is a site-specific installation for Smack Mellon that resembles a playground that at first feels like an exciting, welcoming amusement park, but upon closer inspection reveals darkness and decay. The exhibition is at once inviting, yet off-putting, bewitching and grotesque. The artist subtly chips away at the cheer and joy and leaves you with a sense of having missed out on something that was once beautiful.



Katya Grokhovsky, *FANTASYLAND*, 2021.

Addressing American society's culture of excess and consumerism, the large, colorful assemblages are made of repurposed materials like shopping bags and pieces of textile, adding to this sense of arriving at something that has seen better days. The materials are worn, slightly decaying and sun-bleached, with evidence of their past lives buried in layers below. Much like immigrants themselves, the installation appears to have a history, one that is being constantly reworked and added to rather than cleansed or erased. The works bear stories that the viewer can never fully know. A nod to the journey of immigrating and the idea of past lives and past homes, there is a

strong sense of impermanence. The materials themselves are not archival, and the arrangement of the objects would inevitably vary if it were ever replicated.

Expanding on this sense of impermanence are the giant beach balls scattered around the installation. The balls, all in different stages of deflation, seem symbolic of the American dream, as if the idea of America is slowly deflated as the experience is lived. Deflation in general is a common thread throughout the exhibition. Deflated, lifeless parachutes hang from the industrial beams of the building and are draped around the beach balls. The balls inherently continue to lose air as the exhibition progresses, mirroring the constant evolution of life.



Katya Grokhovsky, *FANTASYLAND*, 2021.

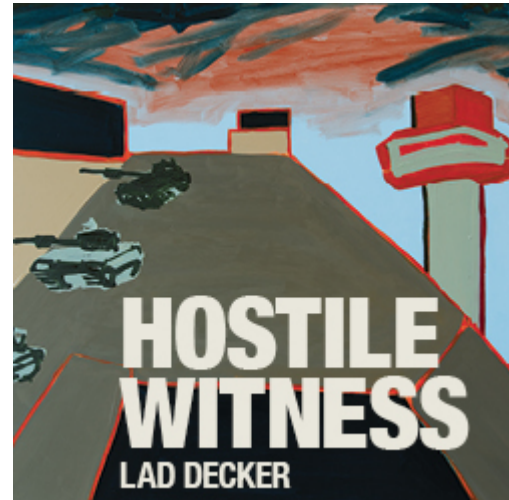
Grokhovsky's works say so much about the experience of immigration: the hopeful expectations, the disappointment, the arduous, endless work, and the feeling of being sold on a dream that exist as a shell of its past. Powerful and poignant, she delivers her message wrapped in a shiny, colorful package that is as welcoming and foreboding as the story of immigration.

Photos by Etienne Frossard, courtesy of Smack Mellon.

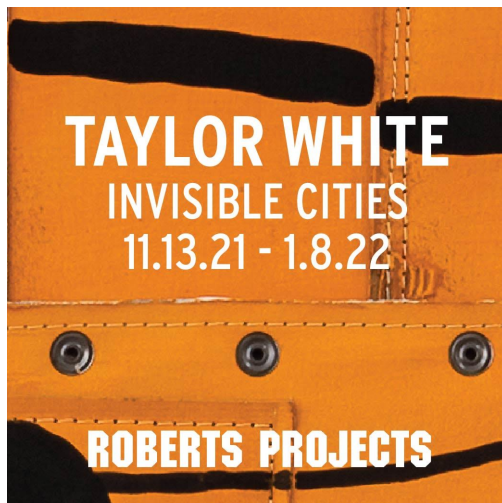
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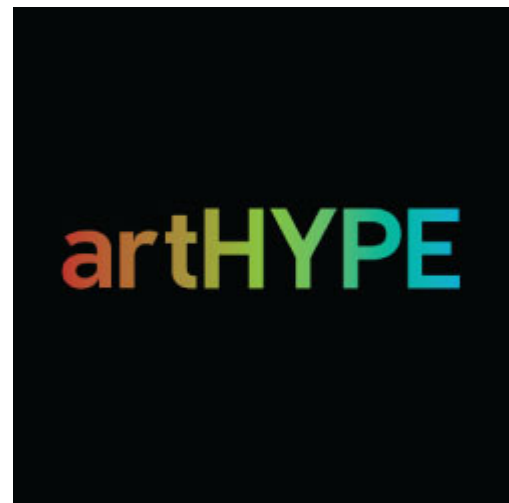
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