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Garden gnomes, candy dispensers and children's toys are among the items that either delight or dismay the 18 artists in Von Ammon Co.'s "Focus Group." Where do these mass-manufactured items belong? One answer is offered by Tabor Robak's found-object sculpture, which riffs on those arcade games in which players use a mechanical claw in an attempt to retrieve such inexpensive treasures as stuffed animals. Robak's version of the game, titled "Garbage Day," is filled mostly with trash.

A focus group, as the gallery's statement notes, is designed to gauge customer's likely reaction to new pitches (including political ones) and products. In this era of nonstop information gathering, every human transaction potentially yields a focus-group scoop. The commodity that might result "thus begins to resemble the consumer whom it targets as its shape is coaxed into being by millions of points of data feedback," the statement says.

That sounds a little more Orwellian than most of the artworks in this show appear to be. Catharine Czudej's video incorporates snippets of ads for TV-peddled innovations such as the Magic Peeler, while painter Julia Wachtel copies cartoons of happy tipplers that might be from cocktail-bar coasters. An artist who goes by Puppies Puppies (a.k.a. Jade Kuriki Olivo), scatters empty Cheetos bags on the floor and, more disturbingly, lays out a life-size mummified corpse. (It's a movie prop, not a case for the District's forensic pathologist.)

Several other participants hint that modern life is a sort of horror movie. Alex Bag redecorated the gallery's bathroom with nude photos and dried drips of fluid. They've congealed on the wall like blood, but their bright, artificial colors suggest shampoo and body wash rather than gore. Emily Schubert and Naoki

Sutter-Shudo both fetishize body parts — fingers and teeth, respectively — by displaying them as if they're pieces of candy.

Many of the pieces manipulate found objects. Tony Hope splashes an Insane Clown Posse T-shirt with cereal, stuck to the fabric with polyurethane rather than milk. Josh Kline stocks a shopping cart with clear plastic bottles, illuminated from below by a white LED. Jacob Kassay places the green plastic cape from a Doctor Doom action figure over another LED, transforming it into a night light.

The gallery compares such assemblages to the ready-mades, including a wheel and an urinal, displayed by Marcel Duchamp a century ago. Yet these 18 artists have a different goal than Duchamp, who didn't intend social commentary. It used to be that a wheel was just a wheel. Now every consumer product is a weapon, fabricated from carefully monitored hopes and dreams. "Focus Group" demonstrates that there are ways, however modest, to turn these munitions against their makers.

*'Focus Group' at von ammon co., Washington, DC. runs through January 11 2020*

von ammon co / 3330 Cady's Alley NW / DC 20007 / info@vonammon.co / 202 893 9797