

Shiny reflections on a capitalist society

BY NANCY TOUSLEY, CALGARY HERALD MAY 6, 2010



New work by Vikky Alexander

Photograph by: Courtesy, Vikky Alexander

Review

Paris Showrooms, new digital photographs by Vikky Alexander, on view at TrepanierBaer Gallery, through May 14.

Multiple reflections on the glass fronts of Paris Showrooms (2009), a series of four new digital photographs by Vikky Alexander, collapse the world of the street into the world of the luxury-good shop, and the life of the street and the capitalist dream world collide.

The Vancouver artist focuses her attention on the places in consumer culture where desire intersects with architecture, design and simulations of picture-perfect nature. The Paris Showrooms explore the deep spaces of glass-fronted shops on narrow Parisian streets, whose pedestrians, cars and opposing architecture penetrate them as reflections.

Glass, mirrors and metal objects in the shops are reflecting surfaces, as well. Full of silver Louis XVI chairs, glass tables and leather sectionals, the glazed shop interiors become a fascinating, vertiginous maze of appearances for the viewer to negotiate. The reflections offer worlds within worlds, confounding and confusing us. What is real?

For previous series, Alexander has photographed the illusionistic spaces of West Edmonton Mall, Disneyland, Las Vegas hotels, the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, model suites in the sales offices of Vancouver condos, and a beauty salon. However, her new pictures of the city of light, made during a residence there have a particular resonance.

It is impossible to look at them and not think of the philosopher Walter Benjamin, who wrote about Paris and the 19th-century arcades, iron-and-glass covered streets of lighted shops, and the dream world of capitalism that is part

and parcel of modernism. And Alexander seems to reference Benjamin here.

Putting the viewer's face close to the glass, Alexander suggests that the "flaneur" of Baudelaire and Benjamin, a detached, observant stroller of urban streets who learns to understand the modern city by walking it, has turned into a desirous, daydreaming window shopper. What are we as consumers, she might ask. How can we break the spell of the dream? What do we want?