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James Georgopoulos: “There Is No End” at MAMA Gallery
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There’s a lot going on in James Georgopoulos’ “There Is No End”—but there’s one main idea at issue: Materialism may be sexy, but it kills. This eclectic suite of high production value paintings, prints, and 3-dimensional mixed media, video, and sculptural works speak a variety of stylistic and material languages, each of which uniquely articulates this central message. A range of shiny, well-groomed, flickering, cautionary confections flounce and flirt across sight-lines and make clever jokes, yet remain present as complex, stately, well-crafted objects and nuanced images. A through line of overt luxury and expense in form and content indicates a healthy sense of irony, inasmuch as they too are targets of our rampantly acquisitive longings.

Though unassuming by comparison with the show’s more operatic, flashier elements, a suite of illusionistic poured resin gold bars (all works 2015) is rather perfect. Each is named for someone (i.e., Elon Musk, Oprah) on the Forbes billionaires list. The series is related mathematically and conceptually to a large-scale, water and steel wishing well (Mark Zuckerberg’s Wealth in Pennies) to which all are encouraged to add. It’s a fungible allegory of the bottomless irrationality of the long-odds American dream, as is the affecting slot-machine sculpture *You Are A Winner*, outfitted with a video loop repeating affirmations (You are hot, You are incredible...) instead of the usual flashing graphics. While this is based on the true story of subliminal messaging as way to keep slot-machine players engaged longer, it exposes the psychological and emotional manipulations underlying the whole cultural shebang. The trick is, it works even when you can plainly see it’s happening. Remember, materialism is sexy.

The downside is represented by references to the space race, horse racing, and the arms race—and by Black Friday, 1976. A hulking piece of 20th-century abstract conceptualism, like Ad Reinhardt on steroids, this painting offers an alluring and affecting location for both the historical event and its leitmotif of despair. As do the highly polished car doors (*Made Man* and *Fully Loaded*, a 1968 Cadillac and 1971 Mustang respectively) which, when divorced from function and mounted on plinths like Brancusi’s or ritual masks, make their true status as fetishized objects even clearer. The monumental installation *Rodeo Drive*, composed of an entire crushed and chromed 1979 Rolls Royce and a large-scale video projection of fancy department store windows, is the showpiece, and in many ways the apex of the allegory. It’s dirty and fancy and unwieldy and expensive and chic, and you have nowhere to put it but you want it anyway.