



material girl





# LISA

By Wesley Grissom

Lisa Hoke's site-specific wall installations call to mind a hyper-pigmented version of Tara Donovan's large-scale paper plate or scotch tape sculptures. Both artists are represented in prominent collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art and both elevate everyday objects from banal to inventive through excess and enterprise.





Hoke assembles accessible materials (like plastic cups and colorful cardboard packaging) into complex installations in gallery and museums across the country. Her polychrome palette and innovative materials infuse a space with vibrant *joie de vivre*.

When Bruce Dempsey of J. Johnson Gallery first saw Hoke's work in Chelsea (N.Y.) it was a nearly religious experience. "The elevator opened up and there was a blaze of color, texture, and movement in Elizabeth [Harris Gallery]'s space. I was blown away and thought immediately of the rich colors, drama, and ornate stucco surfaces inside Baroque churches," he recalls.

Instead of expensive materials like marble and bronze, Hoke constructs complex, colorful compositions from familiar objects. "Lisa looks for new and original components that are affordable and attainable. She proves an artist can work with any material," says the Jacksonville gallery director.

## material world

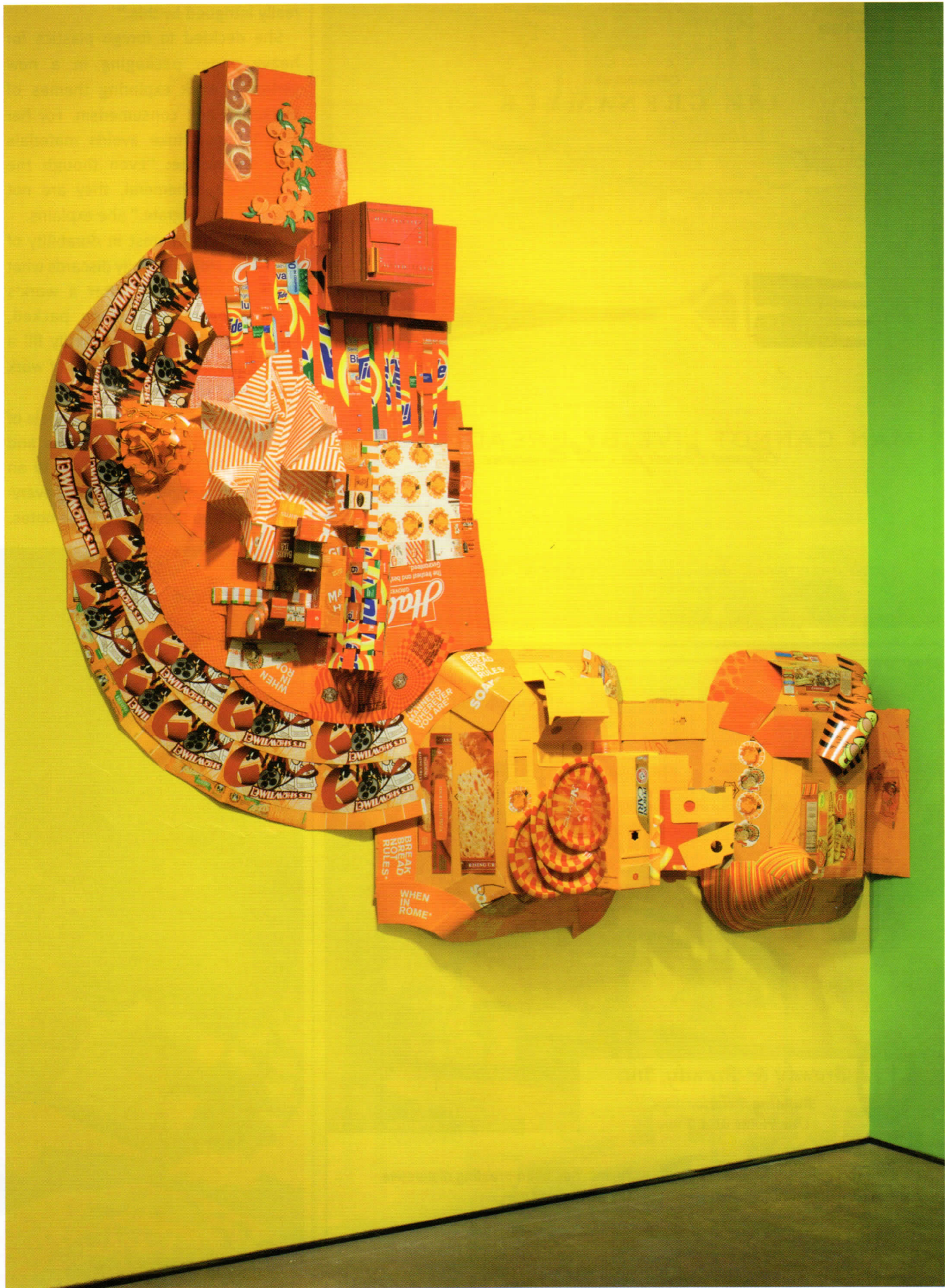
"I use objects that are

inexpensive, accessible, and profoundly available," Hoke admits. She transforms "the debris of everyday life" into art.

Hoke creates visually voluminous patterns with massive quantities of household items. The neighbors and building superintendent of her New York City studio save colorful packaging and cardboard boxes that would otherwise find their way to a trashcan or recycling bin. The artist purchases or happens upon other elements for her pieces.

Hoke's installations of the late eighties involved cast iron and wire, while in the nineties she progressed through a variety of automobile parts (think broken windshields and mufflers) and textiles. More recently she has commented on consumer culture, from the monumental to minute, using just about everything but the kitchen sink. Straws, plastic cups, paper plates, popsicle-stained napkins and coffee filters find new life and artistic value in her ambitious assemblages.

Last year's landmark Picasso exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum set Hoke in another direction: "His cardboard elements from 1914 were in perfect shape. I was



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really intrigued by this.”

She decided to forego plastics for heavy paper packaging in a new series of work exploring themes of marketing and consumerism. For her installations, Hoke avoids materials that deteriorate: “Even though the pieces are ephemeral, they are not going to disintegrate,” she explains.

Despite the interest in durability of materials, Hoke typically discards what can’t be compacted after a work’s final re-incarnation. When packed, installations are light yet easily fill a semi-truck. “Having barns full of work is not me,” she says.

Some of Hoke’s favorite materials of late include Kleenex dispensers and Good & Plenty boxes. “There is an element of design in just about everything I pick up these days,” she notes.



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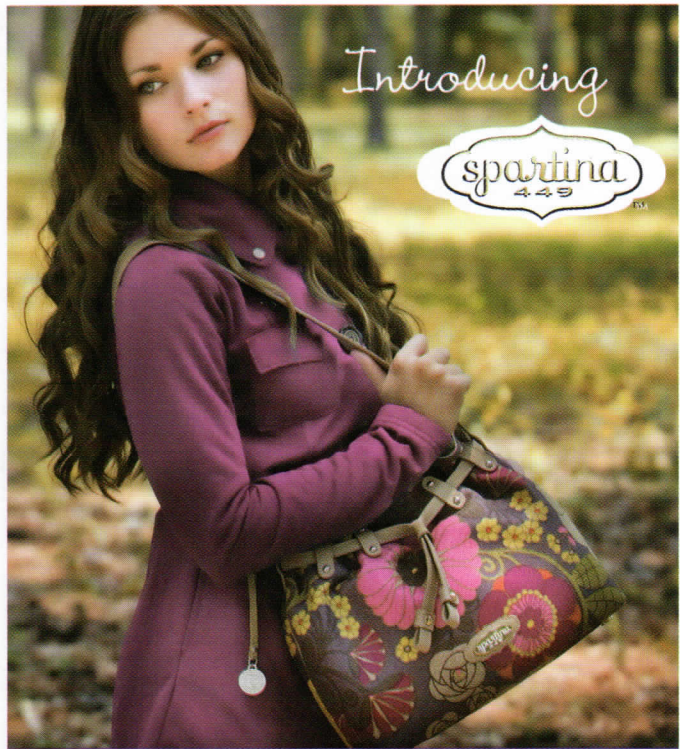
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**inspiration and concepts** Hoke has worked in the same New York City studio for thirty-one years and re-invents the space constantly to ensure she “always look[s] at the world with fresh eyes.” In 1995, she covered the south wall of her gallery with big windows and her work shifted, in a significant way: “When the sunlight started pouring in, the color began in my work.”

The artist sees her installations as collaborations—dynamic, three-dimensional projects which evolve through the hands of others. “My work is filled with someone else’s personal decisions,” she explains.

From the thoughtful people who collect materials that spark her creativity to the art handler who de-installs her pieces, others play an integral role and Hoke is happy to relinquish control. “My goal is that I want it to be something new for me. What happens when someone else cuts my work apart in a way that’s not familiar to me?”

Although Hoke repurposes discarded items, her work explores the purely visual qualities of these surprising materials rather than making a statement on ecology.

“I know recycling is a trend in art and my work is not about that. It’s about isolating—taking a familiar package and going to color as a way to curate the pieces....A Toblerone box with red lettering feels like a piece of jewelry it’s so beautiful.”

Another concept behind Hoke’s work is consumerism and the intrigue of advertising psychology. “There is much more behind what we see and consume. Marketing and design are so powerful. What makes us pick up a container and take it home?”

**love, florida style** For J. Johnson Gallery, Hoke presents *Love, American Style* as a hybrid of two previous exhibitions with the same title that address our culture of mass consumption. The third site-specific work in the series spans the length of the west wall of the Jacksonville Beach gallery, conjuring Al Held’s colossal painting which covered the same substantial surface in 2005.

Like Held, Hoke isn’t afraid of going big or bold with color, yet her work has more in common with El Anatsui, a West African artist who weaves extraordinary expansive draperies



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from copper wire and flattened bottle caps.

Both Hoke and Anatsui scavenge their surroundings for found objects and invite external participation in the final product. (Anatsui prefers that museums and galleries install blindly, draping his “fabrics” at will to put their own stamp on his pieces.)

Hoke re-invented Love, American Style at J. Johnson Gallery using portions from previous appearances at New York’s Elizabeth Harris Gallery and MASS MoCA. “Over the last five to six years I have loved taking pieces I’ve made, reducing them to a primitive state, and rebuilding to create a site-specific piece.”

At the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art her installation hung alongside the major semi-permanent Sol LeWitt retrospective, elucidating the parallels between Hoke and the icon of simplicity, repetition, and scale. (This correlation is further explored at Connecticut’s New Britain Museum of Art, where Hoke was awarded a commission to create an eye-popping installation of plastic cups swirling up a staircase named after the seminal figure in Conceptual Art. Additionally, Hoke’s *The Gravity of Color*, on view through 2013, hovers over LeWitt’s permanent graphite wall drawing in the lobby.)

For the Florida show, Hoke layered materials tightly to conceal the entire surface of the seven hundred and fifty square foot end of the gallery with a “very dense, new kind of piece without paint on the wall.”

When Dempsey inquired about more accessibly sized cardboard creations for Jacksonville clients, Hoke decided to construct miniature studies of large works for the first time. She had worked on an intimate scale with objects like matchsticks, but never translated the same materials from her large works. “It’s a wonderful moment



when the feedback from others creates an opening I haven't even considered."

Hoke experimented with these reverse maquettes while on holiday in New Hampshire and finds the new size exciting. Instead of small mountains of colorful cardboard, she was able to sort scraps in shoeboxes at her summer studio.

"So much of my work is about the chaos I live in. On the lake it's so expansive and quiet. It was interesting to work on these tiny pieces from the memory of chaos, without the constant motion of the city."

J. Johnson Gallery hangs a handful of these twelve-inch-square wall sculptures alongside Hoke's site-specific monumental mosaic in *Love, American Style*, opening on November 11 and running through the end of January. Also included are two older "drawings" (created without pencil, using playing cards and paper.)

Although Hoke reuses elements from one installation to the next, each time the assembled puzzle results will be new. "It's not about imitating what I've done before."

"What's going to be next? I have no idea. Where I am right now is a result of where I have been, but not indicative of what will come in the future. One body of work leads to another and I don't try to connect the dots."

However, we can be confident Lisa Hoke will continue connecting unexpected raw materials to create works that invite contemplation and transmit vibrant exuberance.

*Love, American Style* thru January 27.

J. Johnson Gallery,  
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