Artist Charlotte Kruk puts a twist on the idea of eye candy
RACINE, WIS.- The Racine Art Museum commissioned artist and sculpture Charlotte Kruk to create a new exhibition for its Windows on Fifth Gallery. Open August 1, 2014 through July 26, 2015, Consumer Couture - The Politics of Having is a series of vignettes that explore the dynamics of a "disposable, packaged society." With both humor and serious intent, Kruk uses recognizable consumer packaging - such as gum and candy wrappers, sugar and coffee bags, and food tins - to create garments and sculptures that reflect our material culture. Visually compelling and conceptually provocative, Kruk's work questions the relationship between dress, power, gender, and consumerism.

Clothing - like other forms of bodily adornment - can reflect personal, social, and cultural interests and issues. Modern industrialized capitalist societies - especially those that follow "Western" cultural trends - offer many options for dress. What we wear and how we wear it is inextricably linked to advertising, body image, social class, and influence. Interested in consumerism and wastefulness as well as self-image, Kruk plays with all of these concepts. In order to get materials to use as fabric, either Kruk or friends and family have to consume the product, carefully extracting it from its packaging. The care with which she has to treat what others so easily destroy and/or throw away encourages the artist to think about what we value and why.

While every gender in society is impacted by images in the media, Kruk tends to create garments/sculptures relating to women because she absorbs and applies the information to herself, and because women are the ones most often held up as "eye candy." The connection between this phrase and her choice of material (candy packaging being a primary one) is not accidental. Kruk relays that personally she has long been concerned with body image, consumption of both food and goods, and the guilt that comes from eating what she really wants versus what she should.

Kruk is descended from a long line of domestic seamstresses, who - in the artist's words - would "sew out of necessity." While she has academic art training, she is a self-taught garment-maker and completed her first wearable sculpture at 23. Early garments were purposefully "ladylike" as the artist was trying to visually represent the "idealized perfect society girl." Kruk created strapless 1950s style dresses with full skirts, and fitted and feminine silhouettes. The retro fashion that she has often evoked has been idealized as representations of proper dress and etiquette. Kruk always considers the wearability of her garments and accessories as well as the physical restrictions of the materials she is using as fabric. Over time, she has experimented with various styles of dress as well as unwearable sculpture - both of which are included in her windows installation at RAM.
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