

# Morgan Presents

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## ***Rebecca Ness: Windows and Worlds***

Curated & Text by Morgan Aguiar-Lucander



We are fascinated by what others choose to collect. Whether it be paintings, books, stamps, or royal commemorative plates, the same set of objects bewilders one viewer while entrancing another. Neither onlooker, however, leaves the encounter apathetic. From the charming to the heinous we are unwaveringly intrigued by what others devote time and resources towards, in the pursuit of a *stronger* collection.

Collecting is an impossible task to complete; from the Broad to the Beyeler, the ever elusive perfect collection remains perpetually out of reach. A notion the arguably foremost American narrative writer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, recognized in the closing of his preeminent novel: “It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further... And one fine morning—.” It is the enduring pursuit of this aim that engages us, and in turn propels the collector forward.

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The dreaded phrase “What’s in your collection?” is a statement greeted with disagreeable familiarity by all who have ever dabbled in the turbulent waters of the commercial art world. In answering this discourteous inquiry the collector bares a part of his soul, defrocking himself in a ritual act, in the slight hope that he might be able to absorb an additional sacred object into his collection.

In this presentation of paintings, Rebecca Ness grants us windows of access to examine the menagerie of objects from specific individual’s worlds. In contrast to the barbed inquisition of the art dealer, however, Ness’ lifting of the curtain is an act of encouraged curiosity rather than scrutinizing judgment. In this sense the presentation of these paintings parallels an archeological excavation; Ness has gathered, dusted off and arranged these objects so that they may provide a commentary on both individual and societal identity. Ness pursues this cultural excavation in much the same way an archeologist might dedicated her life towards the reconstruction of Pompeian pottery: in the firm belief that we must look back to understand where we came from, and consequently who we are.

Instead of Pompeii, Ness showcases the cultural relics of a suburban Americana in its twilight: model Corvettes and locomotives, whittled animal figurines amongst crumpled U-Haul boxes. Ness asserts that America’s commercialism, or perhaps in plainer words its *stuff*, holds the key to our existential quandary. That it is the objects we keep, demonstrating their value in our very allocation of spatial and emotional real estate, which in turn constitute a significant part of our identities on both the collective and individual level. The battle of nature vs. nurture is ultimately resolved by Ness through the assertion: *you are what you eat*—namely the objects we consume.

Ness does not didactically declare this proposition, instead through a smattering of objects and facial expressions we are left to construct the narrative skeleton of her argument from the fragments scattered amongst the sweeping compositions of her paintings.

Painters throughout history have indulged in rich and varied compositions in the pursuit of societal critique. Bronzino’s *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid*

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balances an artistic indulgence of colour and form in its moralistic cautioning of unchaste desire. While the Flemish brush of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century critiques the excess of its day through stage lit still-lives, vanitas paintings and memento mori, the Florentine altarpiece heralds and celebrates the craftsmen of the guild in its corresponding use of rich colour and punctuated gold. Ness has more in common with the Florentine than the Dutch painter.

—Morgan Aguiar-Lucander