

Nylon guys, July, 2011
(author: Mallory Rice)

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uncommon projects

ARTIST **ZAK KITNICK**
MANIPULATES
THE MUNDANE.
BY MALLORY RICE.
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
JENNY HUESTON



zak kitnick,
"zuhandenheit" (2008).
courtesy the
artist and clifton
benevento, new york.
photographed by
andres ramirez.

"I ALWAYS FEEL a little bit sensitive when somebody's coming here for the first time," says mixed media artist Zak Kitnick of his studio space, which occupies a small section of a warehouse in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. "It's actually really nice to be in here precisely because nobody can drop in, and you can really not see or speak to anyone for days. That's often very conducive to my work." Indeed, the sprawling complex in a desolate stretch of Brooklyn, formerly used, as the name suggests, for shipbuilding, could

easily be dismissed as an industrial wasteland at first glance. "It's a [space] where you really feel like you could be anywhere, in terms of the lack of natural light. I don't even know if it's raining; I don't know if it's beautiful [outside]."

The way that Kitnick talks about his work—changing his speed and tone slightly when he is saying "artist-y" things, as if putting them in quotation marks—is not at all dissimilar to the nature of his work itself. His series "The People Behind Our Products," features perforated metal sheets that partially obscure objects (cloth, crumpled paper, maps, plastic bags), placed behind them. "Ideally, the work is able to generate multiple ideas. It's like the ability to hold two thoughts simultaneously—they can contradict each other," he says. "It can almost be a conversation or argument. I'm interested in building a sort of criticality into the work itself."

Kitnick is fascinated with retailers like SkyMall, Oriental Trading, and Amazon. While visiting Johan Berggren Gallery in Sweden where he was due to have a show, he noticed an arc in the place where the walls met at the ceiling. On his flight home, he also noticed a "front pocket wallet" for sale in the SkyMall catalogue that was specially shaped to fit the curve of the front pocket on a pair of pants. He ordered two. "I find myself thinking about this complex system through which things are designed, manufactured, bought, and sold, in a way that kind of keeps producer and consumer separate," he explains. "Almost like failing to consider each other's existence. I find myself buying a lot of things." He



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discovered that the wallet fit the arc of the wall in the gallery perfectly, and had them placed in that spot for the show. He called the piece "Actual Size (Wall and Wallets)." "Not trying to be too clever," he says, with a grin.

Purchases like this are a frequent occurrence for Kitnick. "If somebody were to track [them], they'd be like, 'OK, he bought this at Lowe's, and then 400 vegetable posters, and then 50 sheets of decorative stuff, and then two tons of steel.' It just doesn't add up to an existing model," he says. "Like on Amazon: Oh, you're interested in this, you might be interested in this. I get the craziest recommendations."

This summer Kitnick's work appears in shows at Kate Werble and Mount Tremper galleries in New York, and in a group show opening in June at The Company Gallery in Los Angeles. His most significant and most ambitious project, however, is his forthcoming solo exhibit at NYC's Clifton Benevento Gallery in September. Kitnick does not subscribe to the cliché of the artist waiting around for inspiration—there is plenty of work to be done. (Our interview, in fact, has interrupted a nap required after working straight through the night.) "I know what I want to do. In terms of working, if I close my eyes it already exists. But if you close your eyes, it doesn't exist," he says. "So I need to close my eyes and make it exist so that you see it when your eyes are open."