

Junkspace Junk Food

**Parker Ito
at Kaldi, Smart Objects,
White Cube,
and Château Shatto**

**February 25, 2014–
June 6, 2015**

Emerald green parrots.
Black fulvic trace water.
Ceramic figurines.
Bespoke slippers.
Smoke.

These are just a few materials from a recent string of shows by Parker Ito, Post-Internet art's *enfant terrible*. Ito typifies what Geert Lovink termed a pharmacological web 2.0 citizen,¹ a filterless image processor with a penchant for Xanax and deviantArt. Ito lives in a junkspace coated with powdery Cheeto dust and Doritos® Cool Ranch® seasoning, shiny like the crumpled skin of a half-drunk Capri Sun® pouch. His work champions a stereotypically American propensity for binging on junk-culture to the point of aesthetic obesity.

It all began at Kaldi, a small coffee shop in Atwater Village, where Ito anonymously hung a series of demure still-life paintings of artificial rainbow-colored roses. This was the prelude to a yearlong saga of shows that were all woven together by a

mysterious character: Ito's cyberpunk handle Parker Cheeto. Some of the rose paintings were remade/rehung in *Parker Cheeto's Infinite Haunted Hobo Playlist (A Dream for Some, a Nightmare for Others)* at Smart Objects. Its title recalled the California low-fi band Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti. The main gallery space at Smart Objects was left empty, with art hung in an elevator shaft and displayed in the kitchen and bathroom. The rose work hung amidst a strange mish-mash of neon, Technicolor plastic flora, and grainy anime-inspired wall paintings.

Next came *Maid in Heaven/Plein Air in Hell (My Beautiful Dark Twisted Cheeto Problem)* at White Cube in London, the title this time a mash-up of Jeff Koons and Kanye West. At White Cube, Ito's additive process became clear: material was added but seldom removed, lumping together in an indigestible bolus of visual stimuli. His anime character paintings appeared again, this time suspended throughout the gallery at oblique angles within a jungle of low-slung, pigmented chains populated by live parrots. Wallpaper depicted the artist drinking Yoohoo. Paintings of Joan of Arc, modeled after a waist-cropped photograph of an 1843 marble statue Ito found in a Google Image search, joined in the circus.

If this is starting to sound schizophrenic, it is. Ito's work is characterized by a bulimic intensity. Images culled from trolling the web are projectile-vomited back at the viewer as paintings, sculptures, and textiles, producing immersive installations "so total that you can never zoom all the way out."²

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White Cube was just a staging ground for Château Shatto's *A Lil Taste of Cheeto in the Night*, the middle movement in Ito's opus. For the exhibition, the gallery temporarily rented a 7,500 square foot warehouse, which Ito claustrophobically crammed with art. Visitors who entered were lost in the deep whirlpool of Ito's browser history; each painting jut out like a new tab announcing its site title with an animated gif—*Read me! Read me!* One hardly knew where to look.

The cast of characters this time included some familiar faces (Joan of Arc) alongside some new players (Venom, Kate Moss, the Terminator, and Liv Barrett, Ito's gallerist and girlfriend). There was a buff anime Parker in molten silver armor, holding parrots on a beach at sunset. There were numerous bronze and ceramic sculptures of the Western Exterminator, the mascot for a pest removal company who leers from billboard perches off the 101 and 405 freeways. The Exterminators floated through the space enmeshed in light, like roadside images viewed through a windshield at 80 miles an hour. Analog pop-up windows.

All this sensory slop was bound by brightly colored metal chains and plastic tubes of LED lights, a visual metaphor for the network's edges. A chaotic Gordian knot, and even a little delicate: step on the wrong strand, knock over the wrong vase, and the whole tangled mess might come crashing down, smothering you in the process.

A Lil Taste was the Debordian spectacle made manifest,³ the worldwide web's *weltanschauung* materialized in a warehouse on Pico Boulevard. It declared all life mere appearance, material form just a pixelated image spit out by a universal means of production. And all lit by the unblinking glow of a thousand twisted

hanging light strands: "the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity."⁴ Just peel back your eyelids and let it wash over you.

If the medium is the message, as Marshall McLuhan famously proposed, there may be nothing extractable from the implosion of all distinct media, their cold collision like the prophesied Big Crunch of our universe, time in rewind. What emerges from this Post-Internet barrage of bit-torrent PNGs and CCTV clips, scans of 3D-printed figurines aping 19th century marble sculptures? There is no message, for there is no medium.

So, who is Parker Cheeto, ghost in this machine? Other names may include: Deke McLelland Two, Creamy Dreamy, L'atelier de PPPPPP. The artist as character, character as artist, has a long history of associated pseudonyms: Rose Selávy, Monty Cantsin, Banksy. Parker Cheeto is a personality and a glove, a Guy Fawkes mask that signifies a specific person and no one at all. Far from anonymous, though, the name is a juvenile joke—a half-baked stoner pun backlogged for later use. According to Brad Troemel, "what the artist once accomplished by making commodities that could stand independently from [themselves] is now accomplished through their ongoing self-commodification."⁵ Parker Cheeto is the commodity, the double-branded avatar of an Orange County kid-cum-artist and an orange junk-snack puff.

The studio assistants are also Parker Cheeto, and were credited alongside him in the White Cube exhibition. They facilitate Ito's hyper-productive aestheticism,⁶ churning out work with a speed and scope that would be physically impossible for any one artist: the Factory production model doped on a steady dose of Ritalin in order to reach algorithmic velocity.

1. Geert Lovink, "Soft Narcosis of the Networked Condition." *Adbusters*, 7 March 2013. <https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/106/soft-narcosis-networked-condition.html>

2. Parker Ito to Sarah Nicole Prickett, "Parker Ito," *Interview Magazine* (June 2014).

3. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

4. Ibid.

And then came Epilogue: *PBBVx-4.5213418505240406714305462110190527PPPPPPPPPPPPPP* (an exhibition title like a hellish URL, so long I had to copy and paste it here). It was Cheeto's final show, the avatar's somber retirement party. As if on cue, the end to Ito's saga commenced with a concert of scanners, printing scans of rubber Venom masks and bronze Joan of Arc figurines. Black-and-white printouts would drop from the machines into buckets filled with thick black water—"blk," a trendy H₂O brand. Soggy paper scraps were sucked from the buckets by plastic tubes and sent on a looping course across the gallery floor and walls, plunging into pink vinyl backpacks or disappearing through the floorboards below. It felt as if the combined corpus of Ito's trilogy was being drained of its blood. The sound of churning pumps and printers was strangely melancholy. In the basement hung a photograph of Ito in a leather frock and Burberry boxers, a riff on a fashion magazine spread featuring Kate Moss as a militant nun. Parker Ito as Kate Moss as Joan of Arc; the artist playing dress-up in his characters' leftover corpses.

Unlike Hito Steyerl or Trevor Paglen, Ito belongs to a younger generation of Internet artists who have given up on the web's revolutionary potential for insurrection. All is corporate, all is surveilled in his vision of a digital future: better instead to comment, like, and reblog with irony and detachment. To accept our subordination to simulation. True life is the excrement of the Internet, a poor fictive residue of our social media selves. Second Life is a first order reality.

Troemel argues that we need a certain dose of apathy to find anything of value in this barrage of data: "To maintain the aerial view necessary for patterns to emerge, one must cultivate a disposition of indifference."⁷

This disposition privileges quantity over quality, and ditches art historical discourse for the 140-character Tweet. Ito trades in C++ semiotics; he speaks a digital language in which every image is equally fungible. Ito's painted Joan is his figurine Joan, is his photocopied Joan, is his Google Image search Joan, is his source image source sculpture Joan. There is no original, there is no copy. There is only ceaseless circulation, mutation, and multiplication. Like a bit of viral code.

1

Parker Ito, *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night* at Château Shatto, Los Angeles (offsite) (2015), installation view. Image courtesy of Château Shatto (Photo: Elon Schoenholz).

2

Parker Ito, *A Lil' Taste of Cheeto in the Night* at Château Shatto, Los Angeles (offsite) (2015), installation view. Image courtesy of Château Shatto (Photo: Elon Schoenholz).

3

Parker Ito, *Maid in Heaven/En Plein Air in Hell (My Beautiful Dark and Twisted Cheeto Problem)* at White Cube, London (2014), installation view. Image courtesy of White Cube (Photo: Jack Hems).

4

Parker Ito, *Maid in Heaven/En Plein Air in Hell (My Beautiful Dark and Twisted Cheeto Problem)* at White Cube, London (2014), installation view. Image courtesy of White Cube (Photo: Jack Hems).

5

Parker Ito, *Maid in Heaven/En Plein Air in Hell (My Beautiful Dark and Twisted Cheeto Problem)* at White Cube, London (2014), installation view. Image courtesy of White Cube (Photo: Jack Hems).

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Parker Ito, *Epilogue: PBBVx-4.5213418505240406714305462110190527PPPPPPPPPPPPPP* at Château Shatto, Los Angeles (2015), installation view. Image courtesy of Château Shatto (Photo: Elon Schoenholz).

5. Brad Troemel, "Athletic Aesthetics," *The New Inquiry*, Vol. 16 (May 2013).

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

