

THE KITCHEN

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The Kitchen is delineated by a *Tetris*-esque foundation of vinyl flooring, which puts into question the mediocre beige-and-blue aesthetic of wainscoting and chintz wallpaper. It is these observable and

“ordinary” facets that are challenged and set into purposeful juxtaposition for those willing to adjust their gaze and see the complex, symbol-centric world that Sonny Assu and Brendan Lee Satish Tang have so carefully constructed. The trappings of 1980s and ’90s status quo are turned against themselves in irreverent and sobering ways. The scaffolding of the scene illustrates the highly manufactured nature of the barriers between the natural, social, and cosmic currents that hold sway over our human world, especially within the remembered landscape of youth. Once the fourth wall is removed, it is possible to see the accoutrements that complicate and characterize these practical spaces and how cultural realities are reflected within them. The Kitchen accomplishes this with fabulous familiarity, and for all the cuckoo-clock conventionality, the scene holds a clash of both nostalgia and provocation. Irreverent social satire and carefully constructed works of art collide with found and fabricated objects to commemorate the formative years and current careers of two artists of monstrous ability—a motley but fascinating crew that illustrates decades of decadence and destructive denial.

The hot-pink ovoid that hovers like a UFO over the bucolic clapboard house pictured in the thrift-store painting speaks volumes about the arrogant and unjust history of the colonization of Canada, a story of ownership and invasion that is not easily contained within white picket fences. *Doesn't look like anyone lives here. Let's live here!* (2014) is the title of Assu's interventionist work, and it is compelling how many levels of meaning exist in this one work, especially in this “middle-class” kitchen setting, which extends out into the gallery in which it is contained—a likewise colonial and therefore complicit institution. The messages operate metaleptically: “a paradoxical contamination between the world of the telling and the world of the told,” a ripple effect that revels in restorative and fantastic reversals.

Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) paraphernalia is spread out on the gold-flecked Formica table, dice and figurines sitting on top of Tang's intricate pencil drawings of past and present gallery spaces reimagined as “dungeon maps.” *D&D*, which has been described in gamer literature as “one of the Trope Codifiers of the modern era” (yes, gamers do talk like that), carries and connects the kitchen with the world of subtext and subterfuge, a place where small children would eat sugary cereal out of Princess Di commemorative china but also slay dragons and save the world—which really sums up the role of the artist: to both create and kill the dragons that no one else sees.

One trope to rule them all . . .

A *D&D* group waged a campaign in this constructed kitchen late one night, to honour and activate the exhibition space. The campaign raged for hours, and it was a wonder to witness how the players were transported in time and place and yet were entirely symbiotic to the scene. A truly emancipatory degree of creative licence permeated the game being played, a world unbound by gender, social status, or history and an overall “good source of trickery,” which echoed the many versions of altered and reimagined reality within the gallery. There is something to be said



for the battles that are fought by basement dwellers, nerds, activists, and artists of all stripes, and how the truths that need to be told can be quiet riots or deafening assaults on the senses. The kitchen, a perfectly imperfect space, tells just such subtle truths, which offer much food for thought.