



Domestic Brew
Shake-n-Make

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Cozied Incendiaries: Shake-n-Make's Domestic Brew

Stephanie Vegh

For two weeks in September 2017, ninety-nine bottles of beer waited in hopeful anticipation of their own destruction.

Exposed to the roulette wheel of climate fortunes impossible to predict in a Canadian autumn, artists Claudia B. Manley and Liss Platt of Shake-n-Make presented a batch of bottled ale that had been brewed in their Hamilton home using much the same method as any home brewer. The difference lays in their deliberate cultivation of beer's volatility as an outcome to be pursued rather than repressed in the making.

Their experiment was doubly protected – first by crocheted cozies that differentiate each bottle with that cheerfully homemade character of 1970s craft with which Shake-n-Make often speaks, then by identical plexiglass cases stacked to display those ninety-nine bottles of beer as a literal wall that cut the open air of Hamilton Artists Inc.'s courtyard. This containment takes an aesthetic leap away from the handmade, while remaining conversant with a sculptural minimalism that rose to prominence in the same nostalgic decade.

The total accumulation of craft and mass manufacture runs four layers deep – homebrewed beer contained by factory produced bottles and caps, wrapped in hand-crocheted cozies, each contained in a plexiglass box. Even when outdoor

condensation began to cling to the inner surfaces of those cases, the eye pushed irresistibly towards the attraction of the crocheted layer. Those cozies contribute somewhat cheekily to the beer's status as *craft* – that term so widely applied as a badge of easy honour to all manner of things local and small-batch – but also serve a pragmatic purpose in the installation to smother glass should the beer obey its makers' intentions and explode.

Making beer is relatively simple: grains are steeped in hot water to extract their sugars, creating a liquid that is boiled with hops to achieve the desired flavour. Yeast introduced at the fermentation stage interacts with a sweetener such as honey or maple syrup added when bottling to consume these sugars and produce beer's characteristic fizziness (carbon dioxide) and fuzziness (alcohol). Too much sugar will incite the yeast to feed aggressively, especially in warmer climates, producing enough excess carbon dioxide to shatter glass.

Contrary to present-day readings of beer as a predominantly masculine vice that conjures visions of blue-collar labour and the Beer Hall Putsch alike, this potential for craft beer to explode through an excess of sweetness has much to say about the female experience. The heavy drop of honey evokes a sticky sentimentality through which craft has been received as the piecework of private domestic realms, but when applied to this experiment such sweetness is weaponized with public intent.

Beer incites conversations spoken in tongues set loose from their inhibitions. Looking at the work – its willful sabotage, its careful containment – one rightly wonders what other volatile elements are being suppressed by those charming cozies, by all those tightly wrought stitches.

Shake-n-Make's deployment of crochet suggests the fictional figure of Madame Thérèse Defarge in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, furiously recording



sins and executions through her knitting. She is a *tricoteuse*: a working woman of the French Revolution who sowed the seeds of revolt in the Women's March on Versailles only to find herself stripped of political agency during the Reign of Terror, consigned to witness and knit her frustrations at the foot of the guillotine. Madame Defarge is a fictional analogue to countless women throughout history deprived of power who transcribe their voices in craft – a tradition that endures through the pink knitted pussy hat and its more inclusive variants that proliferated in this past year's Women's March Movement, which is not to be confused with the aforementioned event of 1789 in which women like Madame Defarge rioted

against Versailles over the high price of bread and deepening social inequality. Neither the manipulation of bread prices nor the mass protests of women are phenomena unique to the year 2017.

Craft, too, has endured tumultuous historical turns and continues to enact mutual care and social change by rallying the collective energies of its participants. Just as local knitters came together to produce the ninety-nine knitted cozies for those precarious bottles of beer, Shake-n-Make invited community contributions towards the creation of *Domestic Brew*, an accompanying mural work that occupies Hamilton Artists Inc.'s exterior Cannon Project Wall. The artists collected beer bottle caps through an open call and assembled their yield as a daisy-patterned quilt of forms. Identical caps are clustered as petals around a contrasting centre, resulting in a mosaic of logos that reflect a range of tastes from the mainstream to the barely recognizable. The pattern that emerges is a tension-tinged dance of brand identities distilled through the hand-touched preferences of its largely unknown contributors.

While vital as celebratory souvenirs of a beer consumed and enjoyed, these bottle caps must be read for what they are – functional stoppers upon beer's flavour, freshness and volatility alike. They preserve, yet also repress energy in a condition of waiting that endures indefinitely. Presented as a play of corporate symbols arrayed in full flower, they are also undeniably, and provocatively, sweet.

Due to a combination of cool weather and happenstance, none of the bottles in Shake-n-Make's installation exploded during the course of its public presentation. Instead, one is left to wonder how much longer all those bottle caps can keep the lid on so much potentiality, and whether there is knitting enough in the world to comfort the explosion to come.



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC.

155 James Street North
Hamilton, Ontario
L8R 2K9
theinc.ca

Shake-n-Make is a queer art collective (members Claudia B. Manley and Liss Platt) based in Hamilton, Ontario that endeavours to elevate home hobby crafts from the 70s into a playful and critical contemporary art practice. The collective has exhibited at numerous venues in Ontario, including solo shows at MKG127 and the Artists Newsstand in Toronto, as well as b Contemporary in Hamilton, ON. Shake-n-Make has received two visual artist grants from the Ontario Arts Council and is represented by MKG127 in Toronto.

Stephanie Vegh is an artist and writer who studied Studio Art and Comparative Literature at McMaster University, and completed her MFA at the Glasgow School of Art. She has exhibited her work in the UK and Canada, and publishes art writing and criticism both locally and nationally. She maintains an active profile in regional arts advocacy, and currently serves as Manager, Media and Communications at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.

Cover: Shake-n-Make, *Domestic Brew: 99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall*, 2017. Close-up view, Hamilton Artists Inc. Image: Liss Platt.
Page 3: Shake-n-Make, *Domestic Brew: Craft Beer Garden*, 2017. Installation view, Hamilton Artists Inc. Image: Abedar Kamgari.

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