

**Related Events:**

All events are free and open to the public.

**Exhibition Reception:**

Sunday July 17, 3 - 5 pm

**Artist’s Talk:**

Sunday, September 11, 3 pm

**About the artist:**

**Aron Gent** received his BFA from Columbia College Chicago in 2007 and has exhibited in numerous galleries in Chicago such as Packer Schopf Gallery, Co-Prosperity Sphere, and the Evanston Art Center, as well as internationally at Singer Sweatshop in Rotterdam, Netherlands. He is on faculty at the Hyde Park Art Center, where his work was exhibited in the group show *Are We There Yet?* curated by Dawoud Bey in 2008. Aron lives and works in Chicago, IL.

**Aron Gent:**  
**Not Quite As Good  
Because of You**



*Four Bags*, 2011, archival pigment print, 40 x 27 inches,  
Courtesy of Reuben Kincaid

How often have we re-gathered family members for the third or fourth photograph so that everyone is looking in the same direction and expressing an equal amount of joy and attention to the camera? After a friend takes a digital picture we immediately look and delete this photo or that snapshot in which we don't look our best. Even before we get our fifteen minutes of commercial fame, we've learned to edit out the undesirable images not suited for public exposure and are unlike the perfectly airbrushed images seen daily in advertisements.

Artist and Art Center faculty member, Aron Gent presents his recent photographs in *Not Quite as Good Because of You*, drawing inspiration from his youth as a grocery store bagger in the Milwaukee suburbs, as well as his current side-gig as a commercial photography assistant. He explains, "While being a bagger you see peoples consumption habits, you observe the intimacy and consistency in which people purchase goods." Through the images, Gent aims to address the simultaneously intimate and revealing practice of consumerism.



*4th July Cones*, 2011, archival pigment print, 24 x 16 inches, Courtesy of Reuben Kincaid

strategies of "selling" in a consumer society. In *HC-5215LP*, a young girl leans in to take a bite of a sandwich, possibly the beginnings of an image meant to sell a tasty meal. The girl's eyes are awkwardly half-closed creating a strange and unappetizing expression. Similarly, *PORK LEG PROC3* contains elements of the perfect holiday event that could have been pulled from a magazine cover: cozy kitchen setting, home-cooked meal, and finely dressed family. Only, the family is photographed before or after the intended moment resulting in an image

The title of the show originates from a motivating, yet intimidating message taken from a found Publix Employee Handbook, where the president of the company states "Publix will be a little bit better-or not quite as good-because of you." Finding humor in this statement, Gent attempts to highlight a similar irony in the packaging and repackaging of consumer goods. Gent also understands photographs as packaging. Like a shopping bag, photographs help bundle-up ideal moments that can be purchased.

The photograph *Four Bags* first appears as a clever image of Whole Foods shopping bags playfully floating like balloons against a quaint blue sky. Though, on closer inspection, the backdrop is wrinkled and completely unconvincing. Gent strategically reveals the edge of the canvas in the photograph with the ugly studio wall peeking from behind the backdrop and foiling our expectations of an easily consumable commercial image designed to take us to a happy place.

The people present in the photographs on view explore different

where each family member seems to be isolated within their own thoughts and desires, while moving in different directions. Additionally, the two traditional-looking portraits in the show mimic the employee-of-the-month format, which is alluded to in the artworks' titles *Store #00266M* and *Store #00266AM*, and question the customary practice of rewarding the top merchants of a store or business with a framed photograph.

The art works here not only deal with the commercial images of people, but of objects as well. *Grocery Artist (Adrienne Goodrich)* contains several grocery items with packaging that is rendered by artist Adrienne Goodrich, set against a found paint-splattered backdrop reminiscent of 1980's-style portrait and yearbook photography. These items stand in for families dressed in their Sunday best, but their handmade nature makes them appear unfinished and not quite right. Perhaps Gent is challenging our notion of "product" pairing the artist's object next actual cans of food present in the photograph *Hearts*. Which object has the most value? With this in mind, Gent created the temporary sculpture *Untitled*, and has bagged every item in his bedroom, including his bed, flipping the grocery-bagger-as-voyeur syndrome on its head by allowing a look into his relationship with his own purchased objects.

In *Not Quite as Good Because of You*, Gent explores our relationships with these ubiquitous commercial images by pulling away the curtain and asking how these images shape the expectations we have of ourselves and our lives. How do we duplicate these images in our daily life? What do we polish out of our family snapshots and images on Facebook with the aid of Photoshop? In a world overwhelmed by images, and digital spaces for their display, perhaps we are making ourselves too easily consumable by conforming to the advertising images of the idealized life of the consumer

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*Grocery Artist (Adrienne Goodrich)*, 2011, archival pigment print, 24 x 16 inches, Courtesy of Reuben Kincaid