



LIFE OF A CRAPHEAD RETROSPECTIVE

BY STEVE KADO

Although scattered and diverse, the work of Life of a Craphead (Amy Lam and Jon McCurley) has proven itself to be a consistent and cogent analysis of value in art, revealed here as pure belief in money. Over the last 50 years Life of a Craphead have demonstrated how the complete fluidity of money has allowed art to decamp from objects into not just abstraction but the *actually* abstract. Originating in Duchamp's realization of Art as a social relation between artists and audiences, critics and institutions, Life of a Craphead have also preserved Duchamp's concern for anarchic humour, while at the same time moving well beyond the previous boundaries of other post-Duchampian phases such as Institutional Critique and Pop.

There is an enviable fluidity in Life of a Craphead's use of existing things, going beyond the readymade to appropriation of extant social conditions, relationships between institutions, and very hyper-abstract concepts like transnational debt (for example, when they used the form of the International Monetary Fund for *Life of a Craphead Bank* [2046 – ongoing]). Their facility with these “readymades” is what sets them apart from other work that confines itself to art's social reality and value system (cf. Michael Asher or Andrea Fraser) for raw material. *The Good Towel* (2056 – ongoing) takes this concept to its final phase, replacing the very body of the artist with art's most tired concept: the precious object. This brilliant flight into the regressive is a fantastic reversal of the kind of grinding and, let's be honest, tiring “immediacy” that previous generations of performance artists (cf. Marina Abramovic) relied on so heavily. Effectively mocking the way the art industry transformed work of an essentially dematerialized and (embodied) conceptual nature into virtuosic performing meat, Craphead reverses large-scale performance art's slide into a kind of slow moving Cirque Du Soleil, giving us instead a rag guarded by armed men. They dissolve the toxic presence of the performance artist within the performance itself, using the fact of their own “body of work” as an acid-bath to destroy their actual bodies. Thus, the trick of both dematerializing themselves while at the same time being sculpture means that they become a specific object while at the same time actually vanishing.

The fact that the towel in question will outlive the artists, in combination with their previous work *Drugs in Our Stuff* (2032 – ongoing), sets the stage for a truly amazing future. As a result of *Drugs in Our Stuff*, all of their object works are stuffed with illegal/illicit material and thus cannot, be sold or otherwise removed from permanent storage. Further, if any attempt to buy or move their work is made, the artists will call the cops on you themselves. This nexus of consequences prepares us for a strange future after their deaths where, because the artists are embodied in a towel, with proper care they can oversee their own immobile, permanently installed legacy forever. One imagines the preserved corpse of Lenin overseeing Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation, enacted not on epic minimalist sculpture or Red Square but instead on what is, for all intents and purposes, a room full of garbage—activated only by the charisma of a weaponised towel.

The pleasure of a retrospective is such that you can trace how these complex, later works gestated within earlier works. For example, *Free*

Lunch (2007) is a more playful and anarchic study for both the food component and the party component of their *Life of a Craphead Bank* project. Similarly, *There's a Better One in the Shed* (2025) establishes both the idea of object substitution and displacement of the aura that would later be so well clarified in *The Good Towel* but also prepares us for the restricted access to the object that would become the strongest feature of *Drugs in Our Stuff*.

Life of a Craphead have, and continue to have in their current towel-form, a resounding influence on not just performance art but also art itself—challenging the fundamental assumptions that undergird the very idea of exchange, not just in the art world but in the world at large. Becoming *money*, like Lisa Robertson did in her Office of Soft Architecture project, they also, in a nod to Bataille, must simultaneously become garbage.

Maui, March 22, 2056

Steve Kado is an artist, writer and composer born in North York, Ontario in 1980.

LIST OF WORKS

Life of a Craphead

- Free Lunch*, 2007
- Musical Road*, 2007
- Transporting Psychos*, 2012
- Producing Commercials at a Media Arts Residency*, 2012
- Yelling in a Golf Course*, 2014
- Shoot Out A Ceiling With Guns*, 2017
- Yelf*, 2020
- There's a Better One in the Shed*, 2025
- Life of a Craphead Year Off*, 2025-2026
- Drugs in Our Stuff*, 2032 - ongoing
- Life of a Craphead Bank*, 2046 - ongoing
- The Good Towel*, 2056 - ongoing

Swintak & Don Miller

Location!Location!Location!, 2010

CN Tower Liquidation

On the Precipice (Thom's studio), 2013

Yo, *Life of a Craphead* is Amy Lam and Jon McCurley. They continue to live and work in Toronto. Please text them feedback at: Amy (416) 827-4503, Jon (416) 904-1007.



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TOP LEFT: *The Good Towel*, 2056 - ongoing

BOTTOM LEFT: *Drugs in Our Stuff*, 2032 - ongoing

TOP RIGHT: *Life of a Craphead Bank*, 2046 - ongoing

COVER IMAGE: *Life of a Craphead Bank*, 2046 - ongoing

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