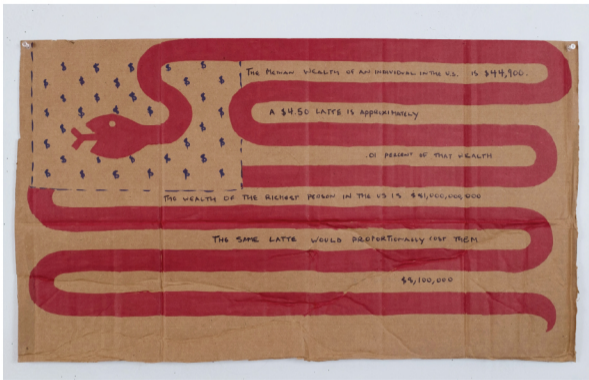




Rejected Hand-Me-Down: Jenny Holzer x Ralph Lauren Polo, 2018, felt applique on kid's polo shirt, plastic hanger, 20 x 18"



above: United Snakes of America, 2017, marker on cardboard, 16 x 30"

front cover: Fortune, 2012, 3:34, animation

Vandana Jain is an artist and textile designer based in Brooklyn, NY. She received her Bachelor's from New York University and went on to study Textile Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology. Her work explores the intersections of pattern and symbol, and spirituality and consumerism. Jain's work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. In the last few years, she has had solo projects at Lakeeren Gallery in Mumbai, India (2012); Station Independent Projects, Lower East Side, NY (2013); and Smack Mellon and BRIC House in Brooklyn, NY (2014). She has received several awards for her work including the Emerging Artist's Fellowship at Socrates Sculpture Park, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Residency, and the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant. Her work has been profiled in Artforum, The New York Times, Art Slant, Mumbai Boss, Kyoorius and Beautiful Decay. [www.vandanajain.net](http://www.vandanajain.net)



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341 DELAWARE AVENUE BUFFALO NY 14202 716.854.1694 WWW.HALLWALLS.ORG



Once upon a time, an exhibition title like Vandana Jain's *Artisanal Capitalism* would have seemed primarily wry and pithy, an ironic observation about the ever-evolving spheres of capitalism in its varying, quixotic forms. In 2018, the title feels almost *merely descriptive*. *Artisanal* is a brand, a way of life, an assuaging of liberal guilt, a scouting badge connoting positive—if ambiguous—moral positioning. It is the hand-crafted, sustainable, feelgood position of our time. It is to be applauded at the same time it is to be rightly mocked. A title that would have once seemed more biting now seems depressingly banal because its truthness cuts deep.

This is not the fault of the artist. Meaning changes, sometimes more quickly than we can measure. And context is supremely fluid in whatever one calls the meta-riffic era we currently occupy. Consider Vandana Jain's hilarious mashup of Jenny Holzer and Ralph Lauren in her *Rejected Hand-Me-Down*. It collapses fine art with commercial design and also remarks upon questions of disposability and reuse—are hand-me-downs even a thing anymore or are they a concept from a bygone era? In 2018, it is not difficult to find a toddler who is dressed better than your average adult. The piece is also distinct for applying such an emphatic declaration on such a diminutive item, undermining the morality it is allegedly promoting. And yet, as sophisticated as the piece is, consider whether you would be at all surprised to walk into Urban Outfitters tomorrow and find that exact item of apparel for sale.

It's a wild notion that the space for artistic commentary has narrowed to that degree, but it's a telling detail that the important questions posed in Jain's work. The ambiguous zone between art and commerce may still be ambiguous but may also be far narrower than previously thought. Part of this slippery equation results from art's attempt to remark on commerce from borrowing the visual

iconography of commerce, a borrowing that requires deftness. Jain's *Valorization (felt)* depicts the top twenty-five US corporations from 1955-2017, ranked according to gross revenue. Depending on your perspective, this could be a detailing of the worst of the worst of the last half century, the brands that have brought us both progress and ruin, taught the world to sing in perfect harmony while simultaneously kicking it over the edge of a cliff. And yet this collected visual equation is a rapturous ten-foot tapestry of hypnotic, alluring, and seductive iconography.

There's no way around that. The imagery Jain deploys in her work was essentially created through acute calculation to play to our dreams and desires in much the same manner as art, if for different goals. Nothing demonstrates that shared hypnotic allure better than *Fortune*, a brief digital animation in which the top 100 companies from the Global 500 (2011) blossom into a magnificent mandala arguably as lush and beautiful as one labored over by Buddhist monks. That said, a macro-economic mandala does not offer the same purification and healing, unless perhaps you are middle/upper management.

And the artist is not merely depicting refashioned corporate iconography. *ALLT ÅT ALLA*, a taped wall piece is a redrawing of the logo for a Swedish leftist autonomous group striving for the abolition of a class-based society. The organization's original logo collates three triangles together beneath a single circle—mountains and sun, or perhaps figures holding up a brighter future together. Jain injects a hyperbolic intensity into these aspirational yearnings. In a way, it is as though the artist applied market research toward how to make the original, flat logo more dynamic and more responsive to the themes it represents. She has applied a designed, marketing mind frame to the thing that seeks to

dismantle that mind frame.

Jain's use of holographic tape within these wall pieces makes for an enticing work of visual art while also giving acute emphasis to the intensity of the themes and problems that lie behind these works. In a new wall piece called *Quid Pro Quo*, devised for a three-sided space, Jain overlays the words CONSUMER and PROFIT atop CITIZEN and PEOPLE as bookends framing a vertiginous swirl of logo-esque forms drawn from the logos of the EPA, Occidental Petroleum, and second chemical company. The moral of the message may be clear, but it is offered free of a moralizing tone. Instead, it reiterates that one's relationship to consumer capitalist culture is decided by a choice.

There is a surfeit of visual intensity in the work of Vandana Jain, as there is in our explosive consumer culture, but there are numerous quieter gestures as well. *United Snakes Of America* is marker on cardboard, a simplicity that does not allow the abrasive bluntness of the fact it articulates to hide anywhere. In the companion piece

to *Valorization (felt)*, *Valorization (dollar)* clearly and simply tracks productivity and hourly wage across almost seven decades, a graph that needs no further explanation and no excessive visualization to depict its grim reality.

Still, it is not all grim reality and plunging into a blank amoral abyss. In a quiet work called *Protest*, a series of golden halos are painted upon sheets of cardboard as protest signs for unspecified and presumably wide-open usage. It is another work that reintroduces the notion of choice into the broader equation of the ills of capitalism. It is a moral (and a morality) that appears to be slowly taking hold—if we are complicit in the creation and maintenance of onerous systems of oppression, we can choose to be as complicit in the methodologies that subvert, reverse, or demolish those systems and their hold upon us.

John Massier  
Visual Arts Curator



top: *Quid Pro Quo*, 2018, paper and holographic tape, dimensions variable  
left: *Valorization (felt)*, 2018, felt applique on canvas, 49" x 121"  
above: *Valorization (dollar bill)*, 2018, beads, rubber and thread on U.S. currency, 2.61" x 6.14"  
right: *Allt Åt Alla*, 2016, holographic and paper tape on wall, 6.5 x 10 feet

