



"GOD SAVE THE QUEEN"

2010

David Buckingham

WELDED METAL, 33" X 60" X 3"

PHOTO: COURTESY CAIN SCHULTE CONTEMPORARY ART

### SAN FRANCISCO

#### David Buckingham: "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful" at Cain Schulte Contemporary Art

Some contemporary artists make much ado of criticizing consumer capitalism, an economic system not without grievous faults, as recent events confirm (to almost nobody's surprise, at least in retrospect). That system, however, has fed the art world for a century, and is thus an odd target for ideological grandstanding from its financial dependents. And besides, selling expensively packaged subversion to the ruling class—isn't that sticking it to The Man?

Fortunately, not all artists endorse such easy outrage and cynicism. David Buckingham, who once wrote ad copy, crafts metal assemblages that simultaneously mock and pay homage to our commercial garden of earthly/earthy delights; like the best Pop artists, he balances visual pizzazz and ironic insouciance. But although his 1960s forebears were dazzled by the brave new world of postwar plenty, Buckingham, at the end of the Hydrocarbon Age, sees the American Dream nostalgically as he goes foraging in desert junkyards for faded, rusting, "55-gallon barrels, wheelbarrows, tool boxes, road signs, tractor parts, car doors, gas cans ... old, battered, colorful metal things that have a story to tell." Back at his Los Angeles studio, he reassembles this industrial jetsam into welded

collage-poems of stunningly beautiful color contrasts that mimic the form and function of old commercial signage while tangibly preserving mass culture's addictive jingles, slogans, movie catchphrases, and pop-tune lyrics.

While a few of Buckingham's pieces take the irregular cutout shapes of icons, as in *Circle Star* and *Dan White #3*, a multicolored scale model of the San Francisco politician's murder weapon, or letters (*The "Carnation" Dollar Sign*, *Chevelle*), most of the works are word arrays set within rectangular formats like marquees. Pieces comprising a few words—like *God Save the Queen*, from the Sex Pistols; *Psycho Killer*, from The Talking Heads; and *Ziggy Played Guitar*, from David Bowie—alternate with lengthier word salads—like *Adult Books* ("Tailpipe, Daddy's Boy, Big Truckin' Stud"), *Come On Baby* ("Come on baby, light my fire," from The Doors), and *White Punks on Dope* (from The Tubes). Those were the good old days; we thought they'd never end.

—DEWITT CHENG