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Libby Rothfeld's "The World Is Not Enough"

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View of Libby Rothfeld's "The World Is Not Enough" at Bureau, New York, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and Bureau.

The walls of Bureau are painted the creamsicle pink of the *Financial Times*' pages, as if you've stepped into the world of cultured capitalism. Ironically or otherwise, Libby Rothfeld's new show is pitched at the taste of the collector class, and links the patronage of art to the operations of risk and speculation. Her sculptures reference staples of high life from classical music to pleats and plaids—and the title derives from a late-90s Bond film in which Pierce Brosnan pursues oligarchs who would let off a nuclear bomb to drive up the price of oil, all the while looking like a wristwatch model. You imagine that the aesthete conjured by Rothfeld's show (named in the press release as "Doctor," and provided with a backstory including work at "The Firm," in academia, and in finance) is happy for someone else to do the dirty work, so he can read his FT in peace.

Rothfeld makes several clever formal moves to link the operations of a commercial gallery to those of the markets. *Of Human Bondage* (all works 2026), named after the 1915 W. Somerset Maugham novel about a man's search for satisfaction in art and love, is a series of sculptures of silhouetted men in suits. Six feet tall and painted in solid slabs of plaid, they are reminiscent of the Pictures Generation, as if Robert Longo's falling businesspeople were cast in a rotoscoped short film by Jack Goldstein. The patterns are garish, heavy on orange, yellow, and green, in the way of ostentatious sportswear or class rings. A "certain kind of man" in the form of collectible statues.

And yet, as if resisting their own commodification, these objects would be awkward to own. The plaid men lean against the wall; another series comprises wall-mounted assemblies of fabric, floating shelves, and objects including cushions and a shoe box. One sculpture looks like a study in how to dress a catering cart on the *Queen Mary II* ocean liner using garment bags for rented formalwear. The surfaces are chopped up and impractical, the craftwork a bit janky, almost folk art.

The show's centerpiece is a panoramic cubist painting in teals and peaches titled *Lunchtime at Brookfield Place*, the name of an upscale food hall in the nearby Financial District. It hangs next to *Lunchtime at Brookfield Place (Collector's Edition)*, a sculpture made to look like a poster for a symphonic performance in 1980, with a reproduction of *Lunchtime* as the art. The painting appears wrapped over a circular pillbox and several Owala thermos lids, placed just so, on a black platform—a lampoon of every masterpiece ever committed to a reusable tote.

The references are most dense in the wall works resembling gigantic cassette cases for classical recordings. The various J-cards are full of proper nouns that seem like plausible parts of a lineage of classical music recordings: Messiaen is a celebrated French modernist, but Zilio-Zenna is either made up or so obscure as to be ungoogleable. Other elements are obviously farcical, like a Bulgari advertisement or a photo of a car dashboard with a big yellow sponge on the console. Taken together, Rothfeld's satires perform a self-consciously postmodern broadcast of an expensive education by means of taste. Ersatz citations work with the genuine, making traps for the viewer's discernment.

But we now have Google and Claude to parse these details, so that deconstructing the semaphore of *Cassette 2 (Sean Connery driving)* into its component signs—an LSO performance of Wagner, an Alabama-based freight company with a retro logo, a photograph by a notorious paparazzo of the first James Bond driving a silver Cadillac at the valet stand of Spago—is less a demonstration of connoisseurship than the conspicuous consumption of computational resources.

Rothfeld evokes a loose group of artists rooting around in the degraded signifiers of past eras (from Martina Cox's bodices to Elizabeth Englander's nutcrackers) in ways that feel expressive but are underpinned by the history of their source materials. Post-internet, everything from prized antiques to rare musicianship is available for remixing. But new codes are always being formed to exclude those who don't belong. The elite responded to fast fashion and rampant bootlegging with quiet luxury; now, diligent upstarts imitate quiet luxury. "The World Is Not Enough" demonstrates a confusing moment in the class arms race. Rothfeld's show ducks the problem of endless aspiration (and its wan parody) by seeming happy where it is, enjoying the great works knocking around in the algorithmic bargain bin.