



## ARTIST GINA BEAVERS ON 'DIVINE CONSUMER' EXHIBIT

BY ALISON STEWART

September 6, 2024

**Alison Stewart (AS):** This is *All Of It* on WNYC. I'm Alison Stewart. We're finishing out our look at New York City gallery openings with Gina Beavers. For years, artist Gina Beavers has found inspiration from social media. Her bright, realistic paintings of beauty influencers, foodstagrammers, as well as elaborate nail art point the spotlight at the ways Instagram tries to sell us on a certain lifestyle.

For her latest installation, Gina has turned her attention to images that are literally trying to sell us goods, advertisements, specifically online ads for blankets, towels, and textiles. The installation is titled *Gina Beavers: Divine Consumer*, and it features three-dimensional paintings of various textiles. They pop off the wall and they almost look soft to the touch. Green and white pillows overlap with one another, red and pink towels are folded on top of each other, and a white knitted blanket seems to be almost pooled onto the wall.

The *New York Times* said in a review, "If Beavers previously laid bare the grotesque but intoxicating nature of what goes viral, here she is plumbing the slippery, sticky nature of today's images, which morph as they vie for clicks and cash online. Her earnest treatment of deadpan ideas has come to comic effect and has a certain poignancy, but spend enough time with one of her comfortcore paintings, as she calls them, and a sense of unease may overtake you. At once banal and strange, these mediate objects are not quite what they purport to be, a very of the moment condition." *GB: Divine Consumer* is on display now at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, and the installation will be open to the public through October 5. Joining me now in studio is Gina Beavers. Nice to see you.

**Gina Beavers (GB):** Hi, Alison. Thank you so much for having me.

**AS:** The big opening was last night, how did it go?

**GB:** It was amazing. My last opening with the gallery was four years ago, or-- Yes, 2020, so we weren't able to have an opening or anything. This was incredible to see lots of people I haven't seen in forever. It was really great.

**AS:** Why did you want to title the show *Divine Consumer*?

**GB:** That's a great question. The divine part came from this idea that I'm working in a new way. I'm making collages with images where previously I was appropriating things just completely. I would see a makeup tutorial and I would just recreate it. Now, I'm playing in the space of Photoshop with these collages in that moment where I have this inspiration where it comes together, it feels like a divine kind of moment, like magic. I wanted to incorporate that with also this idea of being just like a permanent consumer of everything, whether it's images or just stuff.

**AS:** You've described the installation, the pieces, as comfortcore. What does comfortcore mean to you?

**GB:** That's a name that I took out of a lifestyle article. It's sort of related to this idea of hygge, H-Y-G-G-E, which is a Scandinavian-- It's this idea of making a cozy space. I just thought, a lot of my other work has been food porn and different things, so I was like, comfortcore. It really relates to the materials I'm using and also this idea of a moment where we're kind of seeking comfort.

**AS:** You found your work from social media, and the latest group feels different from those paintings. Why do you want to take a step back from using social media as your source of inspiration?

**GB:** I think it was becoming-- If I think back to like 10, 15 years ago or when it first started, it was really such a wild, free place where you would see your friends, people would post lots of random things. It was very open. I think, of course, as more users and more eyes are on it, people have realized, like, oh, we can make money off of this. I'm getting a lot, all of the ads, I'm getting a weird algorithm. I see lots of videos. I don't even see my friends a lot of times. It's starting to sort of lose touch with what originally inspired me about being on there. I started to notice all my ads, which, of course, are an algorithm. I go looking for a nice blanket or something, and then all of a sudden, I'm getting ads in my feed for the exact same blanket, so this kind of back-and-forth playing with shopping and the algorithm, basically.

**AS:** The algorithm helped you develop this idea?

**GB:** Yes, basically. I was just, what am I seeing? What's interesting? What's happening here? Because I'm kind of looking at culture a lot through the apps and trying to step back a little bit and see what are we doing here and what is this reflecting about us.

**AS:** My guest is Gina Beavers. The name of the show is *GB: Divine Consumer* at the Marianne Boesky Gallery. It is through October 5th. As someone who's been thinking about consumerism and online marketing for a long time, do you think it's gotten worse, the consumerism has gotten worse in recent years?

**GB:** Yes, I think for sure. I'm an artist, not an economist, but I would say, the idea of inflation, the idea that we're spending so much money and that this overheated quality of the economy, I would say, is connected to the fact that we're on our phones and we advertise stuff constantly and we're thinking of things and going over and shopping. Yes, I think it's becoming even a bigger part of our lives, in a way.

**AS:** Is the show, is it a commentary on consumption, or is it an observation on consumption, or is it both?

**GB:** Yes, that's interesting. I think with a lot of my work, it's like I'm commenting, but I'm also implicated. I can't really stand outside and judge anyone because some of the things in the show are based on my own searches. I was determined to get a yellow gingham coverlet for my bed, and then I'm getting all this gingham in my feed. Someone at the opening last night said we were in front of the piece, and then she went to look at her phone and she got an ad for a gingham backpack right as we were talking.

**AS:** No way.

**GB:** I definitely feel implicated, but it's just sort of like, this is the state of our lives, we're caught up in this. I'm an artist, I want to reflect what it's like to live now.

**AS:** It's funny you said the gingham we'll talk about that. There's a lot of gingham in the show. We'll discuss that in a minute. What is your own weakness when it comes to online shopping? Something that you're always itching to buy?

**GB:** Oh, this is really, really tough. As you can tell from the show, household, anything. This is the first time we were able to buy a house in the suburbs during the pandemic. It's the first time after living in New York City for so long renting, we have a space, and I'm just constantly thinking about things that I want to put around the house. That's a huge part of online culture too are all of these decorator influencers and all of that. Once you go down that rabbit hole, it's just endless. The groups. Yes, that's my weakness for sure.

**AS:** Where did you find the inspiration for the textiles and the products that you capture in your show?

**GB:** A lot of them on Amazon, searching for weighted blankets or knitted blankets. In order to make some of these, because you can actually make this kind of blanket on your own, there are TikToks that teach you how to make it. In order to make these pieces, I watched some TikTok kind of knitting. They're like hand-knitting videos and shifted it up for my own use in order to make a version that would work. It's very much like Amazon shopping, Google shopping, very basic kind of home goods shopping.

**AS:** Part of the process for getting these images happens through Photoshop, right?

**GB:** Yes.

**AS:** What's that process like?

**GB:** I'll drag photos from a shopping site, or from Amazon, like detail images, side images, all the different ways they're trying to market the piece, and then drag these clips into Photoshop and then create a collage. Then from there, I make a three-dimensional work that's somewhere between sculpture and painting. It starts in this sort of digital realm, and that ends up very handmade.

**AS:** Yes, it's really interesting. It's sort of a 3D work. First of all, the sculptures, the pieces, they're attached to wood, right? Is that the way it goes?

**GB:** Yes.

**AS:** Okay, so what's the process of actually getting the work onto the wood but also having it be 3D?

**GB:** Yes, no, for sure. I'm still figuring it out, but it's basically, I project my photo collage onto the panel, I draw it out, and then I start to build the surface with various materials. Then once I get it to a place where I'm happy with it, I coat it with various things, and then I start bringing in the oil paints and sort of almost decorating the surface with what it looks like. It's like a realistic 3D version of what it is. It's just extra real.

**AS:** It's extra real. Well, it's interesting to get that texture of a textile of knitting is you have to, or like waffled towels you have on the counter, how do you get the actual images? I don't know how to-- How do you get that fabrication?

**GB:** Totally.

**AS:** I don't know what the right word is.

**GB:** No, no, no, you're right. It's basically sculpting. I'm either sculpting with paper pulp, or I'm using this kind of air dry foam for the braiding so that it's not too sticky. I can actually cross it over in sort of a braiding thing. It won't stick to itself. It's not as easy to work with as, say, actual textiles, because textiles don't stick to themselves so you can knit if that makes sense. I'm basically making like a sculpture first and then painting it.

**AS:** Have you ever tried textiles just personally?

**GB:** Oh, wow. Yes. I used to sew when I was a lot younger and crochet with my grandmother and things like that. I feel like I'm nothing worthy in terms of there are so many incredible textile artists out there. I'm really kind of making a painting of a textile. There are so many people who do incredible things with textiles that I could never even.

**AS:** I'm looking at a picture I took, but it looks like a sculpture too, at the same time.

**GB:** Yes. I love this idea of relief. It comes from a love of outsider art and kind of relief work being usually in the world of outsider artists, kind of Americana. That's where that sort of began. I also like to lose control of the painting, and once I've incorporated all these materials, you're losing control a little bit. It's not as precise as it could be. You know what I mean? It kind of runs interference for me.

**AS:** How do you feel when you lose control?

**GB:** I like it. I feel like it lends something interesting, rather than just going strictly from the photo and making it really, it just brings something unexpected. It's very gratifying.

**AS:** When you look at the pictures, I took pictures, and I took them from all different angles. I took front, I took the sides so I could see how much was hanging over the edge. I took it from the right, and I had a sense of wanting to look at the dimensionality of a painting. How do you want to play with perspective?

**GB:** That's really interesting. A lot of these are starting from photos and ending up in photos. I spent the morning going through when people had posted works from the show. It's interesting to me. Sometimes I forget about the sides of it until I'm actually in the studio with it because I'm just thinking strictly as a photo. Yes, I am really interested in the dimensionality, and I'm curious whether that will eventually take me off the wall completely into a sculpture.

**AS:** Oh, that's interesting.

**GB:** I have made some sculptures of multiple paintings in a cube, so you could look at them from all sides. I think because they originate in such a flat space, the front view is kind of where they start and end in terms of with the way I think now.

**AS:** Let's talk about color. What role does color play in your picture, photograph sculpture?

**GB:** I think for this show, I tried to focus on monochromatic. Each piece is like a different color world, and that's like a shopping thing too or a design thing where you're like, I want a yellow one. You start going—

**AS:** I want a yellow one.

**GB:** You put in the color that you want. You start looking at all those. I think a little bit of it comes from there, but it's also fun to play as a painter and the whole range of hues and tones in a certain color, like yellow or blue. It helps me when I'm searching Google to be like, blue gingham, and then just see the world of blue gingham that comes up and use all those different fragments.

**AS:** It's interesting because, in this picture that we're looking at blue gingham, there's a lot of blue gingham, but there's a lot of variation in the color.

**GB:** Yes, it's so amazing.

**AS:** It says blue and white, but it's a lot of blue and white.

**GB:** Yes, totally. Hues are just so fascinating because it could go all the way from a red blue to a green blue to light-- I'm trying to capture all of that, and I think like in a photograph, I usually work from an iPad, and I can really zoom it up, and I can see all these colors in it that you can't really see immediately.

**AS:** Oh, interesting.

**GB:** So for a painter, it's like a dream to be able to focus on color and have these technological tools to help you.

**AS:** Is it more difficult in a show like this to work with two colors?

**GB:** Yes, to get the variation, for sure. Although I will say, from a palette perspective, if you're just working with one set of colors, it is easier if you're working from a photograph. If you're working on an image that has a hundred colors, then your palette is way more expansive. I think, in a way, yes, it is.

**AS:** My guest is Gina Beavers. We are talking about her special *GB: Divine Consumer* at the Marianne Boesky Gallery. It is up through October 5th. How did you decide on where to put one painting?

**GB:** That is a really great question. Something that has bedeviled me ever since I've been showing for ten years or whatever. Installation is a really tricky thing. I thought I had worked it all out in these kind of virtual, like I had these photo collages of where everything would go in the gallery, and then they put everything there. I got there, and we managed to move every single work. Every single work and some of them were quite heavy, so I felt terrible. It's a tricky thing because sometimes I want things to feel overwhelming. What we say in the art world is overhung.

**AS:** Overhung.

**GB:** Yes. Or under. I've never heard underhung, but like a sparse hang where there's only one piece on a wall. That's usually that gives time and space for the piece to be considered on its own. So this, for me, was a very sparse, more sparsely hung show than I usually do, where I just pack many things in, because I like that kind of energy. I wanted the show to be a little bit more soothing, more comforting. It's a little more spread out.

**AS:** One of the pieces I'm looking at is the green chair. What's the name of that one again?

**GB:** I think it's Full circle in Jungle.

**AS:** Full circle in Jungle. It's a wild picture. When you get away, you realize there's so much going on. There's so many pillows, there's so many objects that are attracted to the chair. It is both realistic and surreal. How do you know which way to go?

**GB:** That's a great question. I'm really just trying to stick to the photo so in that sense, it's realistic, but it was a surreal image that I originally composed. It's kind of both. I try to stick to the photo that I've made as much as I can and just Skype. I don't really know where it ends up, but it does end up in this in between stage, like somewhere between surrealism and also there's a movement pattern and decoration. It's kind of within that. Or photo realism. It's somewhere in there.

**AS:** Then some of them are really close up of a knitting fabric. What patience does it take to get that detail?

**GB:** It's very similar to knitting something. I just sat there and braided for many hours and just tried to recreate the photo with those braids. It's very meditative. It's very similar to actually making a textile.

**AS:** Well, aside from your show called *GB: Divine Consumer*, over the summer, you curated a show called *Material World*. Had you ever curated a show before?

**GB:** Not on that scale, no. It was so exciting. It was like it was a dream.

**AS:** What was the guiding principle of the show? Because it's sort of, you gave a talk. I went to the talk. It sort of was a little bit of a precursor to the show.

**GB:** Yes, absolutely. I was thinking, given the work that I'm working on, artists who really work with stuff, whether that's they make representations of objects in their home for nostalgic reasons, or they actually use garbage and things that they have around them, I wanted to make a show around that. There's so many interesting artists across generations and movements that do that. That was the idea of world, it was like, I want to bring all these different artists together around objects, basically, around their love of making art about objects.

**AS:** You've worked a lot from Instagram accounts. TikTok has become huge compared to where it was the last time we talked to you. Have you thought about tackling TikTok in your art at all?

**GB:** Yes, I'm worried about [laughs]. I think I love to play. I'm just like, I love democracy. I don't know. I'm nervous. I'm nervous about it. I mean, I've gone on TikTok quite a bit. It's just such a different platform. It's really much more aligned to watching YouTube or watching TV even because you're seeing lots of creators who you don't necessarily know. I think the initial appeal for me was this idea that I knew a lot of people that I was following or had access to them. I've dipped in, like I dipped in to watch videos of how to make these blankets and things like that, but I'm kind of anxious. Yes, I'll get lost in TikTok.

**AS:** The name of the show is *GB: Divine Consumer*. You can see it at the Marianne Boesky Gallery through October 5th. It is so nice to see you again.

**GB:** It's so great to see you, Alison. Thank you for having me.