

Young, Gillian. "Frank Heath", *Art in America*, 12/05/14

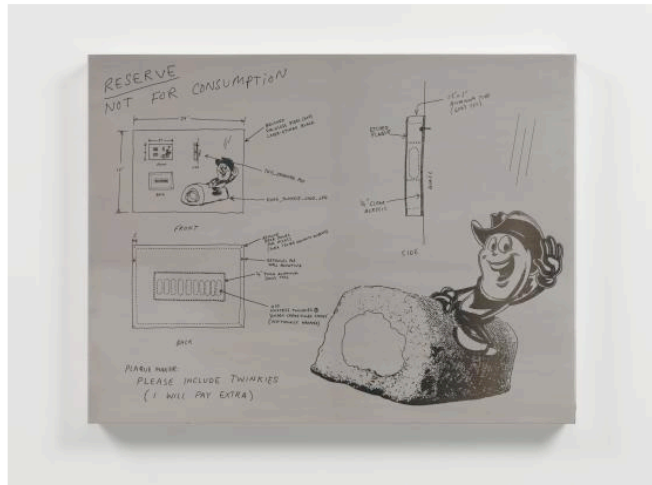
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Art in America

REVIEWS DEC. 05, 2014

Frank Heath

by Gillian Young



Frank Heath: *Production Drawing Backup Plaque (Twinkies Capsule II)*, 2014, laser-etched stainless steel, plaquemaker's Twinkies and mixed mediums, 18 by 24 by 1 1/4 inches; at Simone Subal.

In 2012, Hostess halted the production of Twinkies, the beloved cream-filled snack cakes. During the scare that ensued, people hoarded the remaining treats, paying top dollar for them at online auctions. Once plentiful, Twinkies became scarce and collectible, a new cultural and economic status supported by their shelf life, which is fabled to be infinite. Though Twinkies have been back in supermarkets since 2013, the New York-based artist Frank Heath has made good on the snacks' near fate as antiques. In *Production Drawing Backup Plaque (Twinkies Capsule II)*, on view in his exhibition "Backup" (all works 2014), 10 Twinkies are encased in an acrylic chamber behind a laser-etched stainless steel plaque.

Affixed to the wall, the durable artwork doubles as a time capsule, preserving the snacks for an indefinite future when they, and their container, may presumably communicate something about our present. But the message Heath is sending to another era is highly self-referential. The plaque has been inscribed with instructions for its own production: the plans and diagrams that Heath submitted to the company that fabricated the piece. One diagram featuring a Twinkies logo appears in the upper-left corner of the plaque. The diagram specifies that an enlarged version of the logo be etched onto the plaque's lower-right corner. The cartoonish image of a sponge cake in a cowboy hat riding another sponge cake is thus repeated on the plaque.

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Similarly recursive procedures were evident in the show's six other metal plaque-based works. *Live-Help Backup Plaque (Pioneer TX9100 Schematic JPEG)* is inscribed with the text of Heath's online chat with "David," a customer service representative at the laser-etching company that ultimately produced the piece. Heath attempts to draw David from his professional script, sending him ragtime lyrics and a link to the Wikipedia entry on the Emerald Tablet, a cryptic Hermetic text. The transcript is part of a copper diptych, the left panel of which is etched with a field of hexadecimal code. According to the gallery's press release, the alphanumeric grid is the computer-language version of a digital image depicting an analog stereo that Heath discusses with David.

In this work and elsewhere in the exhibition, Heath's plaques are metaphorically linked to hard disks. Both traditional commemorative plates and the high-tech platters spinning away inside computers are systems of mnemonic inscription—different forms of "backup." New media is thus equated with very old forms of remembrance. Likewise, Heath uses a device normally associated with public monuments—the metal plaque—to register personal and quotidian experiences. *Backup Plaque (Letter from Future Self)* is engraved with a letter Heath wrote to his junior high school inquiring about letters he and other students wrote in 1995 to their future selves, but which they never received as promised upon their graduation from high school (a duplicate plaque was mailed to his old classroom).

The humor that pervades this exhibition is undergirded by a sense of loss that motivates our need to record experiences and transmit them into the future. This is the broad theme of *On the Beach*, a two-channel video playing in the gallery that combines footage from a physics research laboratory in Switzerland with scenes shot in a department store. Holding up a blue towel in the store, a man asks a shopper about making a banner describing what she finds worthy of remembering about life on earth. "Go to Wikipedia on the Internet," she instructs him with deadpan sincerity.