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*Bad Luck Amazon Giftcard*  
Rachel McRae and Anthony Easton  
April 11 – May 3, 2014

Rachel McRae and Anthony Easton's performance and installation of *Bad Luck Amazon Giftcard* gives me the heebie jeebies. Seemingly tempting the alternate powers that be, *BLAG* demands the attention of both our conscious and subconscious selves as the artists perform a series of ritual actions based on superstitions meant to elicit bad luck.

McRae and Easton's collection and placement of freshly purchased items from amazon.com into a pyramid of ominous omens brings to light the question of what it means to build superstition and – given the focus on those superstitions that breed bad luck - tease fates into fruition. Each item in and of itself does not bring bad luck, yet in combination invites 7 years of dismay, impending demise, and a certain irreversible partnership with the devil. Yet, superstition is heavily rooted in ideas of supernatural causality, relying almost totally on a deeply set (and regularly enforced) commitment to the belief of no natural connection. In an attempt to explain surprise encounters, superstition acts as a bridge that defends the very gaps it wishes to fill. If superstition is the practice of luck, then the objects of *BLAG* continue to be nothing more than accessories that are empty of inherent meaning, tempting not fate, but satire.

The relationship we end up observing in the artists' performance is not one between the objects as objects, but rather between the placement of objects as a representation of superstition and the performance of enacting such a placement. The ceremonial gusto that embodies the act of placing each object becomes riddled with the unspoken language of ritual, revealing not our ability to control the unknown, but rather our desire to believe that we have control despite our incapacity to comprehend it. Ritual acts as an exposure of our insecurity, taking the place of universally missing confidence in our understanding of the world. Ritual's secret as a placeholder for our lost confidences becomes buried in layers of ascribed meaning, troubled representation, and faulty intent. Why, then, do we comply?

McRae and Easton's performance of *BLAG* is two fold. McRae and Easton's choreographed movements create a new ritual in and of itself as they assemble the amazon.com pieces into their predetermined place. Breaking mirrors, placing hats on the bed, and opening an umbrella indoors work to invite adversity via carefully planned arrangements. Though traditionally viewed as rites that are rife with history, nuance, and grace, the very practice of building a ritual from scratch unmasks the fragility of observance. This revelation simultaneously acts as a subversion; the performance of a performance of ritual works to undercut the very meaning ritual attempts to uphold by

reenacting each element in a spoof-like manner. Athletic gear and baseball caps, though noble fashion choices, are not necessarily the preferred garb of the druids, witches, and priests that frequent regular ritual routines.

Yet, there is something unnervingly comforting in ritual's idiosyncrasy. Though excessively symbolic in nature, ritual performance taps into our penchant for process, especially at a time when our own systems of belief have failed. *BLAG* is a commentary on the ever-timely resurgence of ritualistic practice and supernatural belief in times of economic and social recession. As brick and mortar shops are closing and credit cards are considered commonplace, the use of amazon.com to purchase everyday items such as an umbrella begins to feel as trite as it is necessary. Buying online has evolved into a ghost of the physical ritual of shopping we once all participated in, foregoing possible interaction with sales associates and other customers for the invisible protection of the Internet's mystery. Rather than gathering found or gently used items for *BLAG*, McRae and Easton's decision to buy new from amazon.com is indicative of a continued obsession with newness, despite our current inability to financially, emotionally, or environmentally sustain such shiny endeavours.

This new ritual, one of false comforts and affordability, is reminiscent of building confidence and alleviating anxiety through affirmation; as we work to surround ourselves with new objects, we are attempting to wash away imperfection and perhaps ultimately, superstition. Desperate for renewal, we prescribe to mechanisms of purification, using ritual as an attempt to make ourselves more presentable to good fortune. At the same time, in the end, superstition leaves each of us wanting to be lucky enough to be included in the prophecy.

-Greer Brabazon



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