

MARK KELNER

Pleasure's Promise

FOR *PLEASURE'S PROMISE*, this 120 foot mural which inaugurates Culture House's new outdoor Avant Garden, artist Mark Kelner uses the aesthetics of advertising and the language of commercial marketing to critique the fraught and ubiquitous history of Newport cigarettes: how they are represented in media and how, arguably, they are specifically targeted towards an urban, African-American audience. For decades, slogans such as "Alive with Pleasure!" and "Gratifying!" have been the cornerstones of many Newport print ad campaigns often found in national adult lifestyle magazines. Overwhelmingly, these words compliment imagery featuring white consumers seen fishing, shopping, and vacationing; all staples of the "American Dream." This is all the more problematic as such portrayals are aspirational for those who do buy and use Newport's menthols as they bring about illness and death for so many. What's being sold as "Pleasure," in fact, kills you. What's an aggressively promoted trope to black communities, in fact, signifies how words matter and

can symbolize conflicting and hurtful agendas.

By employing synonyms of these slogans and by incorporating modest graphic twists in their expression, which expose both their familiar and alien qualities, Kelner paradoxically explores the tension of other concerns beyond race and inequalities of public health. His work also directly comments on the ongoing gentrification of Washington, DC, examining the socio-economic fissures within the city and how new neighborhoods are being engineered toward cultural homogeneity. The sameness of these panels evokes a text-based landscape where buzzwords such as "Exceptional," "Delectable," and the French "Joie de Vivre" all mean nothing but hyperbole. They are designed to induce desire, but sadly, often at a terrible personal cost to long established residents. With plywood and house paint, Kelner uses satire to illustrate the hollowness of false promises, which he hopes inspire viewers to think differently about their world, and how they respond to the saturation of messaging all around them.

EXHIBITION VIEWS: CULTURE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, DC (click images to view videos)



EXHIBITION VIEWS: COLLECTION14, WASHINGTON, DC



EXHIBITION VIEWS: OBER GALLERY, KENT, CONNECTICUT



BEHIND THE SCENES



SELECTED NEWPORT ADS

Newport pleasure!
 Visit us at newportspleasure.com

© Lorillard 2004

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.

Alive with pleasure!
Newport

© Lorillard 2004

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.

FIRE IT UP!
Newport pleasure!

© Lorillard 2004

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.



pick your pleasure!

pick your pleasure! \$6.00 CIGARETTES

Newport pleasure!

LOTTERY TICKETS SOLD HERE

© Lorillard 2004

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.

Newport 100's

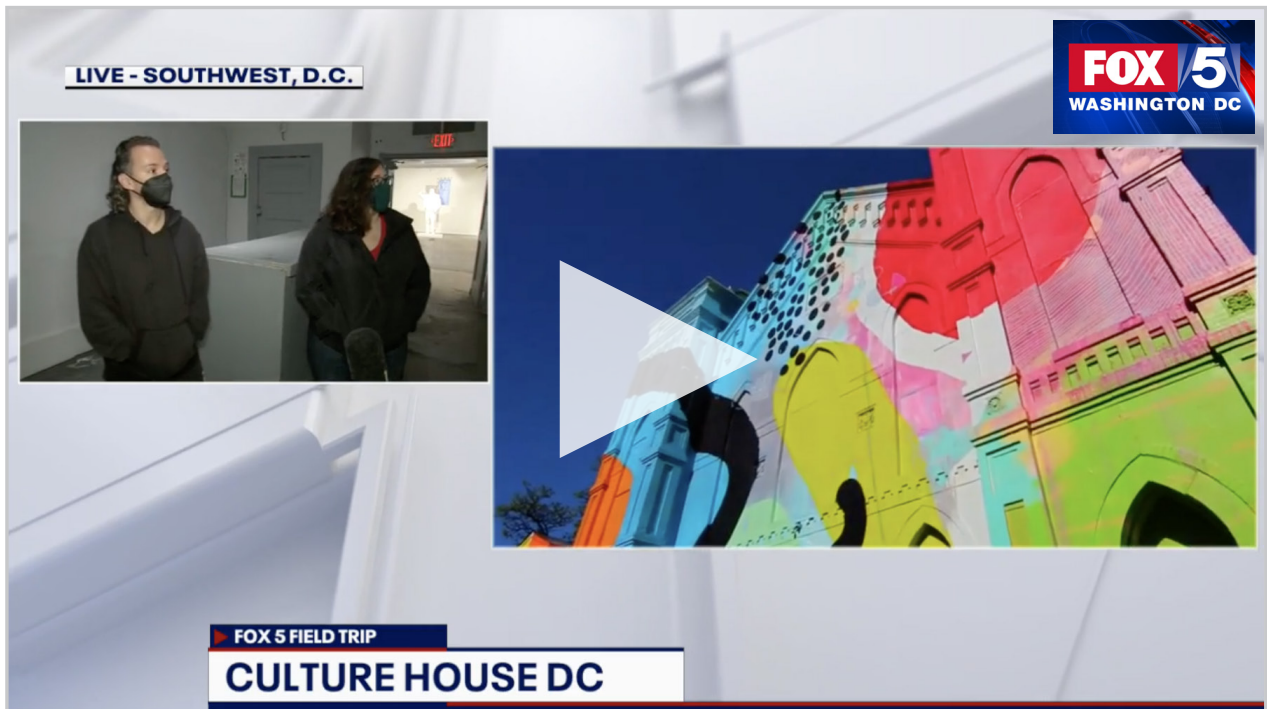
After all, if smoking isn't a pleasure, why bother?

Alive with pleasure!

© Lorillard 2004

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking is Dangerous to Your Health.

PRESS (click images to view video and articles)



The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Review by Mark Jenkins

January 8, 2021 at 7:00 a.m. EST

Mark Kelner

In retrospect, “Alive with Pleasure!” was not the best slogan for a tobacco product. But that tag line, devised by the purveyors of Newport cigarettes, was typical of the advertising that sold smoking as healthy, lively and robustly masculine. D.C. artist Mark Kelner challenges such pitches in “Pleasure’s Promise,” a text-only mural on display in Culture House D.C.’s outdoor Avant Garden.

The U.S.-born son of parents from the Soviet Union, Kelner often riffs on the overlaps, whether literal or conceptual, between Soviet propaganda and Madison Avenue hype. This project, however, is all-American. Rather than the red of the stars that can represent either Macy’s or the Kremlin, the piece is in garish orange on green — the former colors of Newport’s promotional campaign. Kelner borrows those ads’ bulbous erstwhile typeface, but not its words. Instead, each plywood panel hawks one supposed attribute of the menthol cigarettes and their users: “fantabulous,” “hunky-dory,” “devil-may-care” and such.

Newport cultivates an upscale sporty image, with a specifically nautical theme. But, as Kelner notes in his statement, the brand has long been marketed aggressively in Black communities. That’s why the artist decided to erect his satirical placards in Southwest Washington, historically an urban-renewal battleground. “Pleasure’s Promise” is as much about the process of gentrification as it is about the deceit of merchandising.



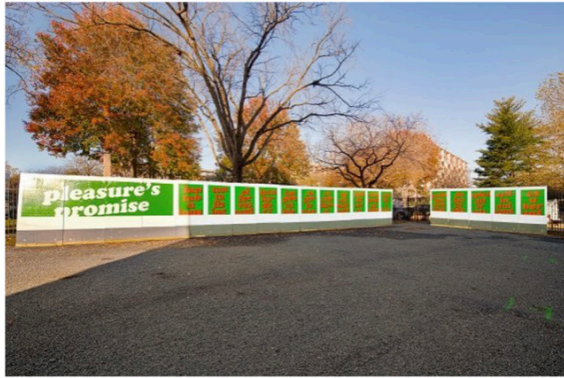
Mark Kelner's installation "Pleasure's Promise." (Courtesy Mark Kelner Studio)

DISTRICT **FRAY**
MAGAZINE

Culture House Presents “Tiny Pricks” +
“Pleasure’s Promise”



November 20, 2020 @ 10:57am | Kelsey Cochran



Courtesy of Mark Kelner Studio.

EASTCITYART

THE AVANT GARDEN AT CULTURE HOUSE PRESENTS MARK
KELNER *PLEASURE'S PROMISE*

By Editorial Team on December 1, 2020

Sat, 24 October 2020 - Sun, 20 December 2020



"Pleasure's Promise" at Culture House. Photo by Kelsey Cochran.