

**VICTORIA SMITH**

**2020**

**A Capitalist Christmas**

When I was beginning to think of ideas for this project, it was November, and it was, as they say, “beginning to feel a lot like Christmas.” I had been thinking a lot about how much the feeling of Christmas equated to me wanting to buy things, such as decorations and Christmas-inspired coffees. So, when assigned a project that was almost entirely open, this was the first idea that came to mind: to create a photo series that represented some of the malicious intentions behind the way businesses use “Christmas spirit” essentially as a marketing scheme. I went through a lot of ideas and trial and error for this project. I shot in an outdoor mall, inside of stores like Target and Kroger, and even the outside of a decorated State Farm building (on the weekend, when it was closed). It was a little difficult to get photos for this project, as at one time I was told to leave an outdoor mall because I could not take photos there without permission. After that point, everywhere I went I had to quickly snap and shoot photos; there wasn’t a lot of time to adjust the exposure settings to get the perfect photo. For these photos, my process was looking for areas that framed a generally “Christmassy” space with glaring outliers such as price tags, store signs, and, my favorite, the State Farm tagline “Providing Insurance and Financial Services.”

I think the main strength of this work is the concept and meaning. There is a strong concept behind these photos that ties them together as a series, while they may not have been as strong on their own. I think the framing and composition of these photos are another strength as well, as I shot each photo as carefully as I could to only include what I wanted within the frame. However, because of the hurried nature in which I had to shoot some of these photos, some are framed much better than others. Color is a strength as well, as red and green colors are consistent across the photos. I would say that unity/continuity is both a strength and a weakness in this piece, as many of the photos work together well, but some, 004 and 005 especially, feel somewhat different. I would also say that balance may also be a weakness as well, as I do feel that some of my images are asymmetrical and lacking in balance.

The meaning behind this project is that in today’s day and age, marketing has essentially taken over Christmas and has basically turned it into a manipulative, capitalist scheme. Businesses have pushed the Christmas season earlier and earlier in order to coerce more money out of people. While I make this critique, I have very much fallen victim to it. As such, these photos have almost a sense of irony behind them as well. And it has also made me realize just how much the feeling of “Christmas spirit” equates to wanting to buy something. For this project, I was inspired by Lisa Kereszi, especially her photography book *Fun and Games*. In her book, she photographs very purposefully framed shots of recreational areas like bowling alleys and amusement parks, creating an almost melancholy mood. Although I took inspiration from her style and technique, my work ended up rather different from hers. I was mainly inspired by her use of framing that made something considered as positive (like an amusement park, and in my case Christmas displays) appear strange, uncomfortable, and out of place.

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