

Brad Troemel  
*New and Handmade By Me*

**FEUER/MESLER**

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Reception for the Artist: Sunday, April 3, 2016

Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11-6

**Introduction:**

Every exhibition I've done has featured new work from a new series that use new fabrication strategies—new to me, at least! I hope you all enjoy not having to look at the same thing over and over again from me, because I know that I'd be bored out of my head making the same thing over and over again. I'd love for you to follow my Instagram (@bradtroemel). I try to update daily, showing images of works in progress so that you can follow from the moment of a project's vague conception on through to its fabrication and final display in a gallery. Most of what an artist does goes unseen. The affective labor, material tests, failed ideas, and ongoing self-education that comprise making a new exhibition are erased at the moment of their end product's display. This leaves you, the viewer, to see a shiny tip of the iceberg of work as though a dozen objects fell from the sky. Except in this case, the sky is my kitchen and I have industrial heaters on in my house at all times to dry things, so it's difficult to sleep. But, I truly think of Instagram as a way to recoup otherwise invisible time, labor, and money invested. Making new work every exhibition necessitates more of all three of those things, so I feel a pressure to integrate the process into the presentation of what I do, and what I do is make new handmade art by me. This is what I'm most qualified to do so there's no turning back. This job is my forever home.

I'm always thinking about how to make a living. How can I continue making the art I want to make, get exhibitions, and pay my bills/student loans? I have a pretty zealous habit of bankrupting myself in the process of making these new exhibitions, with high stakes plans that the money will come back to me via sales. It's not gambling if you make your own luck. The biggest expense in making new work is that you have to buy new materials and figure out how to use them from scratch, which usually requires buying more and more of that material until you know how to work it just right. Failed material tests lead to what I call production schedule "traffic jams" in money, space, and time

where potential ideas outpace the material possibilities of what you can work on at a given point. Ever try driving a U-Haul in New York? The traffic is terrible.

Beyond using Instagram as a way of accounting for my otherwise invisible exhibition sweat, it recently became a priority of mine to realize all of the works I thought about making but was unable to complete due to some limitation of money, space, or time. Just think of all those little idea lists artists make in top-secret Google Docs but never end up doing—you probably have one yourself! So I started a new project called Ultra Violet Production House with Joshua Citarella. UVPH is an Etsy store that digitally composites advertising images to present hypothetical products-as-artworks to buyers. Once you buy something from our store, we then hop on Amazon, eBay, or Alibaba and send all the constituent parts to you along with any tools or means of production needed when you're constructing the final product. We provide guidelines for assembly and include certificates of authenticity. With no standing inventory and material costs paid up front, our only overhead is our own creativity and every artist has a surplus. That and our overhead is time as unpaid labor.

Now that I've described the art I "don't" make, what about the art I *have* made for this exhibition? With finite resources, you need to have priorities. I use Pinterest as a way to organize which tutorials I want to utilize for which project. The works I chose to make for this exhibition are based on Pinterest tutorials where the end result wasn't fully known in advance. These were tutorials that opened up the process to a greater degree of customization, randomization, and innovation. This way the resulting handmade works could become more me and the unique viewing experience could become more you.

*New and Handmade by Me's* main reference points are Pinterest tutorials and Survivalism. Pinterest is an idea cataloging social network that encourages participants to "go out and do that thing," as CEO Ben Silberman says. Pinterest is the place where people become inspired and Etsy is the place they go to get hired. The two sites are prime grounds for maker culture, which is a technology based extension of DIY culture that revels in the creation of new devices as well as tinkering with existing ones. Heard of Steampunks? It's like that but more general. Typical interests enjoyed by the maker culture include engineering oriented pursuits such as electronics, robotics, 3-D printing, and the use of CNC tools, as well as more traditional activities such as metalworking, woodworking and, mainly, its predecessors, the traditional arts and crafts. Maker culture stresses a cut-and-paste approach to standardized hobbyist technologies, and encourages cookbook re-use of designs published on websites like Pinterest. In maker culture there is a strong focus on using and learning practical skills and applying them to reference designs.

The resurgence of maker culture feels analogous to buyer demands that are increasingly anti-mass produced, anti-GMO, anti-outsourced, etc. Farm to table consumption implies an intimate relationship between the buyer, the good, and its maker. Advertising becomes more important than ever, as companies now dedicate themselves to educating their viewers across multiple media platforms about the ethics they stand by. Who made it, what they used, why they do it, where they live. Against the anonymizing effects of globalized capitalism, these demands reflect a desire to be made aware of every actor in the network of production and to be as informed as possible when it comes to the products their bodies are in closest proximity to—principally food, clothing, and hygiene supplies. Farm to table consumption implies a tightening of the number of

people in a supply chain that prefigures a logical extreme: doing it yourself. There is no more intimate a relationship between buyer and seller, producer and consumer, than to merge those two roles into one. Ethical concerns about where a product comes from, how it was made, and how the workers were treated are made self-apparent when you yourself are the worker.

If Pinterest maker culture presents us with the positive liberty to change the world, then Survivalism is the expression of negative liberty from immanent societal collapse rooted in mistrust of the social contract. Survivalism is a movement of individuals or groups (called survivalists or preppers) who are actively preparing for emergencies, including possible disruptions in social or political order, on scales from local to international. Survivalists often acquire emergency medical and self-defense training, stockpile food and water, prepare to become self-sufficient, and build structures (e.g., a survival retreat or an underground shelter) that may help them survive a catastrophe. The idealistic hope for making a healthier world together and the nihilistic paranoia that the world will end at any second once again arrive at the same practical conclusion: doing it yourself. And for this exhibition, *New and Handmade by Me*, that's just what I've done!

### **Exhibition:**

For this exhibition I learned how to

- Build my own vacuum forming machine
- Make glycerin soap
- Quill birds and flowers
- Make bath bombs
- Make chalk from Soylent
- Make handmade plantable paper
- Grow psilocybin mushrooms
- Make sliding security frames
- Build my own time out dolls
- Ombre dye fabric
- Build a mini metal foundry
- Cast underground ant colonies in aluminum
- Bake gingerbread houses from scratch

