

MacBride, Caitlin. "Transcendent Functionalism at Jeff Bailey Gallery," *The Rib*, 28 December 2017.

# THE RIB

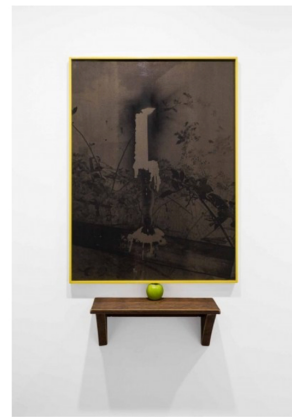
## Transcendent Functionalism at Jeff Bailey Gallery

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HUDSON, NEW YORK | RESPONSE

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Jeff Bailey Gallery's current show *Transcendent Functionalism* features artists and designers who consider usefulness as a guiding principle. The exhibition asks: what is usefulness? Humor? Obsession? Is the past useful? Is the future?

The makers included in *Transcendent Functionalism* consider all possibilities to these questions from the jump. Viewers are offered chairs, planters, vessels, lights, a cloak. The dark humor of 2017 seems to rattle around the gallery. In the wake of a year that left many grappling with their function and worth as citizens, it's particularly useful to consider the American history of object-making. Gallerist Jeff Bailey leads us on a path of contemporary art-making while also harkening back to the history of design established by the utopian community of the Shakers.

This is not the first time art's relationship to Shaker design has been explored. The Parrish Museum paired Shaker objects alongside Donald Judd's furniture in 1996 with the twin exhibits "Shaker: The Art of Craftsmanship" and "Focus: Donald Judd Furniture." The modernist pairing was explored again at The Met last year with "Simple Gifts," which placed the museum's Shaker objects alongside work by artists such as Martha Graham's modern dance "Appalachian Spring," featuring set design by Isamu Noguchi and a score by Aaron Copeland. All three artists were inspired by Shaker life and aesthetics.

A darkly ominous photo of candles against a background of vines and leaves by artist Colby Bird is a solarized photostatic print coated all the way through with multiple layers of oil-based woodstain and charcoal. The photo's surface reflects the objects in the center of the gallery, most notably the Shaker cloak. This rose hued wool cloak perched upon a mannequin feels like a ghostly presence in the space. Its resemblance to the women of Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" weighs heavy on the other objects in the room. This piece feels frighteningly prescient as our political climate beckons us back to another era. While the Shakers were socially progressive, guided by a belief in racial and sexual equality, pacifism, and common property, they were also limited by their repressive stance against procreation as well as the rapidly changing culture at large. They stand a reminder that every utopian movement has its flaws and the best of progressive intentions can be derailed. Yet, what their hands created remains with us. Hearts to God, and Hands to Work, this show stands to prove that through art making and design they will persist.