

OPEN 24 HOURS

Edra Soto





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by Edra Soto

According to data from the Centers for the Disease Control and Prevention, Chicago neighborhoods are among the areas with the highest binge drinking rates. Living for over seven years in East Garfield Park gives me some perspective on how residents of my neighborhood engage in this behavior. Something that has not change throughout the years is the amount of garbage and littering you can find on the sidewalks, alleys and empty lots. Collecting the tossed off bottles of alcohol becomes a way of measuring or archiving the neighborhood's consumption. Something that stands out to me is the amount of empty bottles of cognac (Hennessy and Rémy Martin) consumed. Reid Mitenbuler, author of *Bourbon empire: The Past and Future of America's Whiskey*, explains that,

"Cognac's relationship with African-American consumers started later, when black soldiers stationed in southwest France were introduced to it during both world wars. The connection between cognac producers and black consumers was likely bolstered by the arrival of black artists and musicians like Josephine Baker, who filled Paris clubs with jazz and blues during the interwar years, according to Dr. Emory Tolbert, a history professor at Howard University. France appreciated these distinctive art forms before the U.S. did, continuing a French tradition dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville of understanding aspects of American culture better than Americans did. For African-Americans, the elegant cognac of a country that celebrated their culture instead of marginalizing it must have tasted sweet." "During the 1990s, cognac sales were slow, and the industry was battling an image populated by fusty geriatrics. Then references to cognac began surfacing in rap lyrics, a phenomenon that peaked in 2001 with Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy's hit "Pass the Courvoisier," causing sales of the brand to jump 30 percent. During the next five years, other rappers teamed up with brands, and increased overall sales of cognac in the U.S. by a similar percentage, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States."

The title OPEN 24 HOURS, refers to the 24 hour a day accumulation of bottles that are littered in my neighborhood of Humboldt and East Garfield Park, Chicago. These areas (specifically the ones closed to Franklin Blvd.) are highly visible areas to the community and rarely if ever cleaned by the city. Every morning I walk my dog around the block and collect between four to ten empty bottles of alcohol as a memento to the communities' consumption. The bottles are stripped of labels, cleaned and arranged in a classic still life in the tradition of Italian painter Giorgio Morandi. The still life's represent one day of collecting. The bottles are stripped of their identity and their owners remain anonymous. The OPEN 24 HOURS series alludes to the burden and sometimes heartbreak of a destructive behavior caused by poverty, unemployment, drugs consumption, depression, low self-esteem and the glorification of overindulgent behavior.

Edra Soto (b. Puerto Rico, 1971) is a Chicago-based artist, educator, curator, and and co-director of the artist-run outdoor project space *THE FRANKLIN*. More about Soto at edrasoto.com

Audrey's Club Meetings

by La Keisha Leek

One of my earliest and fondest memories as a child was of my great grandmother Audrey Louise Spotford at her home in West Tampa. She hosted a group of women for in-home happy hours and late-night banter. I simply knew these gatherings at that time as *Club Meetings*. I remember Luther Vandross' *Never Too Much* and *I've Been Working* rippling through the house; the voices of Black women as an overlay. I remember the smell of nicotine from Virginia and Eileen's cigarettes. I remember the fog. I remember thinking I was in the presence of supernatural women; who is to be able to pull clouds out of the sky, and in to our living room? I remember card playing and laughter and dancing, Black bodies dancing. I remember freedom. I remember glasses. Lot of glasses. Clear glasses with ice and brown juice. Liquor. I remember bottles on the table. Paul Masson. I remember my great grandmother's favorite color was purple, too. I remember Crown Royal. I remember community. I remember thinking I couldn't wait until I grew up to have a club of my own.

La Keisha Leek is an independent curator and writer based in Chicago. With collaborator Sadie Woods, they make up the 2016-17 Curatorial Collective in Residence at The University of Chicago's Arts + Public Life. Interested in the practices of emerging artists of color, women, and queer-identified artists, they work to further the reach of regional art practices through social conversations on the arts, community, and politics. Leek is currently the Exhibitions & Community Programs Manager at Mana Contemporary Chicago.

Top to bottom:
 #2 from Say Aah! Hip-Hop's 25 Greatest Drinking Songs / [complex.com](#)
 #24 from Say Aah! Hip-Hop's 25 Greatest Drinking Songs / [complex.com](#)
 Franklin Super Food & Liquor on East Garfield Park, Chicago
 #14 from Say Aah! Hip-Hop's 25 Greatest Drinking Songs / [complex.com](#)
 #25 from Say Aah! Hip-Hop's 25 Greatest Drinking Songs / [complex.com](#)
 #11 from Say Aah! Hip-Hop's 25 Greatest Drinking Songs / [complex.com](#)
 Screenshot from Busta Rhymes music video, youtube
 Walgreens liquor display next to the cashier, Downtown Chicago



#2: The Alkaholiks "Only When I'm Drunk" (1993)



#24: Jim Jones / Diddy, Paul Wall & Jia Jia "What You Been Drinkin' On?" (2005)



#3: Boyz n the Hood "Boyz n the Hood" (1987)



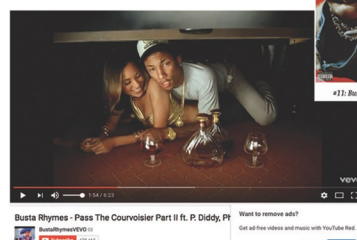
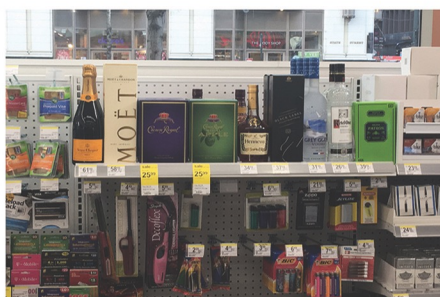
#25: Inducted / Shaunta "Everybody Drunk" (2009)



#14: Eminem / 50 Cent & Dr. Dre "Crack A Bottle" (2009)



#11: Busta Rhymes / Diddy & Pharrell "Pass the Courvoisier Part II" (2002)





Still Life With Bottle

By Claudine Isé

Bottles, jugs and glass vessels have been a quintessential subject of still life representation ever since the genre itself came into being. Glass fruit bowls, seen in murals painted inside Roman and Egyptian tombs, are among the earliest still life depictions, while glass vessels of all sorts became key motifs in the 17th century floral studies, banquet paintings, and *vanitas* tableaux of Northern European still life painters like Georg Flegel, Willem Kalf, and Pieter Claesz. Various shaped and sized bottles and jugs huddle like shivering refugees in Giorgio Morandi's early to mid 20th century "Natura Morta" paintings, and three-dimensional arrangements of bottle-like objects comprise the "endlessly repeating" glass and mirror works of the contemporary installation artist Josiah McElheny.

Looking back throughout the still life genre's history, it's clear that vessels have served primarily as symbolic stand-ins for larger concepts and ideas—the half-drunk glass of wine and upturned hourglass in *vanitas* paintings, for example, were meant to suggest time's fleeting nature, while serving bowls, vases and other refined tableware depicted in floral and banquet paintings spoke of the comfort, wealth, and status derived from owning objects of refinement. Rarely, if ever, would a glass bottle stand transparently as itself, because the still life's symbolic lexicon effectively emptied the pictorial vessel of any content linking it to an *actual* place in an actual world, in order to fill it instead with grandiose metaphoric meaning. In Edra Soto's *Open 24 Hours*, however, the still life does precisely the opposite.

Empty liquor bottles—littered thickly, like seashells, in alleys and vacant lots and sidewalks around the artist's East Garfield Park neighborhood—have been picked up by Soto, taken home, washed, grouped according to the date they were found, and later photographed against white backdrops. The works' titles list the brand of liquor or beer each bottle once contained. Soto has engaged in this same process of collection, cleaning, arranging and documenting the bottles for some months now, day after day, week after week. In the most basic sense, her actions are civic-minded, serving to "tidy up the neighborhood," but there is an archival impulse behind them too. To be sure, there is plenty of social, cultural and political content in Soto's work for us to sift through, and the conversation she is having with art history is readily apparent. Yet *Open 24 Hours*, I would argue, is at heart a granular project, not a symbolic one. Soto wants us to see these liquor bottles as exactly what they are. Only from there can we go on to ask ourselves what their multitudinous presence means, and if there is anything we, as individuals as well as communities, can do to stem their flow.

Claudine Isé is the Director of the Freeark Gallery and Sculpture Garden at the Riverside Arts Center and teaches at the University of Illinois-Chicago and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Isé also runs an independent project space for contemporary art projects called Goldfinch.



Clockwise:

From the *Open 24 Hours* series, posters, 2017

1-2-17: UV Vodka, Hennessy, Patron, Don Julio, Jose Cuervo, Miller, Budweiser, Heineken

1-13-17: Hennessy, Rémy Martin, D'Ussé, Jose Cuervo, Patron, Bud Ice, Seagrams, Paul Masson


1-7-17: Hennessy, Rémy Martin, Avion, Budweiser, Miller, New Amsterdam

Rémy Martin

1-3-17: Hennessy, Rémy Martin, Modelo, Miller, Heineken, Patron Modelo, Bud Ice

Hennessy





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