

# THINGS ON AND ABOVE MY DESK

BY MARIANNE VITALE

Platter of dead batteries. A dried seahorse. Cluster of rocks from South Tyrol.

Hand-carved vultures. They eat rotting carrion without getting sick. They snake their heads deep inside the large carcass and pull out soft meat. They have weak feet, they clean up the Earth. To protect themselves they throw up on their enemy. If the enemy doesn't leave, the vulture falls down on the ground and plays dead. Some vultures prefer only large bones, with which they fly high into the air, to drop them on rocks over and over until they break. The vulture then licks out the sweet center of the bone.

Fake pearls. A set of socket wrenches. A rhinoceros sculpted out of a tin can.

A business card for "Financial Sherpa, Shaman & Schadchen." A chart gauging the economic health of the United States by measuring the shift in the cost of grape jelly. Lifetime service agreements about to expire.

Dottie's phone number. Dottie led me to a Queens lot of caution-orange-striped 12-foot-long barriers, finally. Just beyond the sewage refinery, aside Calgary Cemetery, under the Kosciuszko Bridge, a union yard, home to orphaned commercial bulk from the city

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## CURRENTLY ON VIEW

"Marianne Vitale: What I Need To Do Is Lighten the Fuck Up About A Lot of Shit" at Zach Feuer Gallery, New York, through Feb. 18, and "Marianne Vitale: If You Expect To Rate As A Gentleman, Do Not Expectorate On the Floor" at UKS, Oslo, Norway, Feb. 17-Mar. 25.



landscape. A pile of massive logs with holes bored through. Original NYC water mains, from 150 years ago. Drinking water once flowed through them. A huge lot of mammoth concrete sewage manhole components. Vast hills of cobblestones originally carried aboard Belgian ships. Off in the corner, jumbo boulders cut from 100-foot-high cliffs along Hudson River Drive.

Failed artworks:

A sketch of a bacon-faced man with his bracket-faced donkey.

A giant pastrami sandwich in which the sliced meat is made out of yoga mats.

Series of bronze cast douche bags, which none of my dealers wish to exhibit.

The "Healthcare Series." Nine huge, bulging papier-mâché panels of body parts: navel, tooth, elbow, ear, scalp, eye, nipple, toe, inner gut, doing double duty as military terrain models.

A rococo conch shell being shat out of an erotic cupid.

*The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal*, by David A. Dary. In 1875 there were 50 million of these roaming creatures. A rancher once described the prairies as "Mother Nature's round, undulating breasts, soft and warm in the sunshine, restfully inviting and rich in the promise of nurture." Imagine the sound of tens of thousands communicating with their deep bellow while dust-bathing. Or the deafening rumble of a stampede, miles wide. It took only 25 years to annihilate them, minus a few. In *The Buffalo Book*, Mrs. Bird, a hunter's wife, describes the technique: "When all was ready they would shoot the one that seemed to be the leader . . . then wait a moment till another led out. Shoot it, then another leader, on and on till you had shot several, then they would begin milling around and around . . . then you could kill all you wanted." The shaggy monarch of the plains is no more. All slaughtered and slain.



Books, open to the chapters:  
Learn to Keep People Dependent on You  
(from *The 48 Laws of Power*)

Boiled in Oil (from *The Executioner  
Always Chops Twice*)

Going to Bed (from *The Art of Sleep*)

The Genteel Art of Privy Digging (from  
*The Vanishing American Outhouse*)

A dog-eared collection of black  
pudding and blood soup recipes—  
nothing richer and more satisfying  
to taste while experiencing the  
damage caused by elevated levels of  
prostaglandins (as a palate cleanser  
after a fistful of Motrin). I envision the  
core of the moon rich in iron.



Earwigs sculpted out of wax.

Blown glass bats walking on their wrists.  
The many sharp teeth of a screaming  
opossum. The head of a tapeworm,  
armed with hooks and suckers—*Brava!*  
to an animal that lies bathed in the  
predigested contents of its host's gut!

Video stills of an old friend and me  
driving cross-country, New York-L.A.,  
with the challenge of eating only in  
Chinese restaurants the entire trip. The  
varying hues of egg drop soup.

Jail mail, with sketches of aquatic mammals.  
River otters leave "smell-o-grams" for each  
other. They twist clumps of grass and  
spray them with gland liquid. Do animals  
fall in love? Lose the sense of isolation that  
comes with individual consciousness? ○

Opposite top, Marianne Vitale in her  
studio, 2011. Photo Chris Collins.

Left, *Caution*, 2011, reclaimed lumber,  
12 by 8¼ by 2 feet. Courtesy Zach  
Feuer Gallery, New York.

Above, Still from an unfinished video,  
2008.

**MARIANNE VITALE** is a New York-