

Jil Weinstock

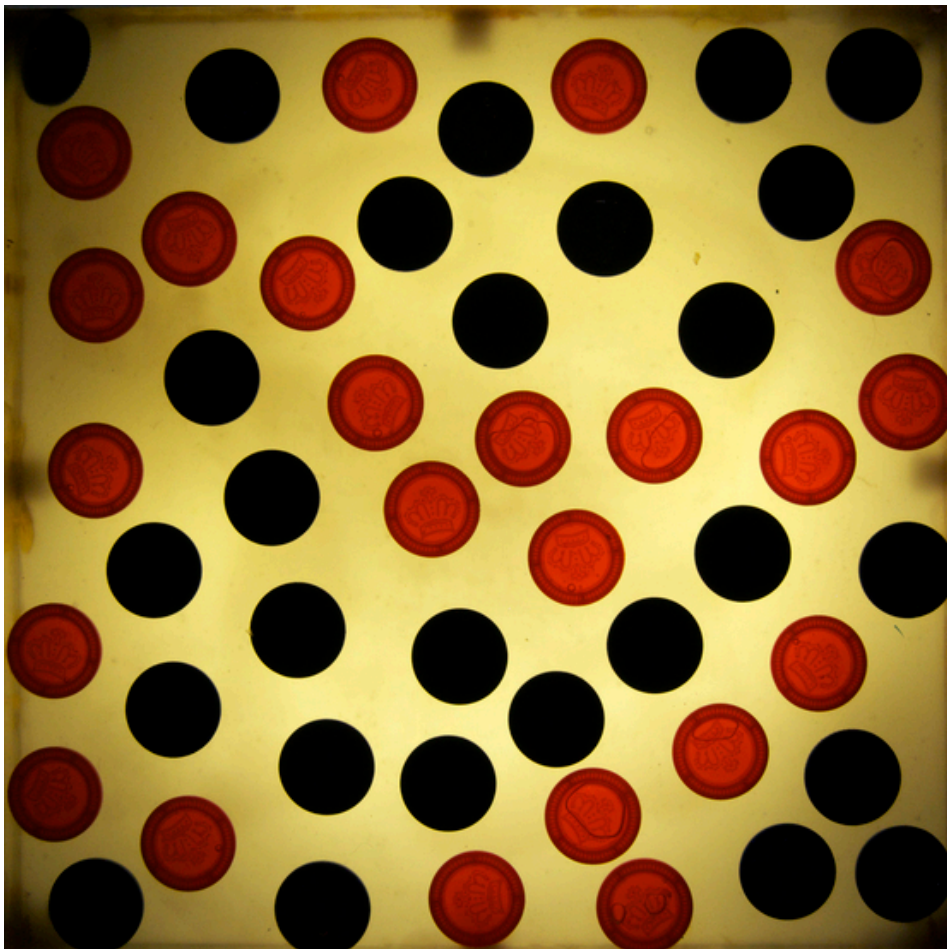
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New York-based artist Jil Weinstock creates playful sculptures and light boxes using toys from her own childhood, by Beth Whitman



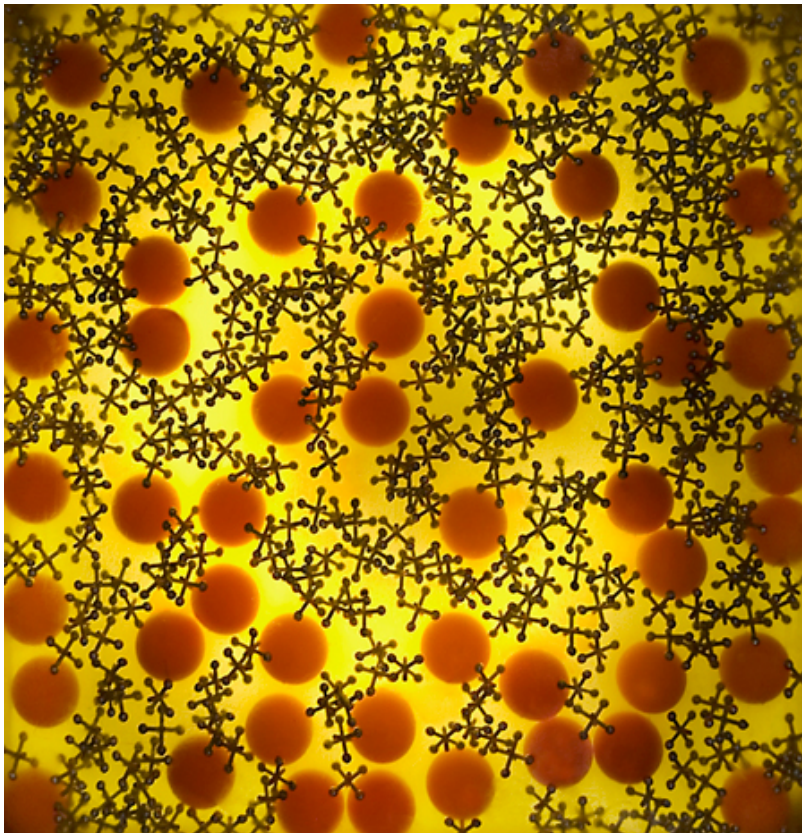
When Jil Weinstock was majoring in physics at UC Berkeley, her freshman advisor made a suggestion that changed the course of her career. “Take a fun class,” he advised. “You’ve taken on a heavy load of physics courses, and if you don’t lighten it up a little, you’ll burn out before you graduate.” After playing around with photography, and then art classes, Weinstock was hooked forever. “I started making three-dimensional art with my photographs, and ended up in art school full time,” she recalled.

While her background in physics still informs her art, Weinstock’s most recent solo exhibition *PLAY*, at Winston Wächter Fine Art in Manhattan, demonstrates the extent to which the idea of “play” – with its mixture of personal recollections, nostalgia and cultural associations – has become a central focus of her most recent work.



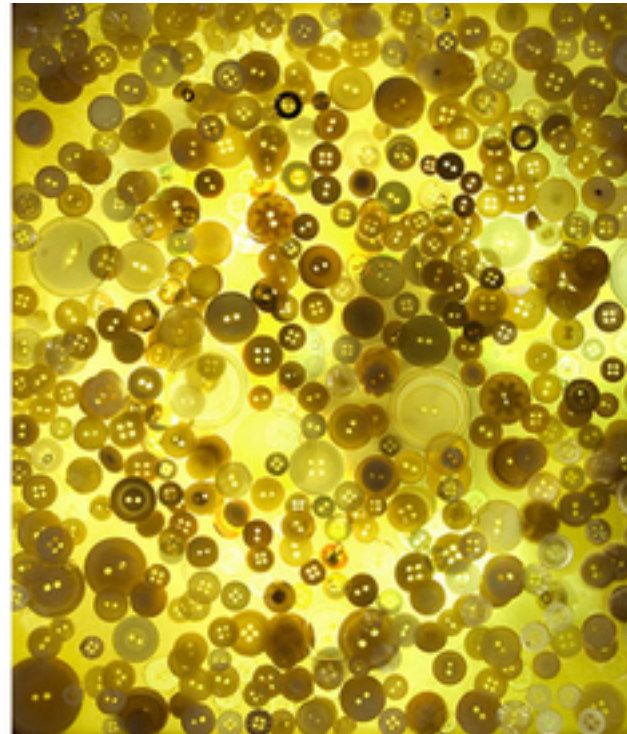
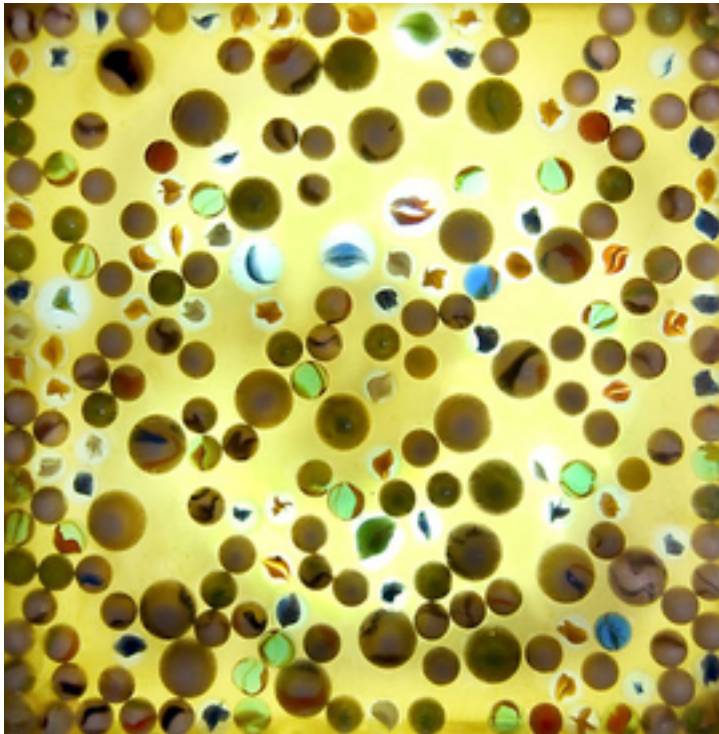
For this show, Weinstock preserves and memorialises childhood heirlooms with modern materials like bronze, metal and rubber. Children’s clothing is sweetly, if strangely, confined inside circles of thick rubber, reminiscent of an oversized antique cameo brooch. Weinstock has worked for years with garments and other domestic imagery, but here the clothing is her own children’s play clothes, while nearby, 12-inch-square light boxes lining the gallery walls encase familiar childhood games such as checkers, marbles, pick-up-sticks, and toy cars – many of which were played with by her children when they were younger.

Weinstock creates the light boxes in her studio, first by pouring slabs of liquid rubber into square metal molds, then carefully placing the game pieces in the liquid, layer by layer, suspending them three dimensionally in the hardened rubber. In fact, Weinstock has become something of an expert in the sourcing, creation and use of rubber, which can have a variety of complex properties, colours and consistencies.



“For many years, rubber has been central to my work,” recalls Weinstock. “It’s not an easy material to work with because its ingredients change and react with each other in relation to the heating process and how you mix or mold the rubber. I actually love the constant experimentation, the trial and error, in figuring out how to get a certain hue or thickness, which comes directly from my physics background.”

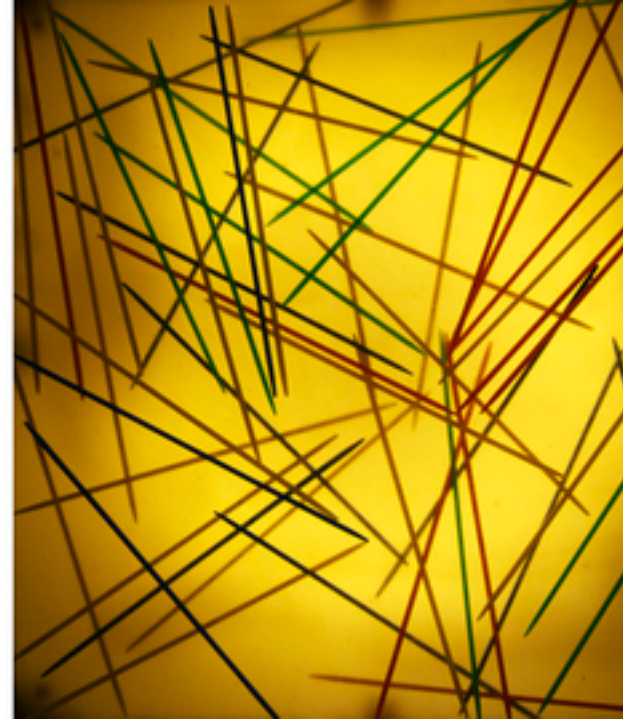
Until, that is, other, more troubling associations come to mind, such as the decline in popularity of these old-fashioned playthings in our increasingly digital world. These days, even the game of checkers is more likely to be played with an iPad than on a board with another human being. For many of us old enough to remember playing in the pre-digital age, Weinstock's work can elicit feelings of loss, both tactile and communal, and yet simultaneously, conjure feelings of solace, for capturing these innocent games, reminding us of simpler times. This labour-intensive use of rubber transforms Weinstock's simple toys into visually alluring, timeless sculptures.



The light-boxed toys and games glow through the rubber, shimmering from lights Weinstock installs on the back of the frame, with tiny, old fashioned on-off switches wired below. When illuminated, the game pieces become vibrant and sculptural inside the translucent, viscous rubber. The toys – whether they are handfuls of sparkling marbles, opaque plastic checker pieces, or an old cheap jump rope – retain their sense of movement, but are deliberately arranged and balanced compositionally, out of their normal context, frozen in time and place. The rubber is like resin, a preservative, but also a showcase for the beauty of the individual pieces, its amber hue evoking a warm nostalgia for the mementos and memories of childhood.

“A theme throughout my work has been the use of layers,” says Weinstock. “Not only physically, with the layering of rubber and game pieces, but the different layers of interpretation that these toys evoke in me, and also in viewers of my work, the way they dredge up individual and also shared associations with the past.” For Weinstock, her own connection with the material could not be more intimate: most of the Fisher

Price toys used in the show – some memorialised in bronze, like a baby's first shoes, some molded from rubber – were once her own, then handed down to her children.



“Watching my son and daughter play with my childhood games evoked all these strong memories and associations for me,” adds Weinstock wistfully. The same is true of the jacks and checker pieces, some of which were found in the back of her children’s junk drawers. “As I came across remnants of these old toys, it set off ideas about how powerful “play” is in our life, the way it shapes and influences us from a young age, and how we react to our memories of it, as well as our relationship to it now as we get older,” muses Weinstock. After gathering together her own and her grown children’s old toys and clothing, the artist has been playing with the complex ideas evoked by these simple childhood playthings ever since.



Jil Weinstock is a lecturer at the School of Visual Arts, and is represented by Winston Wächter Fine Art in New York and the Walter Maciel Gallery in Los Angeles. She has been featured in numerous publications such as Art News, Art in America, New York Magazine, and The New York Times, and her work is widely shown in museums and galleries in America and internationally. Weinstock lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children, and is currently working on a series of wall-mounted, rubberised toy airplanes, accompanied by illuminated boxes filled with detritus from our travel “baggage.”



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