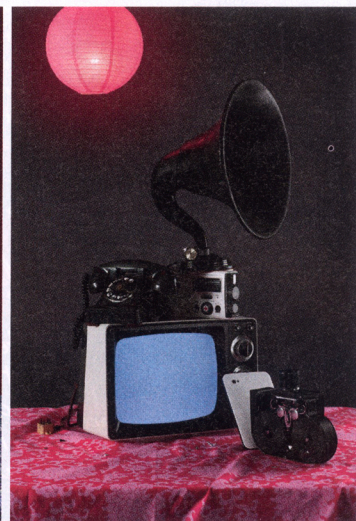


and the palette for each image reflects the esthetics of different eras. “The greens of the 1950s are different than the 1970s,” she observes. Working in her studio in Manhattan, “I start selecting items from my ever-changing stash, make sure my list of requirements is met, think about color and shape, head down the street to buy fabric (Garment District!), and commence stacking. The whole process can take days.”

aged. A cell phone from only a few years ago looks dated, but a lamp or a toaster from 50 years ago might seem fairly contemporary—and work fine.

May studied painting as an undergrad, and says the experience informs her interest in the Golden Age of Dutch still life, where tables are set with flowers that will soon spoil, in reference to the fleeting nature of earthly pleasure. Starting on the project,

LEFT AND BELOW; Jeanette May’s “Tech Vanitas” series uses vintage electronics to explore modern consumer anxieties. From left, “Blue Typewriter,” “Graffiti Speakers,” and “Black & White TV.”



SHOOT

FINDING BEAUTY IN FLIP PHONES AND LAND LINES

Jeanette May examines expendable technology through the lens of 17th century Dutch still lifes.

BY REBECCA ROBERTSON

INSPIRED BY CONTEMPORARY

advertising imagery and by 17th century Dutch still lifes, Jeanette May’s “Tech Vanitas” series features collections of obsolete technology—from teal iMacs and flip phones to Kodak Brownies and vintage toasters—all lovingly

arranged on lush backdrops. The series was shown at Klompching Gallery in New York City this summer and will be included in “Photography Now 2017” at the Center for Photography at Woodstock in November.

May says that when planning the images, she likes to include examples from several common categories of domestic technology, including optical and communication devices, audio equipment, time keepers and light sources. “Items not fitting these categories may be included, but these five are key,” she tells *PDN* by email. Her light sources range from the glow of a black-and-white television to a string of chili pepper Christmas lights,

The objects come from a range of sources, including her personal collection. “Most photographers collect vintage cameras,” she says, and she uses some from her own collection. She borrows objects from friends and sometimes rents props. Some items were “purchased at sales, flea markets, antique stores. I’m trying not to acquire more obsolete technology!”

As a digital photography teacher, May is aware of how quickly imaging technology changes, and says she “feels a pressure to keep up with camera technology and Adobe upgrades.” Part of the tension in May’s series comes from how technology in these different categories has

“I re-educated myself on the history of Dutch art and culture, and found relevance in their newfound wealth, abundance of material possessions, and interest in craftsmanship and collecting.”

In a statement, May writes that her images “embrace the anxiety surrounding technological obsolescence.” Technology makes “domestic life faster, smarter, easier, and more complicated,” she writes, but “the more we yearn to keep current—the newest phone, computer, camera, audio system, espresso maker—the more we produce, consume, and discard. Cutting-edge technology becomes outdated, embarrassing, quaint, collectible, and finally, antiquated or forgotten.”