



## STATEMENT

In 2002 Virginia Fleck began experimenting with plastic bags as an art material. Initially, she found them interesting because they are colorful, light weight, and plentiful. Once she had cut and flattened dozens of them, she began to notice a tone to the “chatter” printed on the bags, which ranged from amusing to disturbing. The bags seemed to tell the story of our times in visual sound-bites delivered by the logos and slogans. For the past ten years she has been making mandalas from plastic bags and has accumulated an extensive collection from all over the world. Each bag, whether from a poverty-stricken region or a thriving economy, reflects a purchase. Cutting and recombining these bags democratize their disparate pedigrees, whether they originated in a posh boutique or a dollar store.

The mandala is a universal, non-religious tool for meditation, typically composed of highly decorative, symmetrical patterns. The carefully chosen symbols and imagery of a traditional meditation mandala imbue it with a meaningfulness that can provide guidance on one’s path to enlightenment. Conversely, ad imagery on a plastic shopping bags is carefully chosen to cause instant associations with worldly acquisitions. Fleck’s choice of medium, plastic shopping bags covered in familiar logos and slogans, imbue her mandalas with a contemporary narrative that allows her to analyze the activity of consumerism as a spiritual encounter.

The logos, slogans and promises printed on plastic shopping bags, are the result of exhaustive market research by advertisers. With an exacto knife, Fleck takes aim at these graphics and through the slow deliberate action of cutting, she extracts, alters and subverts those consumer messages. As a mandala takes shape she purposely employs the familiar tropes of graphic design so that the mandalas will have the eye-catching “bones” of a logo. Indulging her inherently playful nature, she takes consumerism and wrestles it through the sieve of formal beauty. The resulting mandalas are intricately crafted works that reference painting, but are created by collaging pieces of detritus from a consumerist society in a way that reveals the beauty of disposable items that continually pass through our hands.