

#tarplife

For most of us, a tarp is little more than a utilitarian object to keep dust off of a car or maybe an extra layer of protection from the elements when camping in the woods. For a child, it can be the cornerstone of a living room hideout draped across a few chairs. For some people, it may represent home itself. For mixed-media artist JoEllen Wang, the tarp represents worlds of possibilities and realities for children and adults alike, those with and without homes.

JoEllen Wang's work is informed in part by her interest in the rise of nomadism as a chosen lifestyle—frequently termed “vanlife” or, more academically, “vehicular residency”—and “Sedentary Bias” (the judgment that sedentary lifestyles are an ideal or “correct” way to live and the subsequent alienation of or prejudice against those that live nomadically either by choice or by circumstance). As home-ownership among younger generations decreases against the backdrop of an unpredictable economic and employment climate, more people are choosing to abandon permanent residency altogether and to adopt the #vanlife lifestyle.

In an unexpected way, the tarp represents something incredibly primal and powerful: the innate desire to shape our environment, to transform it into something that feels like our own—be it in the makings of a looming castle in a child's imagination or a simple shelter from the elements.

#tarplife exhibits a collection of mixed media paintings that re-contextualize the tarp. Several works feature the tarp alone, void of the usual accompanying elements they cover (in this case, an RV). Another set of works reclaim romantic ideals of domesticity by painting basic blue tarps or vehicles onto the pages of repurposed interior design catalogs and nature photographs from old books. Through these, JoEllen Wang illuminates the possibilities that can be found in an otherwise seemingly mundane object, and encourages us to reflect on our own beliefs and judgments about a way of life that is simultaneously ancient and modern.