

**Sandee Moore**  
*Imaginary Gift*

When did the gift come to mean so little? We're inundated with commercialism 'wrapped' in gift economies that play to our most sentimental whims: cards, certificates, wares and oh-why-nots. It's inescapable – gift giving & receiving – the social debt & obligation attached to a simple note, drink, invitation to spend. I am sick of it; but Sandee Moore is not.

In her research, Sandee concerns herself with the many histories & interpretations of the gift. Ethnographically, linguistically, metaphorically, socially, the fit is rich fodder to 'unpack.' In a visit to her studio, Sandee told me the etymology of the word gift, from German, actually shares a common root to poison. This makes perfect sense. I certainly remember receiving tasteful gifts, though they're outweighed by gifts that left a bad taste. We also spoke of Derrida's quote; "A gift given with no hope of profit or return is an imaginary gift." This calls into question how a gift can exist solely at the benefit of the recipient, in a seeming altruistic state, without recompense to the benefactor. For Derrida, it seems this is impossible, or 'imaginary.' And so Sandee has devised *Imaginary Gift*.

When was it that we went from 'going for coffee' to 'getting coffee' from drinking to consuming; from spending time to just spending? *Imaginary Gift* takes these questions to a delightful extreme. Walking down the street, we are confronted with a suspiciously phallic-shaped, dangerously unincorporated, Gerry rigged sign stating: "Please ring bell for free gift." We do so, & moments later, shooting down a tube attached to this sidewalk appendage covered in AstroTurf, comes hot coffee right in to the cup we're also provided. It's a gift from some someone we can't see, don't know, & likely won't meet. In 'imaginary' terms, this gift can't be repaid as the giver is unknown and out of reach. In early iterations of *Imaginary Gift*, notes of appreciation were left attached to Sandee's mascot-for-nothingness...but it's not the same as payment, & she knows that.

Ultimately Sandee offers many gifts: what's poured down the spout (coffee / sea water / popcorn / music), the surprise of this absurdist but charitable act (in particular once the velocity of the substance renders it spilled beyond the cup's rim and all over your hand), & finally the time spent (a break from whatever you were doing / wherever you were going). Sure, there's generosity in this selfishly idiosyncratic gesture; however the complex exchange, in Moore's hands (or down her funnel), is meant for the recipient to claim agency through feeling as though they have gotten away with something or, conversely, to pay-it-forward & offer something for free later on. This is a gift that's going to stick around; like it or not.

**J.J. Kegan McFadden** is a Winnipeg-based writer, curator, & artist.