Seth Price

REVUE DE PRESSE | SELECTED PRESS

Numéro

English text

Artist of the month

SETH PRICE

At the Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris, the New York-based artist recently unveiled work that tackles the question of digital technologies. Combining shots stolen with a phone and macro-photography of skin, he recycles and redistributes the image flow of our era, and in doing so blurs the traditional boundaries of art, taste and culture.

Interview by Nicolas Trembley

Seth Price's professional website, www.distributedhistory.com, includes a link to his Wikipedia page, which begins thus: "Seth Price (born 1973 in East Jerusalem) is a New York-based multi-disciplinary post-conceptual artist." Which means everything and nothing all at once. For his big retrospective last year at Munich's Museum Brandhorst, the press release announced a show comprising just about everything possible in the creative domain: "sculpture, film, photography, design, painting, video, clothing and fabric, web design, music and poetry ...," Price is one of the most influential and prolific representatives of a generation of artists conceiving and

producing images in the digital age. His most recent exhibition at Paris's Galerie Chantal Crousel was a good example of the heterogeneity of forms in his work, which can sometimes disconcert in its complete eschewal of classic categories of good taste. As Price himself says, we're not used to such technological imagery, but it's still photography nonetheless. It was on the occasion of this last show, entitled *Self As Tube*, that Price agreed to share with *Numéro* some of the secrets of his working methods.

NUMÉRO: The invitation and poster for your show at Galerie Chantal Crousel feature a teenage self-portrait taken in the mirror. What's your background and why did you choose this image to promote the exhibition?
SETH PRICE: My background? It's too boring Nicolas! But it was very supportive, and that was capital. That photo is me in my first year of high school, on an assignment for photography class. This poster was supposed to look like it comes from the world of photography: all the seriousness, the fetish of black and white, the composition, the hand-painted words. I did it because everything in the Chantal Crousel show is a photograph of one sort or another. There's the robot-controlled camera and software I used to take the macro-photographs of human skin. There are these inaesthetic quick shots I made with my phone, notes on people's fashion on the New York street and subway. And there's the CGI I used to make the objects in the paintings. I consider CGI to be a photographic system. 3D imagery means recreating the physics of light and optics. A lot of the apparently real objects depicted in, say, advertisements – phones, jewellery, cars – are created this way, but it's become so convincing that you can't tell. For a viewer, none of the three approaches in this show suggests photography, but they all are, and the poster was a way of claiming that.

Do you remember your first encounter with art? What made you want to be an artist?
There was no early encounter with art, I never had a moment when I decided I wanted to "be" an artist. I hated that idea. Drawing and writing were something I'd always done, they were part of me since before I can remember, but I didn't choose them. I was hostile to art, or what I thought art was: something constituted outside, by corny adults. The idea of "artist" as an identity, as something you aspire to and claim, had something to do with other people, and expectations, so I rejected it. It took

me a long time to accept that label for myself – it was only after my first show, in 2004. I had issues, obviously.

What were you looking at then and what are you looking at today?
At the moment I took that selfie, I had a Hans Ruedi Giger poster up in my bedroom, and a life size poster of Ronald Reagan on the door, from one of his 1950s movies, with a gun and a cowboy hat. During the 1980s ninja trend, me and my friends would hurl ninja stars at him. It totally fucked up the poster, and the door. I had some little homemade posters for bands I was listening to, Einstürzende Neubauten and Throbbing Gristle, stuff like that, plus a lot of rap. I was into computer graphics, so I had pictures cut out of computer magazines taped up. What am I looking at today? I don't know. I'm trying to figure out what imagery of the early 2000s was. I just got Vinca Petersen's latest book. It's hard now to say what is to be looked at, when there's so much addictive looking.

You seem very comfortable in different media. Is there one you prefer?
I don't feel strongly about one or another. But some are certainly easier, in terms of the framing, the givens of the medium. In that sense, I envy writers. Their tools are cheap and minimal, and universally available, and they can do their thing all by themselves, anywhere, anytime. It's like neurotic, survivalist boot-camp art. Drawing is like that too. Stories and lines. That's also what I started with. Art that could happen after the end of the world.

Your work involves complex technological processes. Can you explain your interest in synthetic reproductions?
It's not about complexity, it's that it's unfamiliar. A traditional photographic print also depends on a lot of

197

English text

complex technology and reproduction, but you don't think about it, because it's so familiar. But sometimes you're chasing an image or a feeling that demands unusual methods, and you have to get synthetic, as you say. Like this macro-photography. I wanted to produce an image at a large scale and high resolution, because we never see that. In the commercial world, no one wants detail at a grand scale, it's not worth it. When you approach an ad on the side of a bus, the image breaks apart into low-resolution garbage, and who cares? So there aren't tools for making those images. I had to work out something a little unusual. But unusual methods give you an artwork that feels different. And ideally the technology isn't visible or present, just the feeling.

How do you consider archival images and found footage in your practice? Is the question of appropriation still valid?
Everything is valid. I'll use whatever works. I will say I don't think appropriation was particularly interesting, at least by the time I came on the scene. Anyway, I never did much

appropriation. Seth Price as an appropriation artist was a misunderstanding. It was part of a sloppy way of labelling a group of artists.

Is the way your work is displayed important for your message?
I'm trying to keep it interesting for people, and for myself. It sounds simple, but once that's the rule, you find yourself going through all kinds of silliness.

How do you choose the titles of your pieces?
At the last minute. It was when I was putting together the checklist, the week before the opening, that I realized these works constitute a kind of investigation of "social space." That became important to the show, and it only emerged through considering the titles all at once, in a rush.

How did your series of works with macro-images of bodies begin?
Back in 2015, I wanted to make extremely detailed images of human skin. Different ages, races, genders. Skin seemed banal and familiar, and at the same time uncanny and provocative and strange. I like things that

are both empty and full. I showed the first photographic light boxes at 356 South Mission Road, in 2016, and then at the survey shows in Amsterdam and Munich.

Certain images from the *Social Space* series deal with more classical figurative photography, the image of a child in the street for example. **How do you negotiate that oscillation between abstraction and figuration?**
There's no oscillation. The show is all representational photography. At the same time, everything has been abstracted. Social space itself is both figurative and heavily abstracted. You can point to something apparently concrete and say, "Here it is, we all agree, that's all it is," but at the same time it will never be fully understood.

The exhibition is titled *Self as Tube*. What does that mean?
That was also kind of last minute, so let me try to figure that out... People are tubes, for one thing. Physically. You are a dark, wet, coiled-up tube, with openings at the ends. A camera is a tube, in a way. I'm a tube: material enters and is warped by its passage

through this filter. And when I take that old selfie and put it on the poster, and connect it to this new body of work, there's a temporal tunnel, a tube through time.

Is there anything you would like to make people conscious of through your art?
Unusual feelings.

What's your next project?
For five or six years around the turn of the millennium, I was serious about photography. Not as art, I just had a point-and-shoot with me all the time, capturing New York City and the people I was with. They've been in a box for years. These last three months we've been scanning a few-thousand negatives and slides. I want to use it, to treat it like a ready-made glance at the late 90s, at the switch from analogue to digital, at the introduction of new technologies, at 9/11-era New York, at the exhaustion of the 20th century. Because no one knows what happened yet, and it's been what, 15 or 20 years? In what other period in art history could you look back that far, and still have no official narrative about what even happened?

Nicolas Tremblaye
« *Artist of the month : Seth Price* »,
Numéro n°205, August, 2019.

OCULA

Seth Price at Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Until 20 July 2019
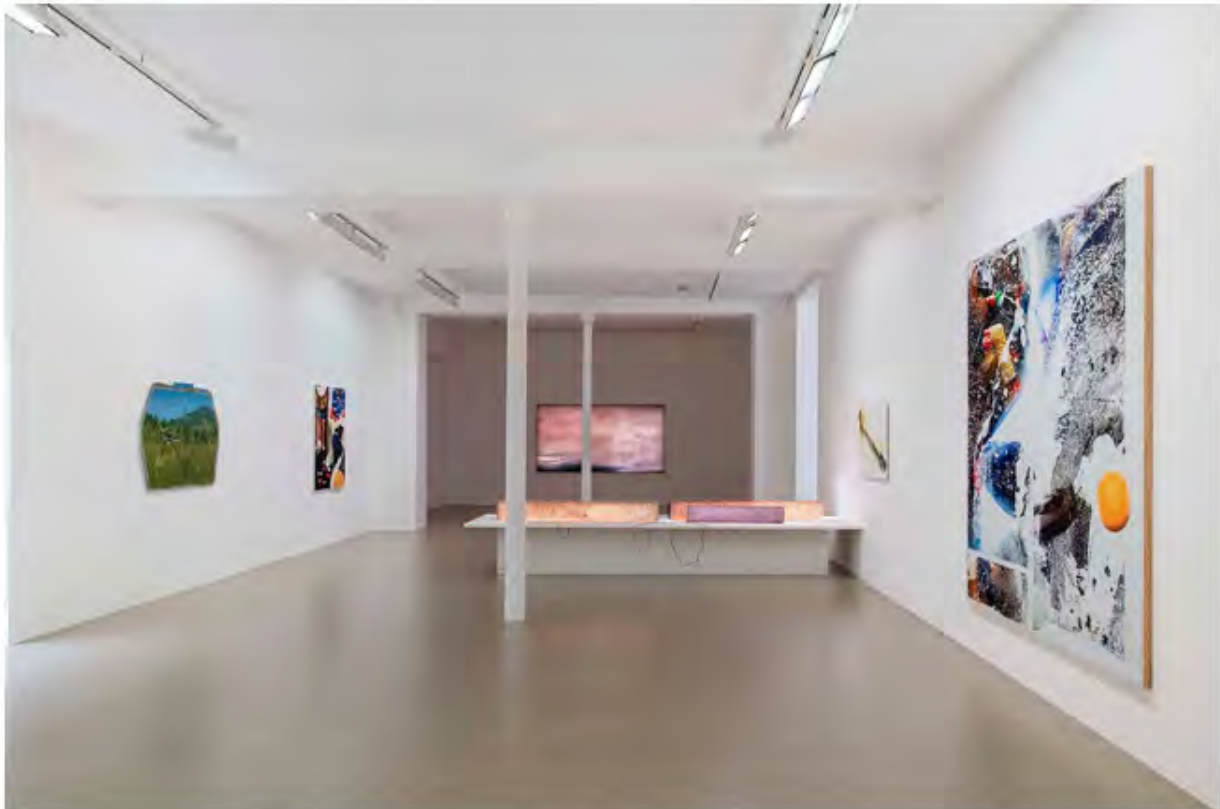
Exhibition view: Seth Price, *Self As Tube*, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (25 May–20 July 2019). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Martin Argyroglo.

SETH PRICE
Self As Tube

Galerie Chantal Crousel is pleased to present *Self As Tube,* a new exhibition by Seth Price. The exhibition includes a series of mixed-media paintings and back-lit photographic works presented as light boxes and light tubes. For his new paintings, Price uses printing, collage, paint, and photographic techniques. Some belong to the artist's recent series of 'Social Space' paintings, which are based on photographs of people that he took in the New York streets and subways, while others feature objects at once strange and familiar, created with 3D modelling software. All works are manipulated by way of chemicals and pigmented polymer fluids on plastic.

Excerpt from Galerie Chantal Crousel's press release for Seth Price, *Self As Tube* (25 May–20 July 2019).

ART / AGENDA
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Seth Price
Self As Tube
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris / France
May 25–July 20, 2019

Galerie Chantal Crousel is pleased to present *Self As Tube*, a new exhibition by Seth Price. The exhibition includes a series of mixed-media paintings and back-lit photographic works presented as light boxes and light tubes.

Seth Price "Self As Tube"
Art/Agenda - June 2019.

For his new paintings, Price uses printing, collage, paint, and photographic techniques. Some belong to the artist's recent series of "Social Space" paintings, which are based on photographs of people that he took in the New York streets and subways, while others feature objects at once strange and familiar, created with 3D modeling software. All works are manipulated by way of chemicals and pigmented polymer fluids on plastic.

The light boxes and light tubes represent the latest works from a series the artist initiated in 2015 where Price photographed models of various ages, genders, and races using a highly specialized camera that captures the body from every conceivable angle. The vast amount of data produced by this process is algorithmically stitched together by a mapping program similar to the one used by Google. Blending the real and the artificial, the images are then further modified with a modeling software. The finished images are printed onto a proprietary fabric specialized to receive dye-sublimation transfers, and either wrapped around a clear acrylic tube or stretched across an aluminum frame, which is then illuminated from within by strips of LED lights. Capped at one end, the light tubes have a flashlight effect.

Picking up on key themes from Price's past, including technological pressure on the self, the "folklore" of social symbols, and the spillage of meanings and materials, *Self As Tube* keeps the line alive.

ASK HELMUT

SETH PRICE - SOCIAL SYNTHETIC

Der Konzeptkünstler ist das Aushängeschild der jüngeren Generation: Seine Werke sind aus Kunststoff geformte Körperteile, er verwandelt virale Hits in Kunst und zeichnet gekonnt einen emotionalen Spiegel des 21. Jahrhunderts. Bemerkenswert!

ASK HELMUT

Photo: Ron Amstutz © Seth PriceVacuum

🕐 Sat 03.02.2018 **10:00 – 18:00**

📍 Museum Brandhorst, Munich

🏷 5,00 € - 7,00 €

Das Museum Brandhorst präsentiert die international erste Überblicksausstellung des US-amerikanischen Künstlers Seth Price (*1973). Die mehr als 150 Werke umfassende Ausstellung zeigt Skulpturen, Filme, Fotografien, Zeichnungen, Malerei, Videos, Kleider und Textilien, Web-Design, Musik und Dichtung. Price dringt seit seinen künstlerischen Anfängen programmatisch in Territorien jenseits der bildenden Kunst vor. Er greift die Produktions- und Vertriebsformen der Musikindustrie, der Modewelt und des Literaturbetriebs auf und nutzt ihre Dynamiken für seine Kunst. Dabei beschäftigt er sich mit den fundamentalen Veränderungen der visuellen Kultur, die mit der flächendeckenden Etablierung digitaler Medien der jüngsten Gegenwart einhergehen.

Seth Price gehört jener Zwischengeneration an, die noch vor der Etablierung des Internets geboren wurde und seine Ausbreitung in allen Schritten hautnah miterlebt hat: die ersten Computerspiele und -programme der 1980er-Jahre, die demonstrativ ihre pixeligen Ästhetiken zur Schau stellten; das Internet als Ort politischer Utopien der 1990er-Jahre, die in der neuen Technologie demokratisierende Potentiale vermuteten; und schließlich die alle Lebensbereiche durchdringende Digitalisierung zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts durch Web 2.0 und Smartphone. Die Digitalisierung fungiert ab 2001 zunehmend als Katalysator aufziehender gesellschaftlicher Krisen, vom „War on Terror", der auch als Krieg der Bilder geführt wurde, bis zu den Krisen des Finanzsystems. Die künstlerische Praxis von Seth Price entwickelt sich entlang dieser Konflikte und der Begehrensmuster, die das Leben in einer globalen neoliberalen Gesellschaft antreiben.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Eines der zentralen Themen in Prices Arbeiten ist der bedrohte Status des Subjekts. Angesichts der dramatischen Umwälzungen einer mediatisierten Gegenwart zieht sich dieses Selbst zunehmend an seine Oberflächen zurück oder scheint in seiner Abwesenheit auf: die „Vacuum Forms" (2004) zeigen in Kunststoff abgeformte Körperteile, die „Silhouettes" (2007-09) greifen digitale Aufnahmen aus dem Internet auf, die intime Gesten menschlicher Verständigung – wie der Handschlag oder Kuss – nur noch als Negativraum fassbar werden lassen, und die im Untergeschoss des Museums Brandhorst gezeigten Leuchtkästen (2016-17) basieren auf fotografischen Studien menschlicher Haut, die sich auf kartographische Technologien der Firma Google stützen. Einige der Werke besitzen keine feste Form, sondern können je nach Raum und Kontext unterschiedlich installiert werden: Geknickt, gefaltet, ausgerollt oder zerknittert werden sie an Wände, Decke oder auf dem Boden platziert. Sie spielen nicht zuletzt auf die Flexibilität und Ortlosigkeit der digital zirkulierenden Bilddateien – im Falle der „Mylars" (2005-06) handelt es sich um Stills aus dschihadistischen Propagandavideos – an.

Die in der Ausstellung gezeigten Werke vermitteln ein Bild der emotionalen Landschaft des beginnenden 21. Jahrhunderts. Wir sehen Fleisch und Haut, kommerzielle Logos, Abfall und Trash, Mode und Design, Verpackungen, Horrorbilder, leuchtende Screens, Humor und Brutalität, Computerspiele und Luxusobjekte. Einzelne Arbeiten besitzen inzwischen einen geradezu ikonischen Status. In seinen „Bomber Jackets" etwa reflektiert Price den Mechanismus ständiger Reproduktion und Umwertung im digitalen Zeitalter. Während des 1. Weltkriegs für Piloten entwickelt, wurde die Bomberjacke bald zum Emblem konkurrierender Identitätsmuster. Als Modeartikel wurde sie zum Aushängeschild von Subkulturen wie der Punk- und Skinheadszene. Später wurde sie zum Signet von Hetero- und für Homosexualität, und erlebt in den letzten Jahren ein Revival sowohl als Massenware wie als Haute Couture. Festgefroren in ein Objekt, der linke Ärmel hängt schlaff herab, zeigt die „Bomber Jacket" die Hülle menschlicher Präsenz, die zunehmend von kommerziellen Interessen und gesellschaftlichen Vereinnahmungen bestimmt wird.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

flash art 50

5 / 5   "Seth Price Circa 1981" at Institute of Contemporary Arts London. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Mark Blower.

Seth Price *ICA / London*

"New strategies are needed to keep up with commercial distribution, decentralization and dispersion. You must fight something in order to understand it," wrote Seth Price in 2002, in his pivotal essay "Dispersion." Ahead of his time, working fluidly with video, sculpture, sound, fashion, web design and written texts, Price engages with issues of production, post-production and contamination, investigating how culture is generated and distributed in a highly mediated present.

The survey "Seth Price Circa 1981" — the first show at ICA London under Stefan Kalmár's directorship — focuses exclusively on the artist's film and video output, and is installed across the entirety of the Institute of Contemporary Arts building. Upon entering, viewers are introduced to Price's practice by the longest iteration yet of *Redistribution*, (2007–ongoing), which documents a lecture-performance delivered by Price at the Guggenheim Museum in 2007. The work is always rendered anew, adapted and updated each time it is exhibited.

The ground floor has been transformed in a long, multi-screen cinema: six projections play loops of films produced between 2000 and 2003. Made during the time Price worked as technical director at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York, these works stand as an exercises in visual culture, explorations of the infinite potential for image research, appropriation and fragmentation. As this admixture of found and shot footage, images, texts, computer graphics and web design rhythmically mesh and transition, the viewer's gaze zooms from one screen to the next, indulging in the density of information.

The architectural setting lends itself to the theatrical; distorted images from key global events bounce across the building, creating unexpected links and a kaleidoscopic view of recent times. In the film *Rejected or unused clips arranged in order of importance* (2003), the phrase "a tremendous sadness that life is the way it is, and not the other way" introduces an aerial view of the Twin Towers shot by the artist before 9/11; while on the opposite side, laying on the floor, a curved monitor displays *COPYRIGHT 2006 SETH PRICE* (2006), adding a sculptural layer to altered news images of the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981 — history liquidly deformed.

The show, comprising more than thirty works and almost impossible to see in its entirety, intentionally embodies characteristics of the work presented. It is rigorous in its selection but promiscuous, affected and mediated in its presentation, dancing between context, content and display. The result is a focused perspective on Price's pioneering work.

by Attilia Fattori Franchini

flash art 50

👉 2 / 5   Seth Price "Redistribution' (2007–ongoing) installation view at Institute of Contemporary Arts London. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Mark Blower.

👉 3 / 5   "Seth Price Circa 1981" at Institute of Contemporary Arts London. Photo by Mark Blower.

ARTFORUM

Left: Martha Rosler's photomontages and newspaper reproductions, ca. 1967–72, Installation view, 2017, Photo: Chris Kendall. Below: Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* (detail), 2006, still from a 37-second color and black-and-white video component of a twelve-monitor installation. Right: **Stan Douglas**, *Monodramas* (detail), 1991, still from a 30-second color video component of a mixed-media installation with ten gelatin silver prints and five monitors.

"Picture Industry"

CCS BARD GALLERIES AND HESSEL MUSEUM OF ART, ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NY

Noam M. Elcott

"PICTURE INDUSTRY," curated by the artist Walead Beshty at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard, has quietly thrown down the gauntlet, not only for exhibitions that address the history of photography, but for all future surveys of twentieth-century art and political imagery broadly. The exhibition is unabashedly ambitious and pedagogical: Three hundred works by more than seventy individuals and collectives spread across seventeen galleries, with extensive wall labels culled from primary sources and the leading scholarship. But the show's lessons can be found not in the texts so much as in the objects themselves. "Picture Industry" offers at least three essential insights for historians, curators, critics, and practitioners of modern art and media.

1. The long twentieth century, from which we are still emerging, was the cinematic century.

Ostensibly a presentation of photography from its origins to the present, the exhibition opens and closes with cinematic images of workers leaving the factory—by the Lumières (1895) and Sharon Lockhart (2008)—and is structured by Harun Farocki's thirty-six-minute video *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995) and twelve-monitor video installation *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* (2006). As such, "Picture Industry" posits a long twentieth century anchored aesthetically, conceptually,

and technologically in cinema. The repercussions are vast. The eminent art historian Erwin Panofsky had already put it bluntly in 1936:

> If all the serious lyrical poets, composers, painters, and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would become aware of the fact and a still smaller fraction would seriously regret it. If the same thing were to happen with the movies the social consequences would be catastrophic.

The declaration is dated—cinemas could go dark without spawning too much awareness or regret; and museums have become outlets of mass media, especially in cultural capitals and around art festivals—but the provocation holds. Indeed, if "the movies" describes a cinematic century, one encompassing film, television, video, digital imaging, lantern slide shows and other projections, photo essays, illustrated magazines, postcards, chronophotographs, etc.—that is, the very objects that constitute the picture industry suggested by "Picture Industry"—then Panofsky's provocation is self-evident. To nearly everyone outside the art world it is. "Picture Industry" assembles many of the artists and nonartists who recognized this fact most powerfully, even—or especially—if many of them did not make movies. Visitors encounter objects, images, and artworks that emerged at the cusp of cinema's arrival (the chronophotographs of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge; the images from lectures by Jacob Riis, who was an early adopter of the lantern slide) those that realized cinema by other means (the photomontages of John Heartfield and Martha Rosler; the magazine work of Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, and LaToya Ruby Frazier; the slide shows of Allan Sekula) and those that carry us into a postcinematic future (the film and video works of Stan Douglas, Seth Price, and Hito Steyerl). (Warhol is absent. But his spirit is omnipresent.) "Picture Industry" announces itself

as an alternative account of photography. That is too modest. It is an alternative account of art and images in the cinematic century.

That century's historical subject is widely acknowledged and named at the start, through the very title of the Lumière's film: *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* is, in a sense, the history of industrialization and exploitation as told from a postindustrial moment, with an emphasis on the human body as dissected by science and as spectacularized by entertainment—from the biometrics of Alphonse Bertillon through the poetic documentaries of the Black Audio Film Collective and the *Objets de grève* (Strike Objects), 1999–2000, of Jean-Luc Moulène. The century's central aesthetic techniques are familiar and, here, well represented: framing, cropping, montage, serialization, projection, looping, de- and rematerialization,

We are still emerging from the cinematic century.

reproduction, and so forth. And yet the watershed intervention staged by "Picture Industry" lies neither in its depicted subject nor in its represented techniques, but rather in its constitution of the picture as an image in circulation across media platforms.

2. There are no mediums, only media platforms; no stable works, only their circulation.

Whether in textbooks, museums, or auction catalogues, the history of photography is still largely told as the history of photographic prints. As such, it enters into the history of art prints more broadly and, thus, into the history of art and its collectible objects. (Their more recent emergence as tableaux merely raises the stakes and prices without altering the logic.) As everyone knows and everyone knows to ignore, this is a museum and art-market

ARTFORUM

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Below: Hito Steyerl, *The Tower*, 2015, mixed media with three-channel HD video (color, sound, 6 minutes 55 seconds). Installation view, 2017. Photo: Chris Kendall. Right: Arthur Jafa, *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*, 2016, digital video, color and black-and-white, sound, 7 minutes 25 seconds.

fiction. "Picture Industry" combats that fiction with the reality of images that circulate across media platforms, both within and beyond the world of art.

The exhibition largely forgoes collectible prints, instead presenting the books, reports, magazines, postcards, portfolios, etc. that constituted the primary platforms for the production, dissemination, and reception of works by many photographic heroes—William Henry Fox Talbot, Timothy O'Sullivan, Lewis Hine, Riis, August Sander, Evans, Frazier, Stephen Shore, etc.—and an even greater number of less familiar names. Stated polemically, the argument is that *photography* does not exist—only photographic platforms do; *the* photograph does not exist—only its circulation does. (The rule is most readily discernible in cinema, despite the protestations of celluloid and movie-theater fundamentalists. "Picture Industry" includes 16-mm film, film transferred to video, assorted video formats, television sets, black-box galleries, and a petite movie theater, among other moving-image platforms.) It demonstrates that what is true for photography and cinema is true for much ambitious modern art.

Fittingly, the emblematic instance is *Schema (March 1966)* (1966–70; there are several iterations on display), a nonphotographic work by the Conceptual artist and amateur photographer Dan Graham. *Schema (March 1966)* inventories the grammatical content and graphic design of its immediate publication context—e.g., "35 adjectives, 7 adverbs, 35.52% area not occupied by type" (*Aspen*, no. 5/6 [1967])—such that the work cannot be exhibited except through its placement in a magazine. As it was elaborated by Graham, who is quoted in the wall text, "Conventionally, art magazines reproduce second-hand art which exists first, as phenomenological presence, in galleries. Turning this upside down, *Schema (March 1966)* only exists by its presence in the functional structure of the magazine and can only be exhibited in a gallery

second-hand. . . . The meaning of the work is contingent upon the specific meaning of each of its appearances; collectively it has no one meaning." Crucial, he continues, is "the use of the magazine system as support." The artist-theorist Beshty has learned deeply from the artist-theorist Graham. What *Schema (March 1966)* is for magazines, "Picture Industry" is for photography's multifarious platforms. Both are also didactic demonstrations of the conditions that determine the production, dissemination, and reception of art.

3. Politics are platform specific.

In the seven-and-a-half-minute video *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*, 2016, Arthur Jafa overlays footage found online—contemporary and historical, professional and amateur—with Kanye West's anthem "Ultralight Beam" to create a harrowing portrait of black life in America. We recognize many of the images because we've seen them online. The formal structure—found footage combined with popular music—is a YouTube commonplace. But the work is projected in a black-box gallery. *Love Is the Message* arrives toward the end of "Picture Industry," after Douglas's *Monodramas* (shown on '90s TV monitors) and Frazier's *Flint Is Family* (2016), which is represented via two platforms: a nearly twelve-minute video and a spread in *Elle* magazine, accompanied by related contact sheets and page proofs. In other words, by the time we arrive at *Love Is the Message*, the gallery—be it white cube or black box—has been stripped of its status as neutral platform. The black-box gallery is a choice, and a stark one, since, unlike its source material, the video is unavailable online. Why did Jafa limit the work to the gallery? The art market is a significant but only partial answer. The limitation is also a response to Jafa's own question: "But this footage is all over the place. . . . It's literally everywhere so the question becomes: How do you situate it so that people actually see it . . . as opposed

to just having it pass in front of them? And simultaneously, how do you induce people to apprehend both the beauty and the horror [of] these circumstances?" In order to make ubiquitous images visible, Jafa takes them out of circulation. The choice is considered, urgent, and—given the trajectory of the exhibition—productively problematic.

Several galleries before Jafa's video, attentive viewers can find a bound copy of *Jet* magazine (vol. 8, no. 19, September 15, 1955)—also available online through Google Books—open to the story "Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth." The article includes four pages of text and seven photographs, three of which depict the mutilated face of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American victim of lynching. The inclusion of *Jet* magazine reads like an implicit rebuke to the 2017 Whitney Biennial and its scandalous painting of Till, which is comparatively decorative and tasteful. Face-to-face with the wrenching four-page story and documentary photographs reproduced in the diminutive fifteen-cent magazine, we are forced to ask whether gestural painting is germane to, let alone valuable for, the representation of photographs conscientiously circulated in magazines such as *Jet*—that is, photographs we now recognize as direct precursors to the traumatic videos gathered by Jafa. Rather than pass judgment on a medium such as painting—let alone make declarations about who has (or does not have) the right to represent black anguish—"Picture Industry" tests the aesthetic and political limits of platforms such as galleries and magazines. Jafa's *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* takes uncomfortable refuge in the gallery. *Jet* marks the limits of such a withdrawal. □

"Picture Industry" is on view through December 15.

NOAM M. ELCOTT IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, AN EDITOR OF THE JOURNAL *GREY ROOM*, AND THE AUTHOR OF *ARTIFICIAL DARKNESS: AN OBSCURE HISTORY OF MODERN ART AND MEDIA* (2016).

ARTFORUM

Seth Price

STEDELIJK MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

Gregor Quack

WHEN THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM in Amsterdam and the Museum Brandhorst in Munich decided to jointly organize "the first comprehensive retrospective of the work of Seth Price," they brought up fundamental questions about the art world's favorite form of hagiography. If retrospective exhibitions are, by definition, exercises in containment and summary, how can they deal with an artist as notoriously slippery as Price, who first received significant attention for a PDF calling for art's "dispersion" beyond and outside the institutions of the art world? If Price used that early document to advocate for an "aesthetic program" that "does not function properly within the institutionalized art context," can a museum exhibi-

tion be the proper lens through which to look back at his work?

For the first iteration of "Seth Price: Social Synthetic," curators Beatrix Ruf and Achim Höchdorfer, together with the artist, sought to address this seeming incompatibility with a spatial layout that reflected the dizzyingly hyperlinked architecture of Price's oeuvre. Fourteen galleries of the Stedelijk's top floor were packed with often expansive works, including "sculpture, installation, 16-mm film, photography, drawing, painting, video, clothing and textiles, web design, music and sound, and poetry." On the floor of one gallery, a lone flat-screen monitor emitted the televisual glow of COPYRIGHT 2006 SETH PRICE, 2006, a thirteen-minute video of appropriated news footage of the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981. A few rooms on, the same footage turned up again, only now screened on cheap portable media players and set to a lo-fi piano soundtrack (*Digital Video Effect: "Chords,"* 2007). Price's signature materials and techniques recurred in relentlessly mutating constellations throughout the space. The transparent polyester film that was formed into a cylindrical sculpture bearing prehistoric horse drawings in *Double Hunt*, 2006, reappeared elsewhere in scrunched-up tapestries carrying altered video stills of a jihadist beheading ("Hostage Video Still with

Time Stamp," 2005–). In another work (*Addresses*, 2006), Mylar ran across the walls of an entire room and continued into the next, now populated with darkened, pixelated reproductions of an older beheading image, Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath*.

Similarly plentiful were the so-called "Vacuum Forms," 2004–2009, a series of polystyrene sheets that Price vacuum-molded to take on the shape of whatever object (knotted ropes, bomber jackets, casts of human body parts) he had placed underneath them. At the Stedelijk, these pieces took center stage. They filled immense vitrines, covered walls or leaned against them with a studied nonchalance that seemed to mock the presumably stratospheric prices once paid for them by their often anonymous lenders. Though Price has stopped producing such pieces, which risked overshadowing other aspects of his practice, the exhibition was not shy about making use of the undeniable visual allure of their dance in the uncanny valley. Of the more than 140 pieces on display, a small vacuum mold of what looks like a generic plastic mask (*Untitled*, 2008) was not only the first piece visitors encountered, but also the most hauntingly memorable one.

The curators' decision to privilege diffusion over concentration extends to the show's excellent catalogue. On the one hand, its contributors make no attempt to hide

Left: **View of "Seth Price: Social Synthetic," 2017**, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij. Below: **Seth Price, *Untitled*, 2008**, enamel on vacuum-formed PETG, approx. 21 × 17 × 2", Opposite page, from left: **View of "Seth Price: Social Synthetic," 2017**, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Clockwise, from top left: *Untitled (Bomber)* (diptych), 2006; *Vintage Bomber*, 2008; *Untitled*, 2006, Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij. **Seth Price, *Addresses* (detail), 2006**, ten etchings and oil monoprints on paper, each 44½ × 30", **Three stills from Seth Price's *Redistribution*, 2007–**, video, color, sound, this iteration 44 minutes 15 seconds,

ARTFORUM

the fact that some of Price's early followers were non-plussed when an artist who had once pioneered ways of evading the structural elitism of the art market eventually found considerable commercial success with almost conventionally beautiful sculptures and wall pieces. As Cory Arcangel quips in his short essay, "Seeing Seth's work is

Price's early work is linked to a time when an exclusive focus on the technologies of circulation made emotional or ethical reactions to images seem beside the point.

always a massive WTF." On the other hand, the essays are unanimous in their insistence that Price's work is too complex and too clever for a notion as black-and-white as "selling out."

Above all, however, the catalogue conveys a sense that no matter how many hours we spent at the Stedelijk, we still couldn't come close to knowing the whole story, because the full range of Price's interests and activities is impossible to grasp. Did we spend enough time on the

iPads in the reading area studying Price's algorithmic art-market data-gathering project, *Organic Software*, 2015? Do we know about the idiosyncratic collections of early video-game soundtracks and academic electronic music Price compiled in the 2000s? How about the four versions that preceded the most recent iteration of Price's programmatic art-lecture video *Redistribution*, 2007–?

In the exhibition, as in the catalogue, the effort to do justice to the sprawling intricacy of Price's oeuvre had two effects. First, it successfully presented Price as one of the most versatile artist-thinkers of the past two decades, not only in terms of how his work more than holds a candle to the sophistication of his much-quoted writing, but also with regard to his nimble use of an immense arsenal of materials and media. Second, it also made much of Price's work appear intensely dated. If the same production techniques, materials, and even images crop up again and again in otherwise unrelated areas of Price's work, this is because, for him, the artist's task has not been to explain or even understand, but simply that of "packaging, producing, reframing, and distributing." The emphatic sense of impartiality Price maintained even while appropriating imagery as charged as stills from the video of the 2002 beheading of the journalist Daniel Pearl links his early work to a time when an exclusive focus on the technolo-

gies of circulation made emotional or ethical reactions to images seem beside the point.

In our own historical moment, when no corner of the internet seems safe from the twin evils of Trumpist misinformation and meme-wielding white supremacists, such unfailingly neutral and detached approaches to digital-image production have begun to feel idealistic and insufficient. Price knows this, of course, as well as anyone. Regarding some of the most recent works in the retrospective—immense, close-up photographs of human skin, installed in light boxes—he has commented on how some raw materials cannot be "uncharged." Perhaps reflecting on Price's past work, the narrator of his 2015 novel, *Fuck Seth Price*, ruminates that it seemed "easy and even commonsensical" in the early 2000s to turn violence from a political problem into a media-theoretical one—something that operated primarily on the level of images. He then promptly admits that "in reality . . . all the same human pain persisted, lurking on the other side of the curtain. It hadn't changed and it wasn't going anywhere." Price's first midcareer retrospective leaves us to wonder what effect this new awareness will have on the next decades of his work.

"Seth Price: Social Synthetic" travels to the Museum Brandhorst, Munich, October 21, 2017–February 18, 2018.

GREGOR QUACK IS AN ART HISTORIAN BASED IN PALO ALTO, CA, AND BERLIN.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel
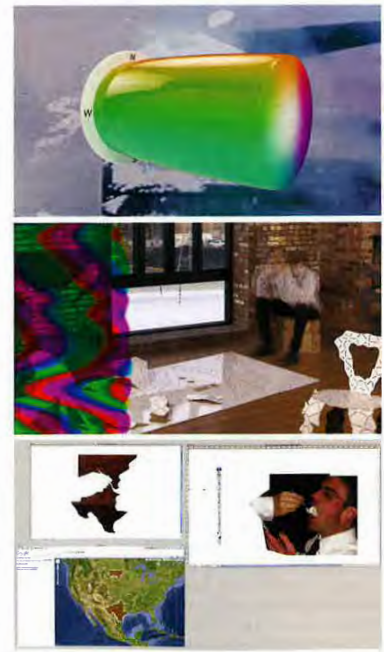
MOUSSE

MOUSSE

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Rahel Aima
Basma Alsharif
Robert Barry
Andrew Berardini
Yann Chateigné Tytelman
Nick Currie
Aria Dean
Kevin Jerome Everson
Fredi Fischli & Niels Olsen
Orit Gat
Jarrett Gregory
Trix & Robert Haussmann
Jens Hoffmann
Adam Jasper
Stefan Kalmár
John Knight

Erkki Kurenniemi
Duane Linklater
Chus Martínez
Robertas Narkus
Kathy Noble
Hans Ulrich Obrist
Andréa Picard
Ana Teixeira Pinto
Seth Price
Johannes Raether
Kitty Scott
Leilah Weinraub
Julia Weist
Elvia Wilk
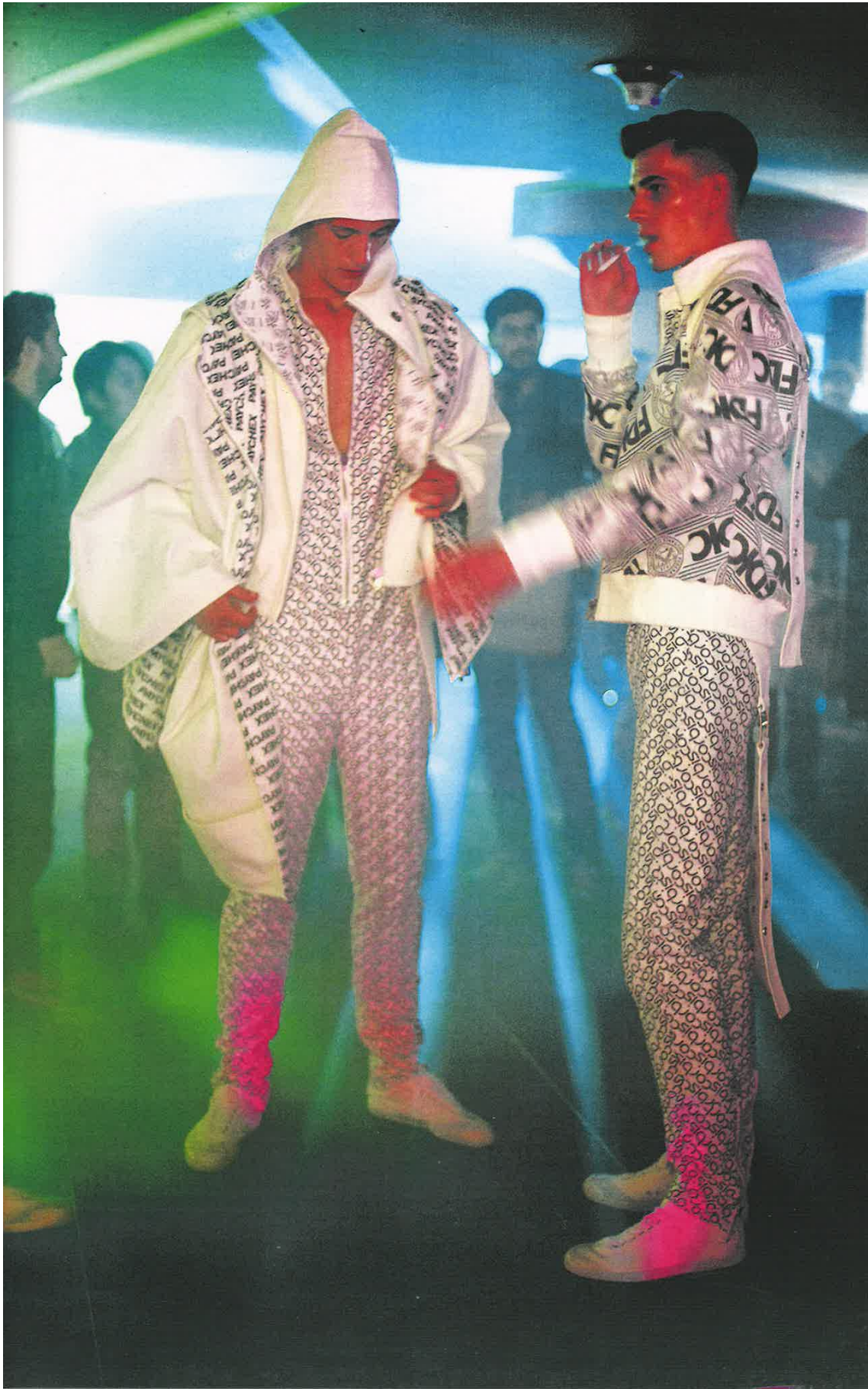Lantian Xie
Yan Xing

MOUSSE
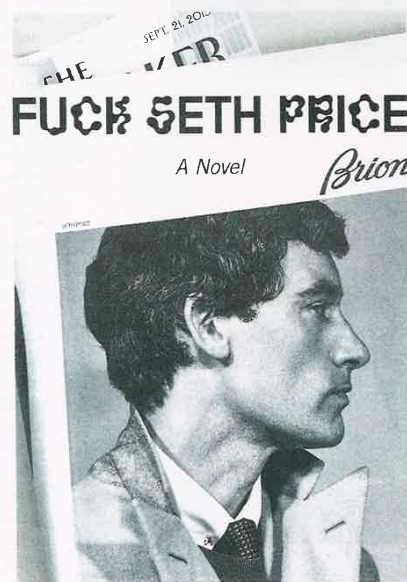
I DON'T STAY IN LANE

SETH PRICE AND STEFAN KALMÁR
IN CONVERSATION

MOUSSE

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

MOUSSE

MOUSSE

MOUSSE

On the occasion of Seth Price's survey exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, this exchange between the New York based artist and the director of the ICA London, Stefan Kalmár, touches on some of the themes and ideas that have animated Price's almost twenty-year-long career.

STEFAN KALMÁR
One thing that surprised me in your opening speech to your exhibition at the Stedelijk was how you described your works as scattered particles.

SETH PRICE
I don't remember that. I know I said it had always seemed to me like a trail of wreckage, of unrelated debris. "Particles" sounds better.

SK "Debris" is a term that I am quite fascinated with recently, as "fragments" might be more appropriate for a 1980s or 1990s postmodern discourse, but "debris" captures much better the mood, the culture, of whatever we call this period after 2000 till today. "Debris" also connotes destruction, or at least an impact of sorts. Debris of course can have particles as its smallest unit.

SP "Fragments" makes me think of cinema, and where montage went with the move from film to video in the 1980s and 1990s.

SK Or archaeology, like Allan McCollum's surrogates. What I find appealing about the term "debris" is its violence, the silent elegance, of floating plane wreckage or building dust.

SP Right, you couldn't ever put it back together. "Fragments" implies a whole that could possibly be reconstructed.

SK Wars create debris, not fragments. Juan Gaitán, from the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City and I have this back-and-forth of what an exhibition entitled *Debris of Civilization* might look like.

SP That's your first-person shooter. How would you install a show like that?

SK Maybe it's just a soundtrack.

SP A soundtrack encoded on a USB stick inside a vitrine.

SK *Music for Airports* on a USB stick in a vitrine. Which kind of is what you do, a bit like a black hole. Traces, speculation, narratives, maybe traps.

SP Sounds frustrating when you put it like that.

SK No, not at all. Like a walk through a dystopian landscape that's not frustrating, but reality, into which traces of narratives are folded.

SP But dystopian?

SK Walking the line of uncertainty, for sure. Your fashion show in Kassel was dystopian—not without complexity, fascination, and apocalyptic beauty, and of course possibility.

SP I was thinking how funny it is that the infrastructure of our communication environment, meaning social media really, was basically created by men in their late teens and twenties. So all of the anxieties of these young dudes are coded into the culture. Insecurities around courtship, mating, status, fear of missing out, bragging, and bullying: this becomes the constant state, for vast numbers of people. Can you imagine if all the social media platforms were built and managed by people in their sixties?

SK "Young man" and military bragging and insecurity, I guess. But then again what would *unsocial* media look like?

SP I'm over in antisocial media, myself.

SK Yep, either all media is social in one form or another or its actually propaganda—the "social" seems like a commodifiable surplus, an extra asset. So there is media and there is "social media."

SP I can't deal with social media. It's not addressed in any of the work in Amsterdam. Maybe only in the organic.software website.

SK But yet when it comes to art writing, your work allegedly is built around social media as one of its core reference points.

SP Maybe there is a kind of work that people make with social media in mind, thinking of its own status as a replicated distributed image. Or maybe it approximates, in its effects, the way that phenomena online must stand out, grab your attention, demand to be discussed, hated, or loved. This can be done well in an artwork, and it also runs the risk of contorting itself with insecurity.

SK And then there is work that comes out of this very particular cultural coil that is the past seventeen years that I think we all are still trying to grasp and make some sense of.

SP Yes, no one has yet formed a coherent idea or story about this period. I wonder if art history has ever gone so long without the stories fully coagulating.

SK Your work in itself inevitably carries the traces of that period and its particular logic. It is part of it—and so am I and so are you. No "outside" there. This is why Amsterdam was so remarkable, because it is the closest I ever saw of what formed— to use your own words—a replica of that condition, and it seemed it "did" itself, as if you were in another room or universe and hadn't touched a thing. If that makes sense. Not sure I can explain it, but I am fascinated by it. It is a good, a very good thing.

MOUSSE
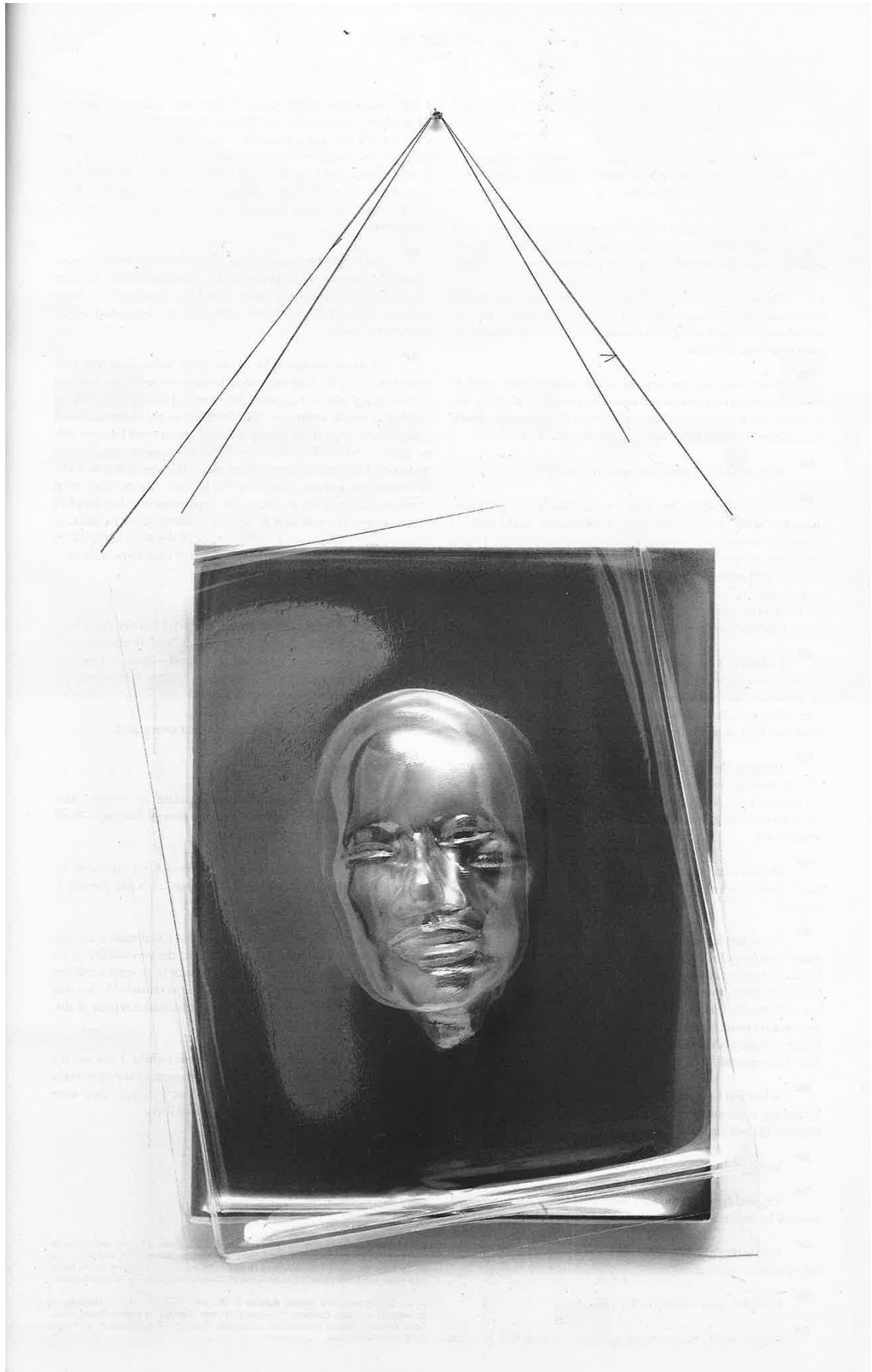
MOUSSE

SP You mean it gave the impression of an outside from which to survey?

SK Maybe to grasp a complex logic and understanding and a form of relating to this reality that otherwise could be perceived as bonkers or simply incomprehensible.

SP I want to contain and redirect that sense of bonkers. A couple of people told me that if they hadn't already known my work, the exhibition would have made them think the artist was a psychopath.

SK Maybe it was a toolkit of sorts. But then again that sounds too didactic. Maybe more a texture, a structure, a script that we only understand through having been conditioned post-2000, sharing the same new form of literacy.

SP That's nice that you use the word "tool." I have come to think of artists as tool makers and myself as a maker of tools for other artists. It's a kind of justification for what I'm doing that finally makes sense to me, or that I'm not uncomfortable with.

SK Why would you think you need to "justify"?

SP To me, art always felt totally embarrassing as a phenomenon, and "artist" was a corny thing to call oneself. And I still find something deeply embarrassing about making an artwork. I think that's why so much of my work makes something from nothing, or plays with immateriality, flatness, image. Since to go ahead and make a piece of volumetric sculpture sitting in a gallery would be the most corny thing imaginable, I'm kind of hugging the margins rather than jumping into the pool.

SK I relate, as I often feel like the joke that starts with, "A curator walks into a gallery..." But then again, I also know that art has afforded me exactly the knowledge of self-reflexivity, of knowing I am implicated. But then again it's hardly "hugging the margins" when you have an entire floor at the Stedelijk, right?

SP Hugging the margins formally, I meant, rather than jumping into the making of definitive "Sculpture." Anyway, it's my own inner feeling. It's a justification that allows me to proceed with making a statement as grand as that exhibition and still keeping intact a sense of self.

SK Do you recall the moment when you made your first "sculpture"? Not that film can't be a form of sculpture. But what was that trigger?

SP I was playing around the summer before my first show at Reena Spaulings (in 2004), trying to figure out what to show, and I had a picture in my mind's eye of an ass coming out of a calendar. I had been doing these calendars, and then the body came pushing out of them. So I had to go and figure out how to cast and mold and vacuum form. But those sculptures were flat and hollow—they were topologically the same, just flat sheets with a slight redistribution of the material.

SK When you look at those works now, do they read differently? Something more uncanny that you weren't necessarily consciously aware of in their "making"?

SP Uncanny in the sense of *unheimlich*?

SK Yes, and how they became somewhat iconic for that period, haunted by its time.

SP People thought they were ugly. For a long time, that was often a primary response.

SK Is "ugly" even a category for you?

SP "Ugly" would mean I'm trying to synthesize it still. It means

I don't understand it yet. Kelley Walker once told me he thought all good art was beautiful, which meant that an ugly work that was a good work was also a beautiful work. I did a screening at Light Industry, and afterward Ed Halter came up and told the crowd how he had always loved my films and videos and then I had gone and started making all this ugly sculpture. Everyone laughed. It feels good to make something that someone would call ugly, but I don't know why.

SK I get what Ed meant, because your "sculptural work"—even though I think we should never see it in isolation, simply because it is not done in isolation—seems more, say, "unhinged." It has a different logic, or maybe indeed tries to escape logics that others attempt to impose.

SP It's funny because a lot of that early video work was perceived as ugly at the time too, maybe because the aesthetics and uses of technology were not common yet, were not widely seen. Making a video of search results for "painting" before the introduction of image search, or making a compilation of compressed Internet video material before the existence of YouTube or video search or the widespread bandwidth to even share video. But then you give it five or seven years and the videos lose that ugliness. Maybe that's what happens when you try to escape the imposition of other people's logics. Eventually you have to face up to being called an artist, or a husband, or straight, or a vegetarian, or all the other corny labels that are about imposing ways of being, rather than ways of doing.

SK "Ways of doing"—I like that.

SP I mean that I recognize that I "do" art. I can say that I have made a lot of art. It's undeniable. But to say I "am" an artist is something else. It would be silly to deny it out loud—again, it's more of a feeling. At breakfast I was a vegetarian because I didn't eat any meat, but who knows what might happen.

SK As if they constantly undermine their own status.

SP Status update.

SK How do these modes that you "operate" in—music, film, text, sculpture, fashion, website, video, painting, drawing—work together? Is this just text, stuff, excess?

SP There are a lot of good terms now for tackling questions like that. "Lanes": I don't stay in lane. "Sandbox": it's like playing in different sandboxes.

SK Again let me rephrase or repeat what I said earlier: for me, your work carries the traces of today's logic, the inevitability of the now, like the Larsen Effect a visual feedback to its own condition that it is part of. This is why Amsterdam was so remarkable, because it is the closest that I ever seen in which it formed a replica of that condition.

SP Thank you Stefan, that's really great to hear. I can say the show was like a documentation of seventeen years of trying to make a painting or a sculpture or a video the way I thought they were supposed to be done, and never quite getting there.

Seth Price lives and works in New York. *Social Synthetic*, a survey exhibition of his work, is currently on view at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and will travel to Munich's Museum Brandhorst in October. An exhibition focusing of his filmic and video work will open at The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London this Fall.

Since December 2016 **Stefan Kalmár** is the new Director of The Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Previously he was Director of Artists Space, New York, Director of the Kunstverein München, Director of the Institute of Visual Culture in Cambridge.
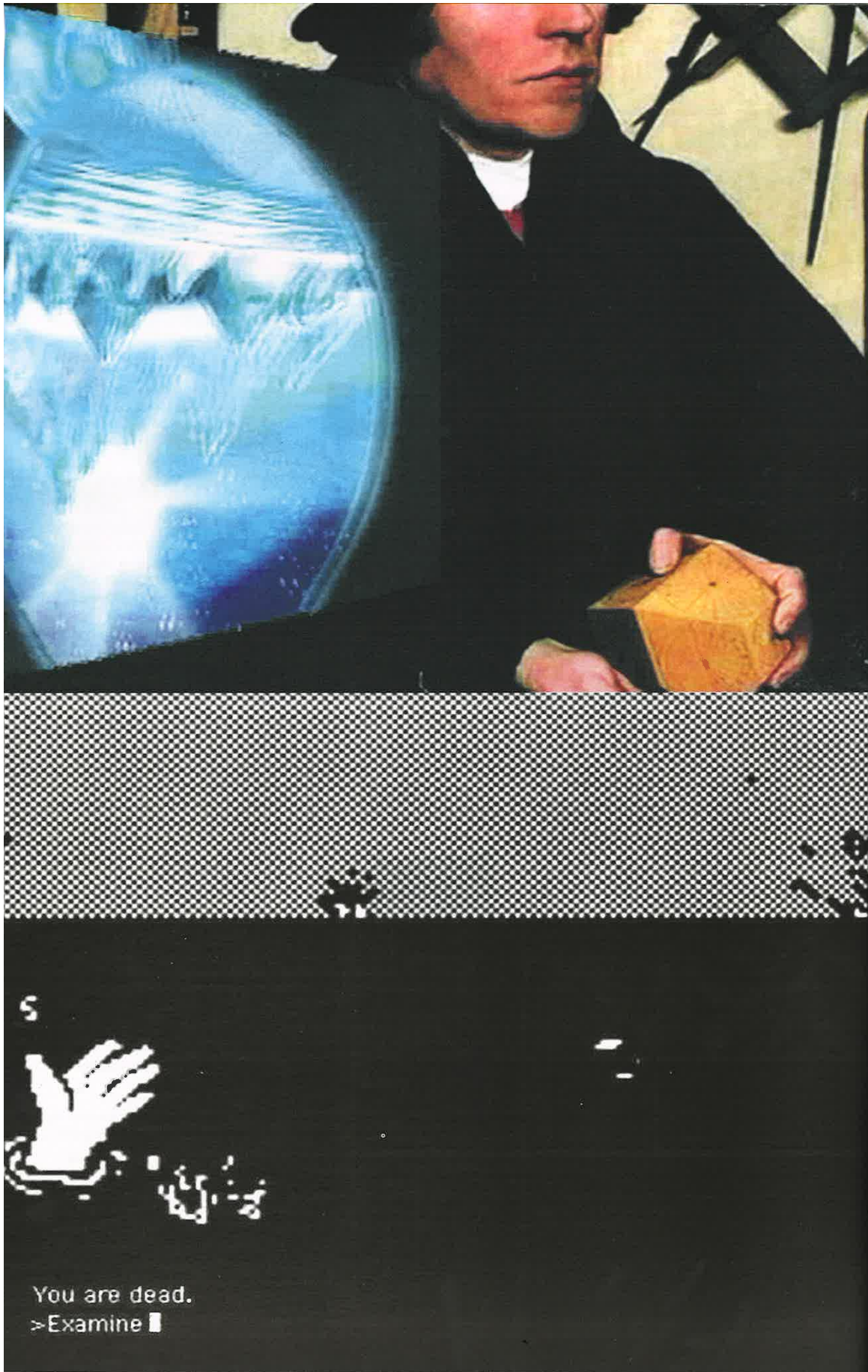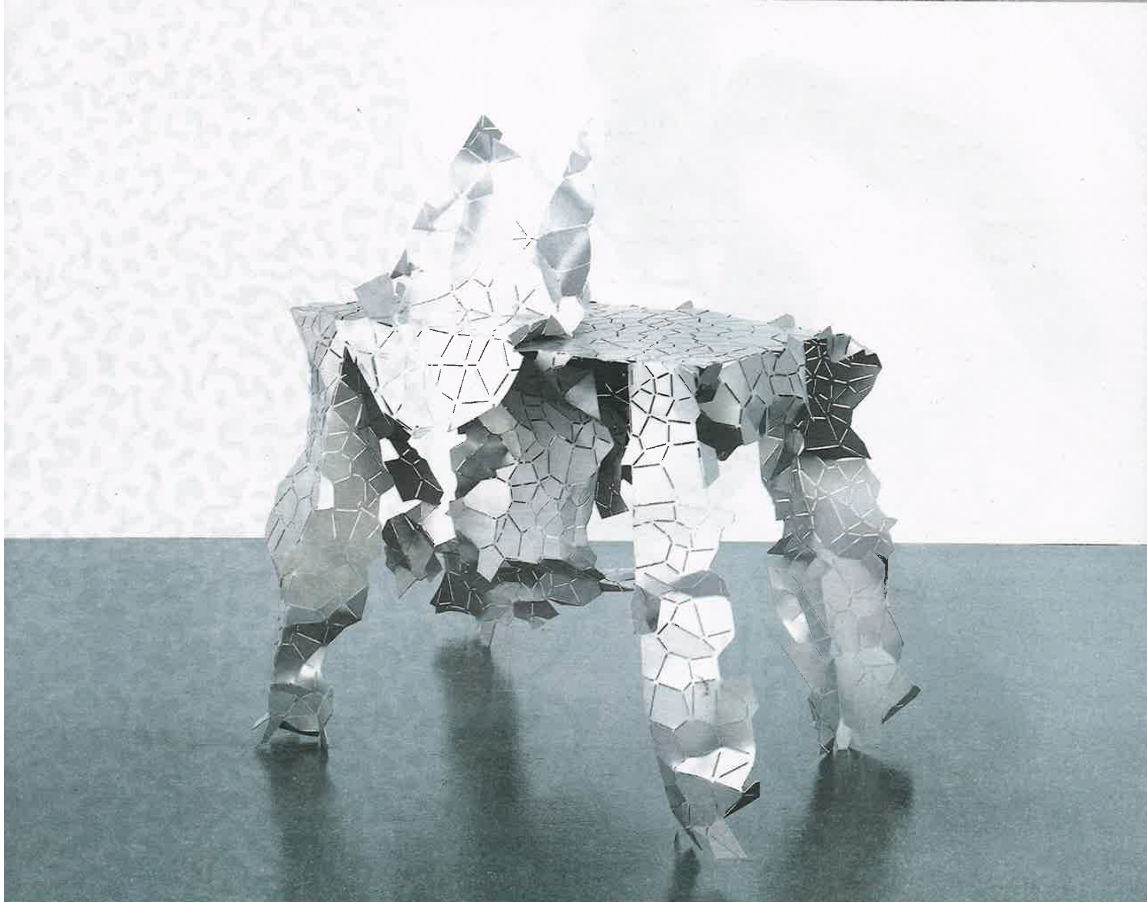
MOUSSE

MOUSSE

MOUSSE

MOUSSE

MOUSSE

MOUSSE

MOUSSE
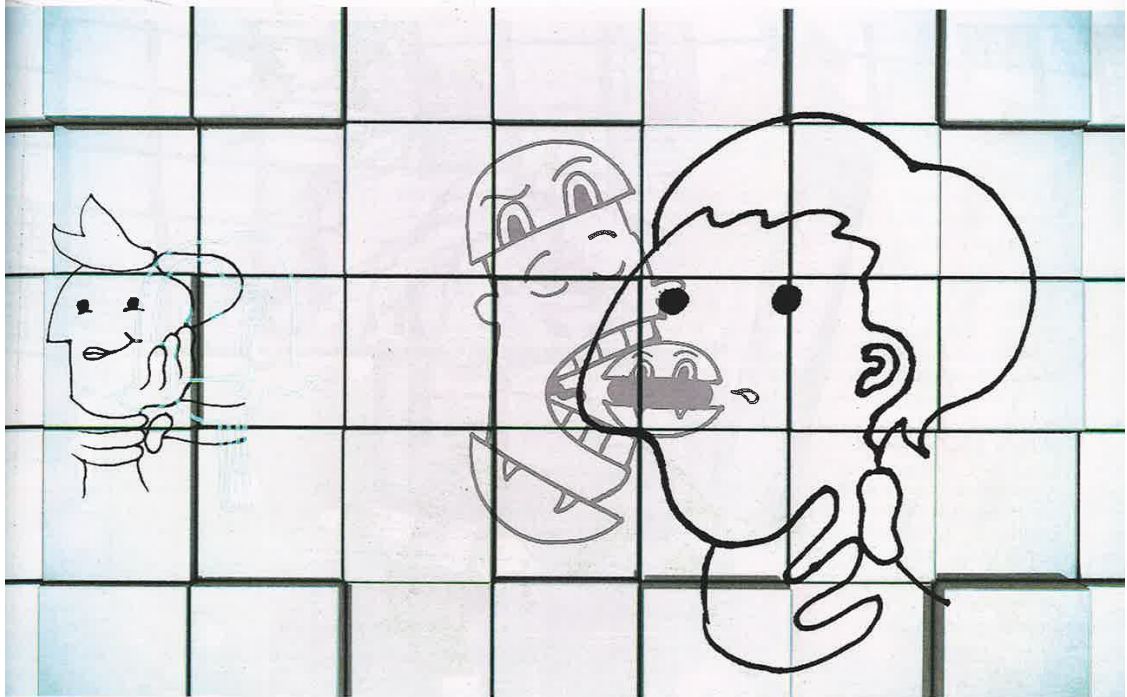
MOUSSE

MOUSSE

In fact, serial killing requires a level of psychological compulsion that children are not capable of.

In order of appearance:

01 *Fuck Seth Price: A Novel* (New York: Leopard Press, 2015; 2nd ed., 2016). © Seth Price. Courtesy: artist and Leopard Press, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz

02 *Folklore U.S.* SS12 fashion show staged during the opening of dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, 2012. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Henrik Strömberg

03 *Different Kinds of Art* (detail), 2004. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Ron Amstutz

04 *Big Screw*, 2004. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Larry Lamay

05 *Mesh Bag with Virus Pattern*, 2013. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Ron Amstutz

06 *Street Style Print Test*, 2015. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz

07 *Art History*, 2003. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Museum Brandhorst, Munich. Photo: Ron Amstutz

08 *Untitled*, 2008. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Reena Spaulings Gallery, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz

09 *Social Synth*, 2017, *Social Synthetic* installation view at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2017. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

10 *Social Synthetic* installation view at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2017. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

11 *"Painting" Sites* (still), 2000. © Seth Price. Courtesy: Electronics Arts Intermix, New York

12 *Industrial Synth* (still), 2000. © Seth Price. Courtesy: Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

13 *Waste Piping*, 2016. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York. Photo: Brica Wilcox

14 *Folded Heart on Table*, 2016. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie, Berlin. Photo: Ron Amstutz

15 *Rotating Sawtooth Pattern Bag* (detail), 2012. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York. Photo: Kat Parker

15 *Exploded Dry Erase Board with Pieces*, 2015, *Wrok Fmaily Freidns* installation view at 356 S. Mission Rd., Los Angeles, 2016. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Brica Wilcox

16 *Crystalline Spill Lattice*, 2017. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz

17 *Fwee9u&LL*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist

18 *Loser with a Tattoo*, 2017. Courtesy: the artist

19 *Nailed to the Wall*, 2006. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Capitain Petzel, Berlin. Photo: Simon Vogel

20 *Redistribution* (still), 2007-ongoing. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist

21 *Redistribution* (still), 2007-ongoing. © Seth Price. Courtesy: the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York

Flash Art

Seth Price

Stedelijk Museum / Amsterdam

A monumental rear-projected video hovers horizontally over the Stedelijk's iconic staircase leading up to its first-floor galleries. In a slow, silent, panning movement, the surface of what turns out to be the chromatophorous skin of a squid has been scanned up close.

Social Synth (2017) was specially commissioned by the museum for the exhibition "Social Synthetic," and it might function as both a prologue to and emblem of the largest Seth Price survey to date, organized in collaboration with the Museum Brandhorst in Munich. Spanning more than fifteen years of the artist's career, these works have contributed to an influential discourse on the impact of digital culture on artistic production, authorship, and our general sense of self within a changed world.

Spread out over fourteen galleries, the pieces range from Price's Mylar sculptures (2005–08), "Knot Paintings" (2009–12), "Silhouette sculptures" (2007–10) and "Vintage Bombers" (2005–08) to his YouTube videos, notebooks, clothing line, textile pieces, texts and drawings. Highlights include key early works like *"Painting" Sites* (2000), his more recent anthropomorphic aluminum furniture designs (2016–17) and the latest version of his lecture-performance *Redistribution*, ongoing since 2007.

Fitting this hybrid, temporally fluid body of work into the unavoidable linearity of a museum space might seem a matter of paradox, yet "Social Synthetic" refutes this assumption with impressive results. Although work is arranged in a roughly chronological manner, and loosely clustered per series, singular elements throughout the exhibition continually throw one off-kilter — establishing numerous cross-connections and undermining any simplified overview.

The three-dimensional exhibition space, itself embodying a complex network, seems now almost digitized, allowing visitors to amble through the unflattened layers of Price's eerily beautiful, unsettling yet familiar universe.

by Suzanne van de Ven

ARTFORUM

From left: **Marie-Louise Ekman,** *At Home with a Lady,* 1973, oil and faux fur on canvas, 19¾ × 23⅝". **Thomas Struth,** *Bright Sunflower No. 1, Winterthur,* 1991, C-print, 33⅛ × 26". **Seth Price,** *Untitled,* 2016, UV-cured print, acrylic, and synthetic polymer on board, 60 × 60 × 5".

AMSTERDAM

"SETH PRICE: SOCIAL SYNTHETIC"

Stedelijk Museum
April 15–September 3
Curated by Beatrix Ruf, Leontine Coelewij, and Achim Hochdörfer

In "Dispersion," his influential open-ended essay begun in 2002, Seth Price poses a question animating his long-standing preoccupations with technology, digital culture, and the rituals of consumerism: "Suppose an artist were to release the work directly into a system that depends on reproduction and distribution for its sustenance, a model that encourages contamination, borrowing, stealing, and horizontal blur?" Featuring more than 150 works produced between 2000 and the present, Price's Stedelijk retrospective will showcase the multidisciplinary range of his responses to this prompt, which include vacuum-form plastic reliefs, photography, digital paintings, drawings, clothing, and video. The catalogue features a superb roster of contributors, among them Cory Arcangel, Ed Halter, Achim Hochdörfer, Branden W. Joseph, John Kelsey, Michelle Kuo, Rachel Kushner with Laura Owens, and Ariana Reines. *Travels to the Museum Brandhorst, Munich, Oct. 12, 2017–Mar. 18, 2018.*
    —Pamela M. Lee

frieze

USA

Seth Price

356 MISSION, LOS ANGELES

Want a balanced life? Try sorting work, family and friends – or, per the unsentimental title of Seth Price's latest show, 'Wrok Fmaily Freidns'. Like any serious artist, Price seems to favour the first. At the show's heart is a maze of construction barriers made from railroad ties, two-by-fours and orange netting. In its rough-cut alcoves hang collages made from chunks of plywood, paint, and aluminium and vinyl offcuts. Titled 'scraps' and 'tests', all are provisional 'works in progress'. *Achievement Scrap* (2015) is a pair of commercial plastic prints of skateboarders Price found in the trash and 'tagged' with the all-caps declaration: 'WARNING: MAXIMUM BADASSNESS ACHIEVED.' Cringe all you want; when Price rebrands 'waste' as 'practice' – packaging and selling discarded products as 'raw' art – such acculturated irony is the touch that makes it work.

Commercial imaging materials are never far from advertising. Flanking the show's entrance are *Disidentified Multinational (V1)* and *(V2)* (both 2015), which the checklist calls a pair of 'UV-cured prints on wood-fibre veneer'. Repeated across their surfaces is the sans-serif word 'Alphabet' – not merely a bland placeholder but the corporate moniker of Alphabet Inc., the newly formed parent company of Google. The text's watermark grey evokes the security patterns printed inside sensitive mail – one of Price's staple motifs. Nearby, mounted to a plywood sheet, is the polymer image of a flayed business envelope (*Design for Multiethnic Envelope*, 2015), the interior of which is silkscreened in a full range of skin tones. Elsewhere, in *Skin Color Test Scrap* (2015), a smear of acrylic polymer on board is patterned with a finger's blotchy whorls. Price's stylistic signature here comprises the fine-grained identifiers of white-collar drudgery – prints, brands, patterns – on a blue-collar ground.

'Wrok, Fmaily, Freidns' – who can have it all? The show's title adopts the bad but legible diction of junk mail, perhaps to cram the wholesome trinity into one body and then slip it past the filters. Price has also created his own grinning, multitasking Mascot: a pencil-bearing, hermaphroditic glob. Like any good logo, Price's Mascot can self-reproduce. Versions of the doubly 'graphic' drawing recur on CNC-routed aluminium furniture (such as *Mascot on a Table*, 2015) and among rough paint swatches (as in *Logo Test Scrap*, 2015). In *Interior Life/Hot Dog With Mustard* (2015), tiny Mascots populate a taupe and yellow security pattern inside another oversize, splayed envelope.

Beyond the barriers, sections of PVC pipe are laid out as neatly as a pack of hotdogs, their bell ends alternating (*Waste Pipe Overflow Stock*, 2016), joined in a cross (*Waste Pipe Test*, 2016) or stood on end (*Waste Pipe Vertical*, 2016). Each length or elbow is covered with a black-on-white vinyl wrap densely patterned with leering Mascots. The sculptures are a cruel metaphor for the human condition: fetishized surface on the outside, and inside, a glorified tube. Recuperated as vaguely minimalist sculptures and comprehensively branded, these works are both trash and commodity, casual and calculated, cynical and desperate.

Price's take would be grim indeed, if not for a quartet of panoramic light boxes mounted to the back wall, showing the magnified skin of (and titled after) respondents to a Craigslist ad – 'Freidns' of a sad sort. The images have been digitally stitched together, patch by tiny patch, from thousands of hi-res photos of each person's arm: a fractal composite whose forking peaks and valleys coldly recall the show's CNC-routed furniture and orange mesh. Yet, their affective finish makes these works seem almost tender, as in *Danny* (2015), where the top edge of the skinscape slips, beachlike, under inky waters. Such emphatic beauty weighs down the easy pretensions of 'Wrok, Fmaily and Freidns', as if to merge these categories within the fecund sociality of art. Price's Mascot wants to be everything to everyone – but is human, after all.

TRAVIS DIEHL

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

HEY, MOTHERFUCKERS – HERE IS YOUR GENERATIONAL NOVEL
Tobias Madison über Seth Prices Roman „Fuck Seth Price"

Der zeitgenössische Künstler als von seinem Körper entfremdeter, stets alles analysierender Geist: So stellt ihn Seth Price in seinem neuesten Roman dar. Ein Buch über Kunstgeschichte und Markt, über Karrierebedingungen und Ausschlusskriterien, über Netzwerke und Technologien, und nicht zuletzt über all die visuellen und sprachlichen Versatzstücke, die sich wiederum aneignen lassen.

Der Schweizer Künstler Tobias Madison, der sich in seiner künstlerischen Praxis selbst auf Aneignungsfragen – von Price bis Sturtevant – bezieht, hat das Buch für uns rezensiert. Im Folgenden denkt er über dessen Sprecherposition nach, über die Unmöglichkeit, in diesem „Selbsthilferatgeber-meets-Bildungsroman" die Stimmen von Autor, Erzähler und Künstler völlig voneinander zu trennen. Hat Price für seine Leser/innen wirklich stets das Beste im Sinn?

„He found himself carrying out strange and horrible acts: murder and abduction, most disturbingly, but also other furtive activities that he couldn't make sense of. Through all of this he was able only to watch, resigned to imprisonment in his physical machinery, his mind turning over slowly like an idle hard disk. This certainly afforded him plenty of time to figure out exactly where things had gone wrong, and he came to blame his obsession with ‚keeping up' — with technology, with the young, with the culture [...]."[1]

Vor ein paar Jahren saß ich mit Peter Fischli in einer Bar und diskutierte hitzig die Arbeit von Seth Price. Unsere Euphorie wandelte sich mehrfach in Ärgernis und wieder zurück: Ärgernis über ein System, dessen scheinbare Balance und narrative Technologien den Betrachter verfüh-

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Seth Price bei einer Lesung im Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 2015

ren und das gleichzeitig ständig versucht, den Raum des Selbst zu dezimieren — eine Beziehung, die wohl die meisten von uns im neoliberalen Kapitalismus teilen. Schlussendlich einigten sich unsere gemischten Gefühle auf: „Weißt du was? Fuck Seth Price!", was ich mit Filzstift in einem Lampenschirm der Bar hinterließ und ging.

In seinem kürzlich bei Leopard Press erschienenen Roman „Fuck Seth Price" lässt Price seinen Protagonisten als von seinem Körper abgelösten Geist eines zeitgenössischen Künstlers auftreten. Diese Entität, die den Leser als Stream-of-Consciousness durch den Roman führt, lässt sich eher als Denkweise denn als Person beschreiben, eine Denkweise, die den Überlebensstrategien in New York unter den ökonomischen Verhältnissen zwischen dem 11. September und dem Crash von 2008

entspringt. In die dritte Person deplatziert, reflektiert sie über die Bedingungen künstlerischen Schaffens: Doch statt der Möglichkeit autonomen Selbstausdrucks findet sie nur noch die komplette Immersion im Kapitalismus, in dem Form und Inhalt als Variablen ausgerichtet werden, die allein durch die Nachfrage bestimmt sind.

Der Körper ist größtenteils abwesend, seine Handlungen werden auf minimalem Raum formuliert, bevor die Erzählung in den inneren Monolog zurückdriftet: das Bedienen von Computerterminals, das Rasen über den Highway, doch auch diverse Einbrüche in verschiedene Räumlichkeiten, das Ermorden eines Stricherjungen. Die Handlungen sind nicht die typischen eines Gegenwartskünstlers, sondern dienen vielmehr dazu, die Stimmung eines Sci-Fi-Romans zu erzeugen, einer Ästhetik, die Price bereits oft genregetreu als Analogie zur Realität des Jetzt verwendet hat — auch um der Gefahr eines allzu „Sozialen Realismus" zu entgehen.

Price präsentiert den Protagonisten als neben sich stehend, als sich in seinem eigenen Denken drehend, als so brillant in seiner Analysefähigkeit, dass jeder Gedanke zwangsläufig aus sich selbst heraus den nächsten bildet. Und doch ist er dabei so orientierungslos wie der Kompass auf dem Buchcover, dessen Zeiger durch ein diffuses Farbfeld ersetzt wurde. Es sind dies Phänomene, die auch von populärwissenschaftlicher Literatur und zeitgenössischer Theorie als Auswirkungen von Technologie auf unsere Psyche beschrieben werden, was wiederum auch der Protagonist bemerkt. Und so wird sein Irrglaube, sich mit seiner eigenen Analyse desubjektivieren zu können, zum grausamsten Motiv des Romans.

Der Voyeurismus, der sich als Modus Operandi beim Leser einstellt, wird dadurch verstärkt,

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Seth Price fotografiert von Collier Schorr für Brioni, Herbst/Winter 2015/16

Galerie
Chantal Crousel
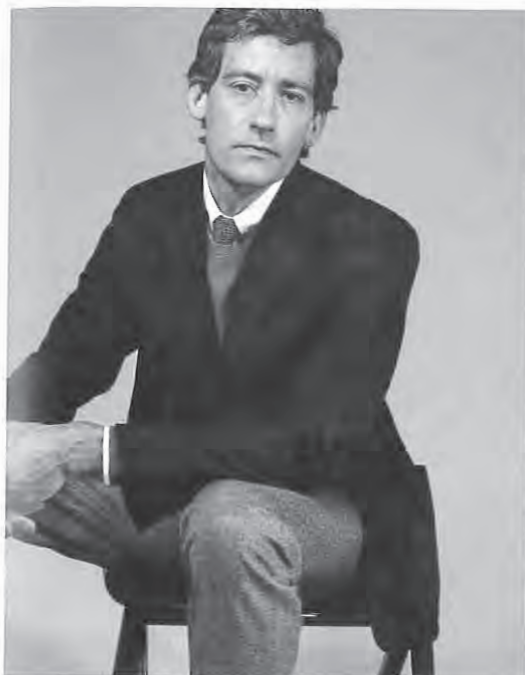
dass der Text als autobiografische Erzählung Prices inszeniert ist. Was darin kulminiert, dass Price den Leser die Genese, das Wunder künstlerischer Schöpfung, quasi live miterleben lässt: etwa wenn der Protagonist die formalen Bedingungen für das Funktionieren eines Romans als Kunstpraxis reflektiert. Empathie tritt genau in dem Moment auf (oder wird gezielt als Special Effect ausgelöst), in dem man eine Korrelation zwischen dem soziopathischen Körper und dem Geist diagnostiziert. Es ist die gleiche Form von Empathie, die heute wie ein spukendes Gespenst über Sozialen Medien lauert, die gleichzeitig menschliche Nähe und räumlich/zeitliche Entfernung beschreiben und dazu führen, dass wir alles für „persönlich" halten oder zumindest versuchen, alles über den Umweg des Selbst zu verstehen.

Doch wem gehört diese Empathie? Oder anders gesagt: Wer fickt Seth Price?

Der Diskurs in und um das vorliegende Magazin hat sich viel mit dem figurativen Vatermord auseinandergesetzt, der Figur des Bad Dad, bei dem es sich, wie Caroline Busta in der letzten Ausgabe angemerkt hat, nicht zwangsläufig um einen Mann handeln muss[2]. Seth Price verhält sich mit seinem Buch als so etwas wie eine Bad Mom: als jemand, dem wir vertrauen wollen, der aber nicht zwangsläufig in unserem Interesse handelt.

Der Ödipuskomplex ist damit nicht weit: Die Psychoanalytikerin Melanie Klein lokalisiert ihn nicht zuletzt im Streben des Kindes, sich den Inhalt des Mutterleibes anzueignen. Price ist sich seines Einflusses auf eine jüngere Künstlergeneration, die ihn als Mutterfigur verehrt und ins eigene Denken einverleiben will, bewusst. So nimmt das Buch stellenweise den Duktus eines Selbsthilfe-Ratgebers für jüngere Künstler/innen an. Doch der daraus resultierende Identifikationseffekt dient Price lediglich dem Zweck, weiterhin an der Redistribution seiner Arbeit zu arbeiten.

Bei aller präzisen Selbstdiagnose Prices bleibt hierbei dennoch die Frage offen, wie er selbst sich zu seinen eigenen Mutterfiguren verhält, besonders angesichts der Tatsache, dass weibliche Figuren in dem Buch fast komplett abwesend sind. Dies könnte auch in der Entscheidung begründet sein, offizielle Kunstgeschichte einfach als die traurige Realität, die sie ist, widerzuspiegeln. Dennoch stellte sich mir beim Lesen ständig die Frage: Wenn das Buch z. B. die Pop-Art als Folklore innerhalb des amerikanischen Kapitalismus beschreibt – wo bleibt dann Sturtevant?

Schließlich ist es ihre Praxis, neben der Revision der Appropriation Art der 1980er Jahre, an

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

die Prices Arbeit selbst präzise anknüpft. Sturtevant steht zu Price in einem ähnlichen Verhältnis wie die Kybernetik als eine von der Counterculture der 1960er Jahre verherrlichte Denkdisziplin zu der systemimmanenten Kraft, die sie heute darstellt und die sich gegen uns gewendet hat. Sprich: Price überträgt eine Praxis aus ihrem utopischen Kontext in die Dystopie des Jetzt, ähnlich, wie dies die Künstlerin mit ihrer letzten großen Arbeit, der Geisterbahn „House of Horrors" (2010), getan hat. Und so ist der magische Leerraum außerhalb des Zirkels zu der gähnenden Leere innerhalb unseres Selbst geworden.

Es wäre dennoch falsch, Seth Prices Praxis der zurzeit (wann nicht?) modischen Wendung des intellektuellen Horror Vacui zuzuordnen (Kunst über die „Leere zeitgenössischer Lebensstile") oder deren markttechnisch potenteren Kehrseite (leere Kunst für zeitgenössische Lebensstile). Wie oben bereits angemerkt, situiert Price seine Praxis innerhalb der Redistribution seiner eigenen Arbeit, wobei „Redistribution" auch der Titel eines seiner Werke ist (fortlaufend seit 2007). Doch zu einem Zeitpunkt, an dem eine Karriere so kanonisiert ist wie die von Price, bedeutet eine solche Redistribution, wie er richtig erkennt, vielleicht nicht mehr das Arbeiten über strukturelle Zusammenhänge zwischen Bild und Text, sondern vielmehr die direkte Manipulation der Rezeption des Betrachters.

Und so deutet Seth Price seinen Bildungsroman in etwas um, in dem Lehre wie Gift wirkt. Und vielleicht ist es wichtig, hier anzumerken, dass diese Parabel von Selbstreflexion und Psychose mit so unglaublich gutem Humor, mit jeglicher Kalkulation entfliehender Stilsicherheit und mit solcher Liebe für die Literaturgeschichte geschrieben ist, wie dies nur jemand tun kann,

der trotz seiner Liaison mit dem Markt, dem Betrachter und der Kunst, eben doch noch für den Erhalt seiner Autonomie schreibt. Demnach wäre das Außen, genauso wie Sturtevant dies bereits vorgeschlagen hat, etwas, das stets nur innerhalb unserer Selbst existieren kann.

„Fuck Seth Price" ist nicht der neueste Text von Seth Price, der laufend schreibt und veröffentlicht. Im Gegensatz zu vielen seiner Zeitgenossen, die ihre Werke mit Fußnoten versahen, verstand er es stets, seine Werke als Fußnoten zu seinen Texten zu verfassen. Oder genauer: als Produkte, die stellvertretend für den Text als Werke fungieren können. Während die Präsenz einer Fußnote in der Regel suggeriert, dass die eigentliche Auseinandersetzung anderswo (in einem anderen Text, innerhalb des Materials, innerhalb des 100-Meilen-Radius lokaler Farmproduktion) geführt wird, wird die Fußnote bei Price zum eigentlichen Textkörper. Und vielleicht liegt darin sogar so etwas wie eine Versöhnung von Körper und Geist.

Seth Price, „Fuck Seth Price", New York: Leopard, 2015.

Anmerkungen
1   Seth Price, Fuck Seth Price, a. a. O., S. 7f.
2   Caroline Busta, „Bad Canon", in: *Texte zur Kunst*, 100, 2015, S. 114–121.

art agenda

by SABRINA TARASOFF

Seth Price's "Wrok Fmaily Freidns"

356 S. MISSION RD., Los Angeles
January 30–April 3, 2016

To cut to the chase: Seth Price banks on banality. Bides his time building constructs, rather than content; repeating forms overblown by rhetoric. Most famously, his oft-cited essay "Dispersion" (2002) has served as justification for the material choices made in his career, quoting—nay, preaching—redistribution of existing materials as alternative currency to the creation of new form as dictated by the demands of the art market. But, like items made of reclaimed wood at Crate & Barrel, so altruistic and self-aware in offering a way out from buying into all that "new" stuff being made, so too is Price's art part careful marketing. What's for sale seems to be the illusion of escape, or capitalism re-branded and snazzily packaged as an "alternate economy"—books readily available to download online, paintings pushing 200k. Quid pro quo. But in the context of post-1990s New York, as long as you're self-aware and inclined to irony, double standards seem to be okay: after all, participation with the market is measured only in terms of how self-conscious of it you are, or how eloquently you can copywrite that relationship.

Eloquence, at that, can assume many guises and at Los Angeles's 356 S. Mission Rd. it appears as Price's latest exhibition, "Wrok Fmaily Freidns." Evoking words of wisdom from "Dispersion"—"You know what cool? Throw in some misspellings"(1)—the titular typos forebode the articulation of the installation, as it slurs through sex, skin disease, collectors, and copyrighted material in a labyrinthine construction site, erected interim for (or as) Price's provisions. Together, the works read like run-on sentences that seem unrelated but appropriate as a stream of thought, functioning as "spatial metaphors," as David Joselit described Price's work,(2) for the blurry effect of viewing images or accumulating endless columns of information online. Pragmatically, the materials all nod to modern ruins—the hoards of stuff that lie at the foot of upcoming skyscrapers, or the stockpiled junk that made Rem Koolhaas's career in writing(3)—yet do so by taking the flatness of the digital as a starting point, and filling it out to the desired volume. Ideas amass, like rapidly typed messages, total delirium.

Entering, the viewer is guided by provisional paravents of orange plastic fencing, carrying everything from prints of tessellated logos and vector images (for example: Spill Test or Logo Test Scrap, both 2015), found panels inscribed with spaceless sentences (I.D. Construction Barrier, 2016), to prints of pencils emptied at one end to reveal alluring orifices (Strip Test A and Strip Test B, both 2015). In these, Price disarms by overstimulation, lightheartedly coaxing viewers to draw a blank (pun intended) amid his calculated chaos. Elsewhere, sterile-looking PVC pipes printed with hermaphroditic blobs, Waste Pipes (2016), help the mind procrastinate on odd detail, while intermittently installed iPads link to a digital catalogue of collector profiles for anyone to peruse—including personal information about their homes, or "geo-data" as it has been dubbed. Everything is up for grabs. Not only does Price appropriate the ambulatory infrastructure of online communications as a sculptural model, but in doing so, replicates its false democratic promises: the accumulation of sheer content standing in for determinate action,

art
agenda

thus reinforcing not the ideology of re-distribution, but the power inherent to the network as a capital system itself. Significantly, Price seems completely aware of this complicity, making his experiments into communicative capitalism-cum-contemporary art conceptually viable by maintaining his authority over choices made. It's impossible, in other words, to critique someone who is not only completely aware of their critical shortcomings, but further includes those ideas in their practice—as appropriation, as mimicry, or whatever you want to call it. Price's work is a product of its own critique, a response to the act of contribution in the market itself, which by all intents and purposes is actually kind of (evil) genius, albeit annoyingly so. Yet still, the inevitable question is: where is the line between co-opting the productive methodologies of capital as a means to negate them, and making yourself conveniently available for exploitation by those same systems?

Price's latest exhibition provokes a stab at an answer. Considering the asking price for the works, still mid-level in today's market for whatever it's worth, he has cashed in on content-based critique that arguably only caters to the systems of power it claims to position itself against. The work is legitimized by the audience's attunement to assertions made by the artist—through subsidiary essays, interview, press, or last year's Nicolas Tremblay-"curated" ads for luxury menswear designer Brioni, in which Price appears as a model—which are then uncritically correlated to the objects on display. Price's ideologies, perhaps in failing to respond to the gradual onslaught of art super-stardom, seem to collapse under their own weight, leaving the work itself as little more than another empty embodiment of abstraction and value amassed. And reification, Bruce Hainley reminds in an essay entitled "Justin Bieber Losing His Swag," "isn't critique, but you know, whatevs."(4) Perhaps Seth Price, Brioni suit and all, is also losing swag.

(1) Seth Price, Wrok Fmaily Freidns [exh. cat.] (Los Angeles: Ooga Booga, 2016), 3.
(2) David Joselit, "What To Do With Pictures?," October no. 138 (Fall 2011): 84.
(3) See Rem Koolhaas's Delirious New York (1978), also about illusionism and urban landscapes.
(4) Bruce Hainley, "Justin Bieber Losing His Swag," Spike no. 41 (Fall 2014), http://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/justin-bieber-losing-his-swag.

Sabrina Tarasoff is a curator and writer based in between Paris and Los Angeles.

View of Seth Price, "Wrok Fmaily Freidns," 365 S. Mission Rd., Los Angeles, 2016. All images courtesy of 365 S. Mission Rd., Los Angeles, and Petzel Gallery, New York. All photos by Brica Wilcox.

Seth Price, Spill Test, 2015. Screen printing, acrylic paint, and pigmented acrylic polymer on wood, 40 x 26 x 1 inches.
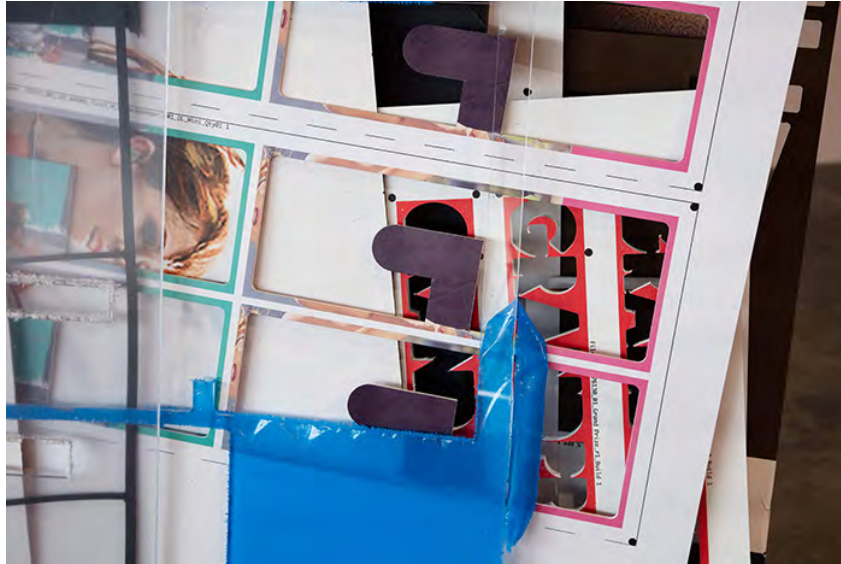
**art
agenda**

View of Seth Price, "Wrok Fmaily Freidns," 365 S. Mission Rd.,
Los Angeles, 2016.

Seth Price, Print Waste, 2016. Printed vinyl wrapped around
print-waste from commercial imaging facility, wooden pallet,
and cinch straps, 53 x 116 x 15 inches.

art
agenda

Seth Price, Print Waste (detail), 2016. Printed vinyl wrapped
around print-waste from commercial imaging facility, wooden
pallet, and cinch straps, 53 x 116 x 15 inches.

Seth Price, Danny, 2015. Dye-sublimation print on synthetic
fabric, aluminium, LED matrix, 58 x 233 x 4 inches.

art
agenda

Seth Price, Waste Pipes, 2016. Printed vinyl on PVC waste pipes, foam blocks, cinch strap, metal stand, 82 x 83 x 57 inches.

View of Seth Price, "Wrok Fmaily Freidns," 365 S. Mission Rd., Los Angeles, 2016.

SETH PRICE

LECTURE ON THE EXTRA PART

Seth Price, „Hostage Video Still With Time Stamp", 2005

If it can be said that Seth Price's work depicts, it is foremost the picture's own forces of dissemination, disintegration, and corruption that it shows. In preparing this issue, we asked Price about the role of the photographic (in its capacity to automatically generate images) in his art.

In turn, Price responded with a short history of magic, suggesting that photography's origins lie not only in occult or spiritual practices, but also in their attendant need to capture society as an image. As his essay further proposes, it may not be a coincidence that procedures of organization and institutionalization and their consolidation in the modern world evolved in tandem with technological innovations: photography as a matter of faith, photography as an instrument of control.

I was speaking to a group of peers who were interested and generally sympathetic, although there was also a degree of skepticism:

"Magic has been around forever," I said, "so let's start at the beginning. For the sake of this lecture, let's posit three ages of spirituality. The first age runs from the dawn of humanity onward, some x thousand years. We'll call it the Shamanic Age. During this period, virtually all human practices would have fallen under the rubric of Magic. The world was magic, and everything in it. The trees had will, the air had power, the fire told stories. Or, alternately, your will was fire, your stories were as the air, and human power was a tree. Because everything was interchangeable with everything else. Which is a primal state many of us wish to return to, and may yet, thanks to digital technology.

Seth Price, „Hostage Video Still
With Time Stamp", 2005

Next comes the Pagan Age, which brings us up to the birth of Christ. Where shamanism was a loose, scattered phenomenon, paganism was more structured, with traditions and institutions. And this reaches a pretty sophisticated state with the Greco-Romans and the Egyptians. But in the centuries leading up to Christ you get a relatively quick, worldwide transition to the third age, the Monotheistic Age. What happens is, institutions stage what amounts to a hostile take-over of pagan ideas. They keep the structuring frameworks, but they get rid of multiple deities, and animal worship is tossed out, and nature worship is frowned upon. This is all a power move, because now they're able to concentrate worship into singular prophets like Christ, and Mohammed, and Buddha. These guys function like bottlenecks, so that you can mediate a society's desires through a priest class, which is itself hierarchical and controllable. So religion begins to act like a kind of photography, a way of freezing the spirit image: you have only to remember one thing, like praying, because the system manages the rest for you.

The magical tradition we're discussing today can be understood as a *counter* to the Monotheistic Age. It's not that these people want a return to shamanism or paganism, they just don't wish to operate within traditional institutions. They're interested in the same concepts of growth and transformation, but they're intentionally operating outside of the dominant traditions. They want full autonomy, right? To create their own imagery, and distribute as they see fit.

I won't go into all the magical figures and currents that emerge during the two thousand years after Christ, but obviously it was a pretty bad time to be interested in these kinds of things. I mean, it could get you tortured, or executed as a public example. Instead, let's fast-forward through The Dark Ages and the Enlightenment to the late nineteenth century, which is when you get a *huge* resurgence of interest in all this stuff. There's a great occult reawakening. You get people like Madame Blavatsky or Dion Fortune, these mystical figures trying to develop systemic thinking, who consequently attract acolytes. These people are heralding a new phase of magic, and it's basically a Modernist phase, if you want to historicize it in academic terms. It's certainly contemporaneous with what we call Modernity: the development of photography and cinema, and the modern city,

Seth Price, „Hostage Video Still With Time Stamp", 2005

and industrialization, and all the great relativist thinkers: Darwin and Freud, Marx or Nietzsche, even going into Duchamp. All of whom, by the way, would have been condemned as warlocks just two centuries earlier!

So magic starts modernizing, and rapidly. That means the growth of complex, usually urban, systems. Of course the irony is that they're mirroring the church, though they'd probably want to trace it to the Freemasons. In London you get the Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn, one of the most influential organizations ever. With The Golden Dawn, magic isn't about some weird nineteenth century mystic like Gurdjieff, it's an institutionalized structure, with a priesthood presiding over a series of levels that initiates have to ascend through. It has the so-called Secret Chiefs, who are supposedly these anonymous, all-powerful individuals that no one's ever met, who may not even exist, who only priests can communicate with. I mean, what is that? Church, right?

Around this time you also get Aleister Crowley, the so-called Great Beast, and he's this brilliant, ambiguous figure. You know: is he for real, or is he in it for the power trips and the girls? And that's always the tricky role to play, this kind

of knife's edge between shaman and charlatan. It's like Beuys, or Koons, these contemporary artists just *daring* you to believe their shtick. In some ways Crowley was still invested in traditional institutions, but the radical thing he introduces is the idea of *Will*. It's an ancient idea, but he basically promotes the notion that every Magician should follow his or her own Will, which is elevated to almost a religious concept. His main precept goes, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." People who don't know any better always assume this is an exhortation to anarchy and chaos, but that's not true. There's disagreement on the implications, but the key thing is that Will shifts the focus from the system to the individual. And this is Crowley's real gift to Magic, or, as he spelled it, 'Magick' with a 'k'. *Will* is what people fastened on to, the stubborn creation of something from nothing, like spelling Magick with a K. And of course this is what makes him so appealing to artists.

Crowley dies in 1947, which is kind of a neat way to jump into the postwar era. By then you have the growing influence of Austin Osman Spare, who's a fascinating figure. He was only a little younger than Crowley but he was really part

of the new era, he marks a transition. Crowley was a man of the vanishing nineteenth century, even if he was a revolutionary. Spare, meanwhile, was this lone wolf, this uncompromising guy. He was a gifted artist, but one who didn't make the grade, kind of like Hitler. He just did his lonely magical thing by himself in a garret, until he died. But his legend grew, because all by himself, or through his Will, he developed an internally cohesive system that people still use.

Probably his most notable development was "sigil magic." Making a sigil means basically taking a word referring to something you want to control or effect, like, say, the name of an enemy, and compressing the letters into a kind of graphic monogram. It reduces material being to a compressed and graphic sign, which you can contemplate, or copy and distribute, or file away, or destroy. This little index becomes a concentrated expression of Will. And that's part of the definition of magic, right? That all your power and energy is compressed into a singular image. Magic is a kind of system by which Will gets poured into an image. Of course that's art, too. And you can think of Magic since Modernism as being in dialogue with the rise of image technology. Spare recognized that with Modernity it's the material world that's getting harder to substantiate, and that images can actually do that work for us.

So, Spare's a total individualist, and in a way he leads to one of the more interesting recent developments, which is Chaos Magick. This starts to appear in the 1970s, "The 'Me' Decade," which makes sense, because Chaos Magick is all about the individual, it's opposed to top-down structures. If Crowley and all these hierarchical groups are Modernist, Chaos Magick is Post Modern. It's decentralized, it's schizophrenic, it's horizontal,

it sidesteps the hierarchy. Not only is there no system of priests and initiates, there's not even a fixed belief system. You can be a Chaos Magician but also believe in Christ, and then you can disavow Christ tomorrow and declare your faith in Islam. Chaos Magick encourages eccentricity and anarchism, so of course it's threatening to traditional magicians. Now, not coincidentally this is the time when network technology and personal computing appears, and you can just picture all these bearded, programmer longhairs walking around MIT or wherever, toting little sigils, trying to will a new world into being." I stopped for a beat. "And you know what? They did."

To weak and obliging laughter I unscrewed the cap of my water, gearing up for the next part of my lecture. A small voice rang out from the back of the room. "I'm sorry, but haven't we left the monotheistic age? Isn't it possible we're already becoming something different?"

I considered the question. I found myself producing careful, almost defensive acknowledgments. "In one sense you're right," I said. "We live in an age when people cobble together a way of being that works for them, and it's not a monotheistic way. You go to Episcopal Church on Sunday, you visit your acupuncturist on Tuesday, you get your palm read on Thursday." I searched my conscience. Did I believe this? But the voice carried on as if I'd said nothing of consequence: "You also mentioned that digital technology might eventually allow us to return to a primal state."

"I did. But, and this is a big but, only by obliterating differentiation. But also we can say, with Nietzsche, that science amounts to simply another, newer, faith. The world of technology offers a scaffolding for the same old questions, the same blind subject positions. And beyond that, you can
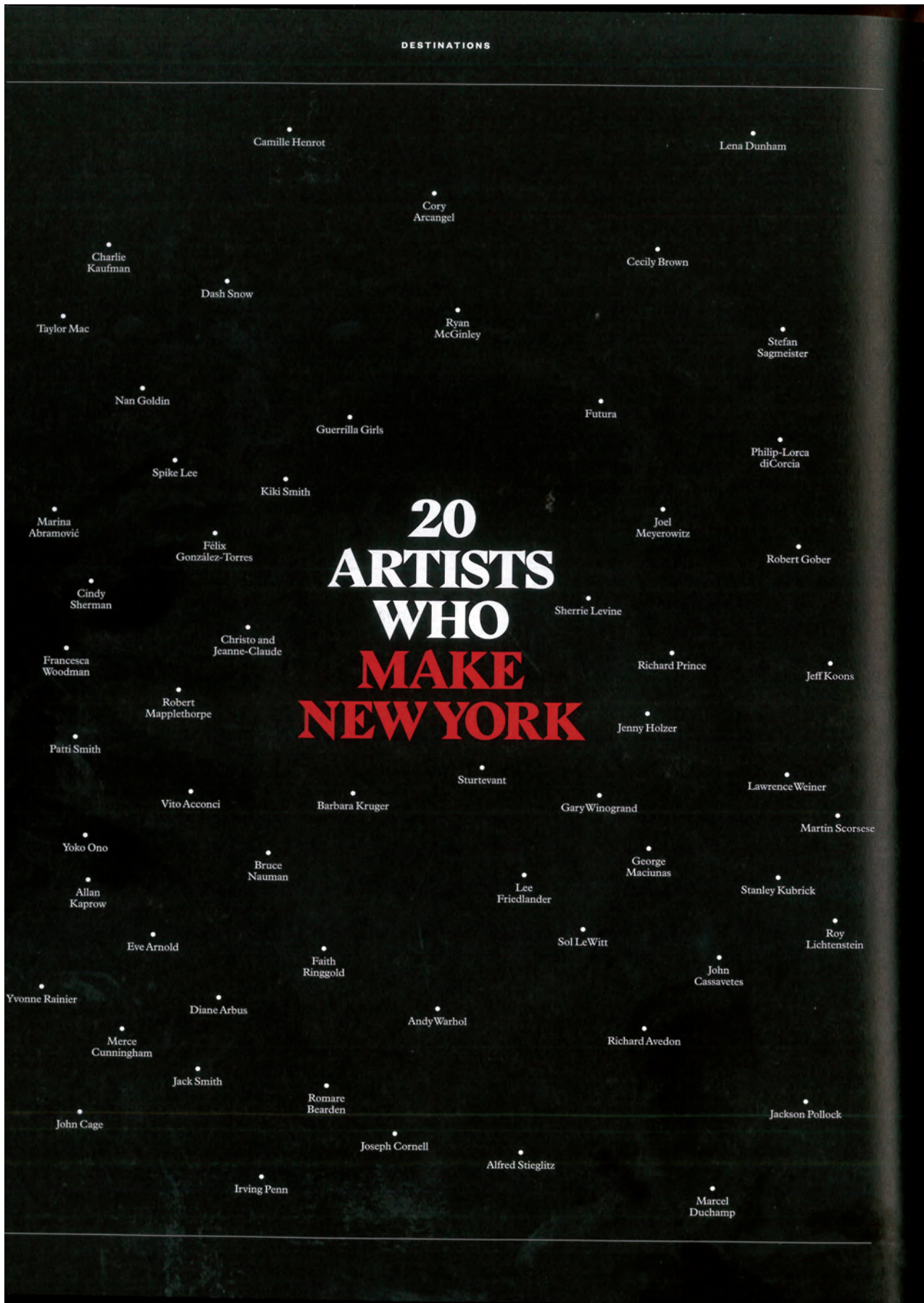
say that we have Hollywood and celebrity culture and social media, and that our world of repro-duced images is a new belief system."
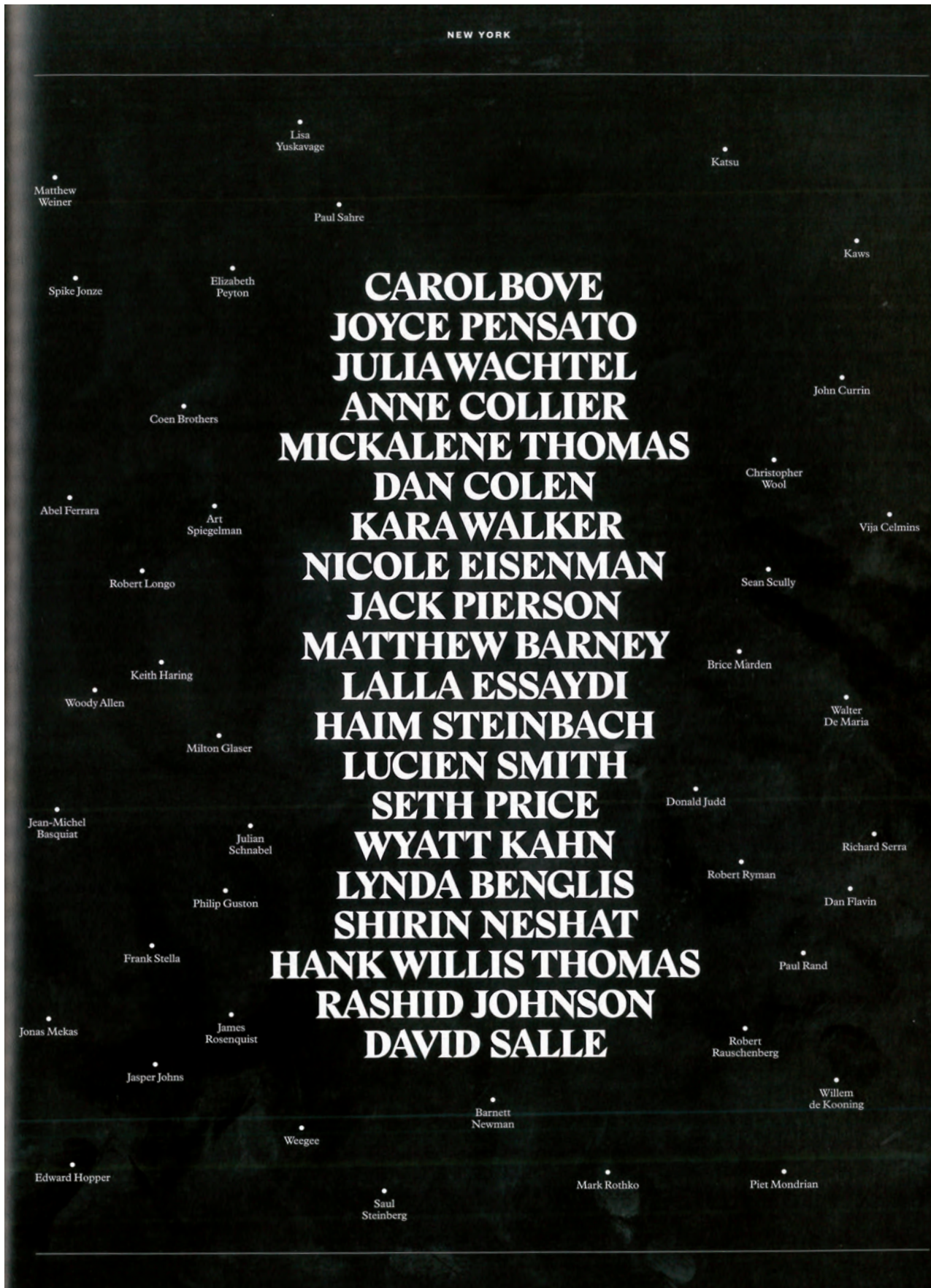
"No, no," came the reply, "I'm not talking about any of that."

"Aren't you?" I said, suppressing irritation. "You're claiming there's a *we* that's entered some new era, where the questions are all different, and everything moves through new channels. I don't know if that's the case. I don't see that we've passed through any transition, or entered some other world."

"Shamanism does speak of a journey into another world. But this is a vision only." There was a pause. When the voice returned, it was a low whisper. "In this vision, my body is com-pletely dismembered. Then it is reassembled. Afterward, I am able to go about my business again, only now my body has a small, extra part, like an extra bone."

Just as stars are hidden during the day yet hang above us still, it is true that one dreams all the day long, just as during the night.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

DESTINATIONS

Camille Henrot

Lena Dunham

Cory
Arcangel

Charlie
Kaufman

Cecily Brown

Dash Snow

Taylor Mac

Ryan
McGinley

Stefan
Sagmeister

Nan Goldin

Futura

Guerrilla Girls

Philip-Lorca
diCorcia

Spike Lee

Kiki Smith

20
ARTISTS
WHO
MAKE
NEW YORK

Joel
Meyerowitz

Marina
Abramović

Robert Gober

Félix
González-Torres

Cindy
Sherman

Sherrie Levine

Christo and
Jeanne-Claude

Richard Prince

Jeff Koons

Francesca
Woodman

Robert
Mapplethorpe

Jenny Holzer

Patti Smith

Sturtevant

Lawrence Weiner

Vito Acconci

Barbara Kruger

Gary Winogrand

Martin Scorsese

Yoko Ono

Bruce
Nauman

George
Maciunas

Stanley Kubrick

Allan
Kaprow

Lee
Friedlander

Eve Arnold

Roy
Lichtenstein

Sol LeWitt

Faith
Ringgold

John
Cassavetes

Yvonne Rainier

Diane Arbus

Andy Warhol

Richard Avedon

Merce
Cunningham

Jack Smith

Romare
Bearden

Jackson Pollock

John Cage

Joseph Cornell

Alfred Stieglitz

Irving Penn

Marcel
Duchamp

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

NEW YORK

Lisa Yuskavage

Katsu

Matthew Weiner

Paul Sahre

Kaws

Spike Jonze

Elizabeth Peyton

John Currin

Coen Brothers

Christopher Wool

Abel Ferrara

Art Spiegelman

Vija Celmins

Robert Longo

Sean Scully

Keith Haring

Brice Marden

Woody Allen

Walter De Maria

Milton Glaser

Donald Judd

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Julian Schnabel

Richard Serra

Robert Ryman

Philip Guston

Dan Flavin

Frank Stella

Paul Rand

Jonas Mekas

James Rosenquist

Robert Rauschenberg

Jasper Johns

Willem de Kooning

Barnett Newman

Weegee

Edward Hopper

Mark Rothko

Piet Mondrian

Saul Steinberg

CAROL BOVE
JOYCE PENSATO
JULIA WACHTEL
ANNE COLLIER
MICKALENE THOMAS
DAN COLEN
KARA WALKER
NICOLE EISENMAN
JACK PIERSON
MATTHEW BARNEY
LALLA ESSAYDI
HAIM STEINBACH
LUCIEN SMITH
SETH PRICE
WYATT KAHN
LYNDA BENGLIS
SHIRIN NESHAT
HANK WILLIS THOMAS
RASHID JOHNSON
DAVID SALLE

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

York', but it is pointless to waste time grieving over something that is constant, natural flux.

Despite the clean-up, that part of town still feels quite gritty and real. Is it still an inspiring place to make work?
Which part of town are you referring to? The one captured in the photographs? If so, I agree with you. I tried to use a 'kitsch' form of photography—the Polaroid—to capture what I considered 'The Relics of New York', objects and ephemeral 'happenings', including fire hydrants, park signs, garbage cans and even the slush puddle on a crosswalk after a blizzard. These moments are timeless, immutable, altogether free from the overbearing change.

SETH
PRICE

Like his gallery mate Wade Guyton, post-conceptualist Price— who staged a fashion show at DOCUMENTA in 2012— works in every medium conceivable (and even some that

to most are inconceivable). Recommended reading: *How to Disappear in America*.

Is New York—so rich in myth and history, artistic and otherwise—an important context for your work?
New York is cool. Great for making art and showing art. But the old NYC isn't here any longer. Thank God. You make art that comes out of NYC, but it speaks in different languages, too. I mean, you also find yourself at the intersection of other matrixes. There's an axis that runs between Berlin techno and Brooklyn techno, for instance, and one that runs between New York food fetishism and Stockholm food fetishism. I don't know where I'm going with that one. I guess I don't think of my work in terms of New York history.

What does 1980s appropriationism mean to you at this stage?
Not much. I'm not so familiar with 1980s appropriationism. It's really just a form of repackaging, isn't it? I do like packaging. But I haven't appropriated much, in my own work. Most of the things that people think I've taken from somewhere else were in fact fabricated in the studio, from scratch, under time-consuming and laborious—not to say

gruelling—artisanal conditions, with careful attention to detail and craftsmanship.

How important has your work with the collective Continuous Project been to your personal development as an artist and theorist?
Very important. Although, theorist! I'm really not a theorist.

Can you imagine what your practice would look like without the internet?
Cooler?

The Vintage Bombers *are among your best-known works, and recently you've been working with the designer Tim Hamilton. Why the fascination with clothing?*
I was just interested in investigating industrial garment construction as a sculptural language: can you make a sculpture by feeding an art concept through that particular commercial production system, that vocabulary, those labourers, et cetera?

You've written, published and (re)circulated materials on an impressive scale. Where would you advise someone coming to your work for the first time to begin?
I've written a novella, called *Fuck Seth Price*, that's due out this spring. It's not my 'voice' but it's close enough.

Seth Price *Container for Virus Plus Handmade Pattern*, 2013, blackened cork facing, neoprene shell, printed charmeuse liner, screen-printed Tyvek centre panel, zips, buckles, etc.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Seth Price
GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL

Seth Price's latest works explore the conceptual and visual construction
of the standard business envelope, a motif the artist has examined
across various media in recent years. The two new groups of work, part
of an ongoing project called Folklore U.S., build on his contribution to
Documenta 13 in 2012—a venture that included fashions inspired by

Seth Price,
Compatibility Mode,
2014, screenprint,
acrylic, pigmented
acrylic polymer, and
gesso on plywood,
47 ¼ × 83 ⅝ × ⅞".

the patterns printed on the interiors of confidential mailers (a collabo-
ration with menswear designer Tim Hamilton) and large-scale soft-
sculpture envelopes. In this show, "Animation Studio," Price returned
to a more traditional presentation of flat wall-mounted works.

Three screen-printed planks of plywood depict what the artist calls
"exploded envelopes," ones that have been torn or folded open. They
carry multiple, sometimes conflicting connotations. Their decrepit,
rejected state evokes junk mail and the inanity of endless packaging
wasted on worthless contents. At the same time, however, the emptied
envelopes' irregular shapes seem to celebrate the utilitarian item's
simple efficiency while acknowledging the imminent obsolescence of
the postal system as a valid means of communication. Complicating
the photorealism of the envelopes (and recalling the stenciled silhou-
ettes Price has been making since 2007, in which negative space takes
on a tangible, if inscrutable, presence), works such as *Medium* and
Compatibility Form (all works 2014) also feature curious abstractions.
Based on isolated sections of the torn envelopes, these extracted amor-
phous shapes cleave together notions of representation and abstraction.
The material nature of these works presents yet another interesting
dichotomy, as their low-tech salvage aesthetic is actually the result of
a sophisticated fabrication process. The ostensibly cheap, Arte Povera–
inspired supports have been custom-made for Price with a central ply
of rigid, high-quality wood so that the planks do not warp when coated
with the layers upon layers of acrylic polymer needed to create the
smooth, porcelainlike surface onto which the envelope images are then
silk-screened.

The nine other works that were on view are artist-framed silk-
screens on fiber-coated wood panels. The horizontality of their four-
by-eight-foot format immediately evokes a standard business envelope,
blown up to gigantic proportions. Nodding to both Pollock's allover
and Warhol's use of brands, Price evokes the security patterns intended
to conceal an envelope's contents by repeating, on some of the pieces,
a single corporate logo across the entire composition. The logos for
Dropbox, Corbis, and Pixar have been selected not just for their visual
appeal but also for the role those companies play in the dissemination
of digital information: Dropbox enables file-sharing, Corbis licenses
images through an online archive, and Pixar specializes in computer
animation. By emblazoning his oversize envelopes with these particular
trademarks, Price not only references pertinent digital-age issues of
security and privacy but insinuates that these companies have some-
thing to hide.

A final work, perhaps the most complex on view, belongs to nei-
ther series but suggests a summation by combining elements of both.
Animation Studio, a three-dimensional exploded envelope pasted on a
screenprinted background above the word PIXAR, is a collage of actual
and virtual. Here, as in all of these works, Price turns the envelope
inside out, as it were, to send a message that we should look more
closely at the producers and purveyors of digital information.

—*Mara Hoberman*

Books

Fuck Seth Price

by Seth Price   Leopard, $20 (softcover)

Seth Price is really good at writing about art. I'm not so sure he's a particularly great fiction writer, though. In this work, subtitled 'a novel', the narrator notes that 'his oft-used strategy of "smuggling familiar materials into the realm of synthetic" made for a good description of the process of fictionalization'. He's right, because the good news is that this is basically a wide-ranging, insightful, *factual* essay examining the stuff being pumped out of studios internationally, with just an occasional needless Paul Auster-esque foray into melodrama (the odd murder here or there that is of such little consequence that telling you about it is in no way a spoiler).

The protagonist of the 'story', whom we can assume to be Price, is on the money, for example, in his analysis of the two defining strands of the hipper side of the art market: art that takes its cues from digital culture, and the new wave of abstract painting that is flooding art fair booths. For Price they are cut from the same figurative cloth, representing 'the digital process of abstraction'. This he adds is 'a direct, materialist portrayal of our historic moment, when the alien productions of computers and their apparent meaninglessness redefine all human values including expression itself'.

In Price's view, technology is an omnipotent presence. For art to have any effect, he states, it must play by tech's rules. He describes painting (which he has worked in) as being essentially formally anachronistic, regardless of the cues taken from digital culture in its subject matter: 'Painters could join a more or less continuous chat room hosting every painter who'd ever exhibited.' He concludes instead that sculpture is the medium of the future, because from the Bronze Age to the information age, it has been open to every new tech development thrown at it. While weaving together myriad themes (architecture, careers, labour), Price, in his conviction of art's dependence on tech, places the vanguard of culture not in the world's artist studios but in the start-ups of Silicon Valley.   *Oliver Basciano*

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

ARTNEWS

In a New Book With an Unprintable Title, Seth Price Considers the Art World, Aesthetics, Murder
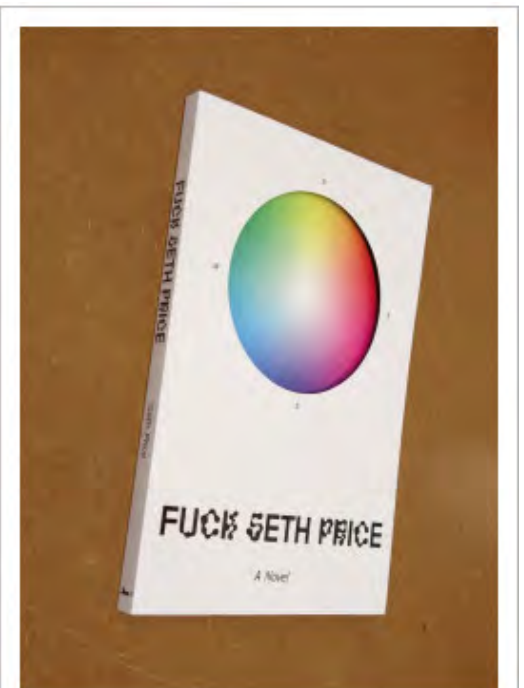
By Andrew Russeth
Posted 07/16/15 9:19 am

This week New Yorker critic Peter Schjeldahl offered some pretty sensible advice to all those who are maddened by the obscene action in today's high-flying art market: chill out. "Sensing that people will one day look back on this era as a freakish episode in cultural history, why not get a head start on viewing it that way?" he wrote. "Detach and marvel." Hear, hear! That's not to say it's always an easy business, but I'm working on it.

Having said that, let me address, for a moment, the brave and sober art historians of the future who will take up the challenge of understanding this freakish moment: ladies and gentlemen, pick up the crisply written book that artist Seth Price just released on Leopard Press, Fuck Seth Price. It presents the contemporary art world in all of its manic, horrible glory: its commercial market flooded with money, its inhabitants buffeted by existential doubts, its artists under siege by the digital.

Fuck Seth Price.
COURTESY LEOPARD PRESS

The book concerns an unnamed male artist who, Price writes on the first page, one day "found himself carrying out strange and horrible acts: murder and abduction, most disturbingly, but also other furtive activities that he couldn't quite make sense of." By this point, we're told, the artist had pretty much stopped making art, having minted a tidy fortune by making abstract paintings that he carefully calibrated to appeal to collectors. (Sound familiar?) And so begins a little flashback.

One day in the early 2000s, the artist was sitting in one of those then-new high-end restaurants which specializes in elevating a previously cheap, retrograde cuisine (red-sauce Italian-American, in this case) into a pricy, hip one. (New Yorkers can picture any branch of the Carbone empire.) He "found himself wondering whether abstract painting wasn't due for a spaghetti-and-meatballs recuperation," Prince writes. His thinking continues rapidly:

ARTNEWS

Someone, he realized, needed to come along and devise a painterly abstraction that embodied cultural sophistication and 'nowness.' It had to look classically tasteful and refer to well-known historical byways, but it also had to be undergirded by utter contemporaneity, either of sensibility or of production method.

The artist brainstorms a few possibilities and then combines them in a materials list which handily brings to mind dozens of artists today (including Price himself): "Foxconn worker's accidental Coke spills on Nigerian mud cloth, scanned and randomly manipulated in Photoshop, printed on Belgian linen stretched over a vacuum–formed frame."

Price coins the term "post-problem art" to define the style of abstract painting which has come to the fore in recent years, a period when paintings have sold like hotcakes and "everyone was in agreement that the market was the only indicator that mattered now." That, of course, is hyperbole, but only slightly, since a whole ecosystem now exists that is made of collectors who vociferously acquire and trade works by young artists who have almost no critical or curatorial track record. Price sums up the prevailing mood with brutal precision:

It was no longer necessary to deem a piece interesting, provocative, weird, or complex, and it was almost incomprehensible to hate something because you liked it, or like it because it unsettled you, or any of the other ambivalent and twisted ways that people wrestled with the intersection of feelings and aesthetics. You almost didn't need words anymore: it was enough to say, 'That painting is awesome,' just as you'd say, 'This spaghetti is awesome.'

We have all heard that language before—maybe even coming out of our own months.

The painter admits that his engineered style is cynical, but then makes a nice leap: that the work is actually about cynicism, that it's about the process of selling out and the vagaries of taste. "What if you believed in not believing?" he muses. "Executives or world leaders entertaining this question would rightly be classified as sociopaths, but in the world of art these questions were okay."

Naturally, as the highs of his new career achievements fade, this leads him to some self-questioning. "Am I supposed to just be a part of this system that generates taste and money, and go on making things until I die?" he wonders. That pervasive dread, I think, explains the fascination in recent years with artists who in various ways have opted to drop out of the art game, like Lee Lozano, Cady Noland, and Charlotte Posenenske. ("It is difficult for me to come to terms with the fact that art can contribute nothing to solving urgent social problems," Posenenske declared.)

Not many do actually drop out, but Price's artist does, and though it's never quite clear what he's up to, he seems to spend his time writing and performing various macabre activities which he is largely unable to control and of which we only ever catch slight glimpses. All the while, his thoughts continue, ingeniously touching on all sorts of present-day issues, both savory and not.

The artist reasons that since painting is confined by its strict limits (a thing hung on the wall) and tied closely to fashion, the future omust belong to sculpture, which is open to changes, evolving with technology. And, yes, bigger is better. "When devising publicly significant artwork, a good rule of thumb was to aspire to the condition of a handgun: simple, familiar, and loaded," Price writes, noting that Serra and Koons seem

ARTNEWS

to get this—Serra, especially, who has pushed his work into the realm of architecture.

As Price asks, with a heap of rye wit: "[W]hy were we building bigger and better exhibition halls if not to showcase the limits of human potential, dispatches from the zone where unbounded and well-funded creativity met hitherto unknown capacities for technological ingenuity?" So crank it up!

Incidentally, that question echoes very closely something that the artist Robert Irwin said to me a few years ago, albeit a great deal more skeptically: "We're building these cathedrals to art today, really almost to the level of absurdity, so you ask yourself, what does it contribute?" He answered with his characteristic optimism: "I'm of the opinion that we are constantly discovering the world and that the point of art is that act." I suspect we would all happily cosign that statement.

On a day to day basis, though, the book suggests that the job of being an artist, for many leading figures today, consists in large part in managing a business, negotiating control with outside interests (there's a nice exegesis on the parallels between Koons and Kanye), flying to the openings of oligarchs' private museums, feeling guilty about the decadence, and deciding when to compromise. Price at one point writes of his artist: "He asked himself whether there was really anything wrong with getting into bed with power and wealth if that was what it took to make great art."

That feels like an increasingly pressing question, and one that some artists, like Koons, Kapoor, and Serra, seem to have answered quite definitively for themselves. But Price also offers other questions, and they linger. What effect is the rise of digital technologies having on art, our sensibilities, and even our way of thinking? What exactly does great art entail? And, if and when it appears today, can we can even recognize it? Price: "At its best, art was a faith without religions, a gnosis without spirituality, a system without need of names." So what is that we are actually believing in?

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Excerpt from Synthetic Piracy

Seth Price

It was easy to locate the moment of inspiration that had rejuvenated his painting career, making him rich but ultimately leading him to reject contemporary art. One day in the early 2000s, he'd been sitting in a new Italian restaurant, considering his supper. For decades now, he remarked to himself as he regarded a bowl of grated pecorino, Americans had possessed a sure idea of what Italian food was: what it tasted like, what it looked like, what it meant. For his parents' generation, and even within his own childhood, Italian food meant Italian-American food, an immigrant form, once alien but now ubiquitous in the kitchens of the majority of the populace, a way of putting dinner on the table, hardly a cuisine. Then the 80s happened, and everyone discovered real Italian food, food from Italy, and defiantly not Italian-American food, which consequently entered a kind of limbo. Spaghetti and meatballs: yes, everyone still liked it and cooked it, it still had its place, but that place was not a trendy restaurant.

Recently, however, which is to say in the early 2000s, shortly before he'd had his revelation, some notable chef had realized that spaghetti and meatballs was what people had wanted all along, and why shouldn't they have it? This chef understood that you could give diners what they wanted without abandoning culinary invention and the associated high prices. What you did was trundle out lowbrow recipes and thematize them, burnishing them for a new audience too young to remember why they'd been discarded in the first place. To use a mid-90s term, the old recipes were upcycled. Originally this had implied the redemption of waste material through canny adaptation, and was widely associated with environmentalism and Third World do-gooderism; no one had previously thought to apply the notion to the world of conceptual foodservice.

It was a runaway success. Customers were excited and relieved to plunge into the frisson of the old/new, and restaurants all over the city, and then internationally, adopted the formula. Soon came high-end tweakings of meatloaf, mac & cheese, donuts, PB&J sandwiches, chicken wings, and even Twinkies: all cherished comfort foods that no one had previously thought to rework as pricey lifestyle fare. It must have been the times, he mused, because something similar had also happened in the movie industry, which overwhelmingly pursued remakes of best-forgotten films, the crappier the better. We live in an era of expensive fetish food, he thought, but it's also an era in which poor, uneducated parents name their babies "DeJohn" because it sounds pungent yet sophisticated, unaware that these associations originated in a series of 80s television commercials for a style of mustard. But all this stuff—high and low, classic and contemporary, good and bad—was muddled and slippery, and everyone was equally clueless. When Grey Poupon actually rolled out a line called "DeJawn's" no one wanted it, not because it was marketed as "Da Street Mustard," but because it was widely considered "too 80s."

As he sat there devouring his bucatini con le polpette, he somehow made an associative leap and found himself wondering if abstract painting wasn't due for a spaghetti-and-meatballs recuperation. After all, it had enjoyed a history similar to that of Italian-American cuisine. Both had appeared early in the twentieth century and were widely received with suspicion and derision (all that garlic!); both enjoyed a mid-century, early-adopter hipster appeal that inevitably subsided, though not before preparing the ground for a broader mass appeal, which precipitated a fall from grace in the perception of elites, who came to see these phenomena as boring and outmoded. Artists continued to make abstract painting in large numbers, more than ever before, but, as with cooks of spaghetti and meatballs, they were amateur or otherwise removed from the real conversation, not cutting-edge professionals in sophisticated contexts.

Someone, he realized, needed to come along and devise a painterly abstraction that embodied cultural sophistication and "nowness." It had to look classically tasteful, and refer to well-known historical byways, but it also had to be undergirded by utter contemporaneity, either of sensibility or production method. Upcycling was evolving as an idea, and was perhaps itself being upcycled: in the 90s it had promised to help the developing world redeem its waste; in the early 2000s it grew to encompass the food consumption of a smaller set of first worlders with extra time and money, and now it would take on an even more rarified realm of cultural production available to only the wealthy few: fine art. But he knew this was the way of all culture, all trends: a continuous flow from top to bottom and back again, as in a trick fountain.

He went directly home after dinner and drew up a list of working methods and materials, which he would dutifully follow in the months to come. His new painting would be abstract, he decided, because there was a broader audience for that since it matched all décors and lacked uncomfortable associations with real people, events, and political situations. Abstraction in and of itself was uninteresting, of course; the all-important twist here, the redeeming feature, would be the way in which this work was generated, which would expand in importance, endowing the abstraction with meaning. Here there was quite a bit of latitude. Most obviously the painting could be computer-generated, i.e. it might consist of Photoshop manipulations printed out on Belgian linen. It might also be based on chance,

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

which obliterated traditional notions of composition and looked kind of punk: accidental stains on canvas, for example; maybe the oil-pan drippings of a FoxConn machine as it produced iPhones. But then he wondered, did machines drip anymore? Did anything run on oil? Wasn't everything becoming electric? Maybe this avenue was far-fetched. Perhaps the work might play with the medium's material conventions: a "painting" that was in fact composed of vacuum-formed polystyrene: stretcher bars, canvas, markings, and all. Perhaps it would be apparently abstract but actually full of charged referents that became clear only when you inspected the list of materials, i.e. "Coca-Cola spills on Nigerian mud cloth." Or you could hit all four possibilities at once: "FoxConn worker's accidental Coke spills on Nigerian mud cloth, scanned and randomly manipulated in Photoshop, printed on Belgian linen stretched over a vacuum-formed frame."

In truth, the production method hardly mattered, because whichever he chose, the results would look more or less the same: tepid compositions, hesitant and minimal in appearance, kind of pretty and kind of whatever, loaded with back story. The main thing to remember, both in executing this work and appreciating it on the wall, was to be knowing, just like the chefs who composed fancy renditions of red-sauce dishes, and the diners who paid top dollar, and the critics who wrote breezy acknowledgments.

The problem this solved was the persistent issue of taste in painting. In no arena of art-making did taste intrude so assertively and persistently as it did within the practice of painting. Unlike with installation art or conceptual art, where it was difficult to discern or comfortably judge the merits of a work without anxiety, with painting the problem of taste was always right on the surface, in the frame, so to speak. It was okay to point at a painting and assert "that's good" or "that's bad" without feeling like a complete idiot. You couldn't pull that off as easily when faced with a scrappy installation or a conceptual work composed of puns and feints. The problem was, while these artworks got to hover in the grace of doubt and inscrutability, there were far too many observers who were absolutely certain about their judgments as to what constituted good and bad painting, and the history of painting was therefore racked by cyclical surges of interest one way or another, now veering toward "bad" painting that indulged in tastelessness by way of excess, vulgarity, or prurience, now tacking back toward a more graphic, minimal style. Because fashions changed rapidly, a single painting might in twenty years traverse the spectrum of perceived value and then whip back again, and this variability made everyone nervous.

This new style he'd hit on, however, managed to finesse the taste problem by recourse to the old philosophical trick of playing being against seeming. In preparing the work, any number of methods or styles would do, so long as the result was "cool," insuring that the painting would seem classic and minimal, while emanating a vague awareness of rich historical struggle. To an observer it would seem tasteful, but in its apparent lack of concern for traditional skill or labor, its arguably cynical irreverence towards sincerity or depth, its dismissal of history, and its punk attitude, it would be tasteless.

Or perhaps it was the other way around? One couldn't really say, or rather one could, but only with a nagging feeling of insecurity. This instability was catnip to critics and journalists, and they wrote a lot about this new painting, bickering and bemoaning and celebrating. Collectors were thankful for those gusts of language in their as they blew through

the auctions. Young artists and students were relieved to get back to doing what they'd secretly wanted to do all along, albeit under the powerful sign of a new contemporaneity. In short, the entire art system latched on to this revived style, much as restaurant-goers had fallen for the re-enchantment of chicken wings.

You could call it Post-Problem Art. It bore a clear if unacknowledged debt to the wonderful ad slogans of the period, like Staples' "That Was Easy," or Amazon's "… And You're Done." Done! An amazing word. Go ahead, have done with all the anguished historical debates over meaning and criticality and politics and taste. In a way, this development recapitulated some of Francis Fukayama's arguments in The End of History, which suggested that the postwar phenomenon of Western liberal democracy and the capitalist market system had established a kind of plateau, from which one could survey the bloody slopes below. It certainly was true that the system Fukayama described was responsible for the floods of cash that coursed through the art system in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century, a surge that raised all boats high above the oceanic currents of issues. For better or for worse, everyone was in agreement that the market was the only indicator that mattered now. This climate, in which artworks would certainly sell, and the fact of selling was sufficient verification of their quality, made it officially okay simply to "like" a painting. It was no longer necessary to deem a piece interesting, provocative, weird, or complex, and it was almost incomprehensible to hate something because you liked it, or like it because it unsettled you, and all the other ambivalent and twisted ways that people wrestled with the intersection of feelings and aesthetics. You almost didn't need words any more: it was enough to say "That painting is cool," just as you'd say "This spaghetti is awesome." This was a radical development, forgoing any more complicated relationship with art; it was a tremendous ironing-out process. Before you knew it, you'd spy a Malevich and declare, "That guy's a total badass!" Or was it Marinetti who was the badass? On the other hand, wasn't the goal of art not to sharpen your critical knives but to be a fan, to unquestioningly follow your unplumbed desires and inclinations, even if they tended toward things that weren't unambiguously cool or fun, and in this process begin to untangle yourself, to learn from your relationship with art all about experience and history and emotion?

He later realized, once he was showing his new paintings and making good money off them, the genius was that a digitally generated abstract painting was not only leveling in terms of aesthetic taste, but also managed to be both abstract and representational, thus neatly resolving another longstanding problem. The painting was evidently abstract, since it didn't portray anything but an arrangement of computery markings, but at the same time it could be seen as representational: it represented only itself; it represented the digital process of abstraction. This was a direct, materialist portrayal of our historical moment, when the alien productions of computers and their apparent meaninglessness threatened to redefine all traditional human values, including expression itself. If you said these paintings were merely abstract, weren't you by extension implying something similar about every other item or lifestyle concocted by digital means? By playing with these questions, his paintings were capable of reconciling two opposed art-historical alternatives and synthesizing them into some weird, new, Janus-faced form that was capable of looking backward and forward.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

These new artworks aroused accusations of cynicism, and he admitted that he was inviting that conversation. But what was cynicism? He defined cynicism as proceeding in a way that you knew to be harmful or morally bankrupt, for reasons of greed or cowardice. This definition handily described the activity of most politicians, bureaucrats, and CEOs. The question was, what if you found such compromised behavior complex and compelling? What if you believed that exploring the world of perceived or actual cynicism was a powerful way to understand our contemporary moment? What if you believed in not believing? Executives or world leaders entertaining this question would rightly be classified as sociopaths, but in the world of art these questions were okay, because suffering wasn't directly involved and any apparent cynicism was likely to be banal and venal, i.e. cashing in by provoking your audience with facile or puerile gestures. He didn't feel that his work belonged in this category. If his paintings were provocative, it was because they drew out acute and omnipresent cultural toxins: anxieties about cynicism and selling out, feelings that had everything to do with how fucked-up it was to live under neoliberal free-market capitalism. He found this exhilarating; he believed in it. And this tangle of contradictions was the greatest thing about art: it always meant the opposite of what you thought it meant, or wanted it to mean. Abstract versus representational; old versus new; pure versus corrupt; tasteful versus tasteless: all artistic values and categories were inherently unstable, and might suddenly swap places.

Recalling his breakthrough into digital painting a decade earlier, he suspected that the moment he'd grasped the fact that digital painting's genius was to reconcile all opposites was the start of his disenchantment with painting, and with "the digital" more generally, which was a condition predicated on reconciliation, leveling, and synthesis. Representational painting was just as banal and outmoded as its old foe abstraction, so why was it interesting to gesture at both of them at once? Who gave a shit? From the point of view of the painting-machine he'd set in motion, all these oppositions of taste and style were merely marketing factors to be coopted, the way Whole Foods might absorb a pair of rival local grocers, only to preserve them as themed deli-counters so as to snare all the old clientele. Either/or was irrelevant, save as a gimmick to capture market share. It was a deep irony that the mechanisms of digital culture were built on a binary fundament even as it sought to eradicate all opposition, contradiction, and friction on an ontological level, steadily reducing human variety to a kind of affirmative mush.

It was not a coincidence that his disenchantment with visual art occurred right around the time when making simplistic, often digitally formulated abstract paintings became suddenly passé, as was discussing them, critiquing them, even satirizing them. These paintings amounted to societal self-portraiture, and an age grows tired of its own face. Casting about for something to do, he found himself newly interested in writing, which, in comparison to art, offered delightfully fresh challenges. He recognized the peculiarity of this step: advanced painting since the Impressionists had jettisoned the aim of recreating a recognizable, narrativized human world and had plunged into abstraction, whereas writing had always remained in thrall to narrative and human psychology. Yes, there had been a Modernist rupture in literature, and the achievements of Woolf, Joyce, and Beckett had been followed by generations of worthies, but the majority of serious literary fiction, and all mass product, went right on pursuing the realistic concerns of "adult literature," in distinction to the serious art world, where there was really no going back to representational realism.

As MoMA's founding doctrine put it: "Modernism is the art that is essentially abstract." The field of contemporary art was activated by cataclysm and relentless progress, while contemporary literature remained relatively staid. This was because it was a mass form, he reasoned: who follows contemporary painting? The few. Who reads contemporary books? Everyone.

At this moment, however, he believed writing culture to be undergoing a tectonic shift and finally detaching itself from traditional narrative. No doubt this development was late in coming, trailing by a century visual art's own decisive mutations, but then again, for all that radical change, where was art now? Wallowing in hush money, patting itself on the back for having finally solved the evolutionary problem of how to be simultaneously good and bad, abstract and representational, popular and cutting edge, with the result that nothing was at stake but auction prices. Even much of the politically engaged work that positioned itself in opposition to "market art" was obsessed with finance, aiming its critical guns at Bitcoin, bank logos, credit-default swaps, and the mythical one percent. Ultimately, this neurotic relationship to the market was an impoverishment.

Writing, on the other hand, which had little connection to money and power, was only broadening its already considerable mass appeal, thanks to the proliferation of texting, tweeting, blogging, and so on, even as those same forces were emancipating writing from its longstanding narrative conventions. In fact, it was less apposite to say "Who reads? Everyone" than "Who writes? Everyone." Maybe this explained why writing was becoming at the same time more popular and more abstract. In short, writing was becoming just plain weirder.

In this situation, and in distinction to the problems of visual art, everything was at stake: "the novel" of course, but also "the field of literature," "the book business," "the future of the word," and communication itself. And no one knew what it meant. You could feel the charge of that anxious energy, a thrumming motor coursing through recent novels and columns and articles and blog posts. He imagined it to be a historical echo of the introduction of film, with all of that medium's looming ramifications for the image, and how odd that this contemporary upset concerned words!

He himself was not a writer, by any stretch. He'd tried it years ago, had even enjoyed success with some oddball critical essays that circulated in art-world contexts, but ultimately he'd dropped it. The problem with the art world was that you were expected to write uneven, eccentric, unresolved texts, it was like being a grad student in an "Experimental Writing" workshop. While many in the art world were wonderfully omnivorous, broad-minded readers, few were any good at writing, including most of the critics and curators, so it was easy to stand out.
Most people didn't even bother with critiques of art-world writing, and for good reason: if people criticized you for being lazy or obscurantist, you could assert that you were being "artistic," that what you'd intended was less lucid rhetoric, more Delphic poesy. Writing these texts was like making films where everything was "a dream sequence," and therefore immune to charges of illogic and sloppiness. At the same time, of course, nothing was at stake.

Excerpt from Seth Price's forthcoming book *Synthetic Piracy*, 2014.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

COMPATABILITY MODE
by Seth Price

Seth Price, *Compatability Mode*, 2012. Courtesy: the artist

Urgency is a wretched condition. I hate that. So it's hard to discuss it here. There are specific sorts of urgency that make sense to me. Familial exigencies, for example. Or, it's November and New York is getting cold, and there are increasing numbers of people without shelter or food, whom you pass every day as it grows colder. Or the opposite is true: it's freakishly warm for November, yet again. Urgency in "culture," on the other hand, seems to be tied to an anxiety about keeping up and not missing out. That mandate might be parsed like this: stay on top of work deadlines, while steadily shunting your worker-self in a direction you sense to be "upward"; maintain a passable grasp on current events; register technological shifts, debates of the moment, new books and movies; and follow the doings and opinions of people to whom you grant authority via steady drips of pictures and remarks. These are marketplace feelings. They're linked to the way desire and taste and identification are swapped and leveraged. This probably used to be more of a Western metropolitan thing, but digital culture has helped to transubstantiate the market into a gas, it gets to be some kind of Terran atmospheric condition. In terms of cultural urgency, the obvious forerunner was fashion, or what has become the global fashion system, which compels you to internalize subtle shifts in the atmosphere, and where seduction plus insecurity yields the sense of urgency. It's banal to observe that fashion is a "control structure," and that kind of phrase makes it sound doomy when it's also a source of pleasure and play, but there it is. Maybe urgency too often boils down to chasing fashion. Then there's digital culture, which is about staying abreast of new products and current updates, and also achieving the state of being able to tap into your shit at all conceivable times and in all possible places, in order to simultaneously render every facet of your selfhood as accessible and as secure as possible. Which is paradoxical, and more interesting for that. But these anxieties only end up calling The Cloud down upon us. The Cloud represents the air-tight control structure as platinum-certified MBA turd. The dream of the market is that if everything can be reduced to a common currency, i.e. binary code, this allows effortless transmission with no value lost in the conversion, with the aim that anything, virtual or material, may eventually be frictionlessly exchanged for absolutely anything else. But not by you. And then there's the art world. The urgency that we deserve revolves around knowledge and competition and the pursuit of intellectual trends, but sometimes it is just worrying over What Are The Wealthy Into, which is a dead end, or What Are The Youth Up To, which elicits a reaction along the lines of: "We're pleased to have the sinking feeling that they're up to something important but unintelligible." Crowded from behind even as your face mashes up on the out-door. I do believe that the urge to keep up with exhibitions and events, through travel and participation and trade mags, is ultimately a professional, or even a professionalizing, quality. But I don't see myself as a professional, and I don't think art is a job.

di Seth Price

L'urgenza è una condizione maledetta. La odio. Per questo mi è così difficile parlarne qui. Ci sono tipi specifici di urgenza che capisco bene. Le esigenze familiari, ad esempio. Oppure, è novembre e a New York comincia a fare freddo, e man mano che la temperatura scende, si vedono ogni giorno sempre più persone senza tetto, né cibo. Oppure capita il contrario: fa un caldo inverosimile a novembre, di nuovo. L'urgenza nella "cultura", invece, sembra più legata all'ansia di stare al passo con ciò che succede senza perdersi nulla. È una missione che si potrebbe esplicitare così: rispettare le scadenze di lavoro e al contempo orientare la propria identità professionale in una direzione che deve essere "in ascesa"; mantenersi passabilmente informati sui fatti del giorno; registrare i cambiamenti tecnologici, i dibattiti del momento, i film e i libri in uscita; e seguire le azioni e le opinioni delle persone considerate autorevoli attraverso somministrazioni costanti di immagini e di dichiarazioni. È la percezione del mercato, che registra i flussi di scambio e acquisizione dei valori del desiderio, del gusto e dell'identificazione. Probabilmente in passato era un fenomeno più tipico del contesto metropolitano occi-

dentale ma la cultura digitale ha contribuito a trasformare il mercato in un gas, per cui è diventato una sorta di condizione atmosferica terrestre. Quando si parla di urgenza culturale, l'ovvia antesignana è la moda, o ciò che è diventato il sistema moda globale, che ci obbliga a interiorizzare i mutamenti sottili nell'atmosfera, e dove la seduzione sommata all'insicurezza produce senso di urgenza. Suona banale definire la moda una "struttura di controllo": è un'etichetta che la fa apparire oscura mentre è anche una fonte di grande piacere e divertimento, ma tant'è. Forse l'urgenza si riduce troppo spesso a inseguire la moda. Poi c'è la cultura digitale, che vuol dire stare al passo con i nuovi prodotti e gli aggiornamenti, e anche conseguire una capacità di connessione con le proprie menate sempre e ovunque allo scopo di rendere al contempo qualunque aspetto di sé massimamente accessibile ma sicuro. Il che è paradossale, e proprio per questo tanto più interessante. Ma queste ansie non fanno altro che richiamare la "Nuvola" su di noi. La "Nuvola" rappresenta la struttura di controllo ermetica in quanto stronzata certificata dalle massime istituzioni finanziarie. Il sogno del mercato è ridurre qualunque cosa a una valuta unica, per esempio il codice binario, per consentire una trasmissione

facilitata al massimo senza perdita di valore alcuno nella conversione, con l'obiettivo di rendere in futuro qualunque cosa, virtuale o materiale, interscambiabile senza difficoltà con qualunque altra cosa. Ma non direttamente da te. E poi c'è il mondo dell'arte. L'urgenza che ci meritiamo ha a che fare con la conoscenza e la competizione e il perseguimento di tendenze intellettuali, ma qualche volta vuol dire anche solo preoccuparsi di Cosa Piace ai Ricchi, il che è un vicolo cieco, o Cosa Fanno i Giovani, che suscita una reazione del tipo: "Siamo lieti di avere la spiacevole sensazione che stiano facendo qualcosa di importante ma incomprensibile". Spinti dalla folla che si accalca da dietro con la faccia ormai spiaccicata contro la porta d'uscita. Credo che l'urgenza di stare al passo con esposizioni ed eventi, attraverso viaggi e partecipazioni e riviste specializzate, sia alla fine una qualità professionale, o addirittura professionalizzante. Ma io non mi considero un professionista, e non penso che l'arte sia una professione.

OCTOBER

What to Do with Pictures

DAVID JOSELIT

> *"It's an amazing customer imprint," Mr. Ballmer
> said. "And Skype is a verb, as they say."[1]*

In 1967–68 Richard Serra prepared a famous list of verbs.[2] This compendium of actions—"to roll, to create, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to dapple, to crumple, to shave," and so on and so on—implies matter as its proper "direct object." You can roll, fold, store, bend, shorten, twist, dapple, and shave lead, for instance, or crumple paper.[3] This litany of verbs also includes two sustained "lapses" into nouns, including many gerunds (whose grammatical function is to transform verbs into nouns): "of tension, of gravity, of entropy, of nature, of grouping, of layering, of felting . . . " If the infinitive verb marks a time outside of action ("to rotate" suggests a possibility that need not be acted upon), Serra's nouns imply the dilated moment of an unfolding event—to be "of tension," for instance, means that force is being or has been applied. Indeed, Serra's early sculptures might be defined as matter marked by the exercise of force.[4]

Serra's verb list furnishes a terse blueprint for post-Minimalist sculpture. But it also implies a general theory of transitive art—of art produced through the exertion of force on something, or someone. Since what counts in transitive procedures is not the nature of the material acted upon (such as lead or rubber) but the generation of form through action, Serra's list can easily be repurposed

1.   Andrew Ross Sorkin and Steve Lohr, "Microsoft to Buy Skype for $8.5 Billion," *New York Times* (May 10, 2011).
2.   The list was only published in 1972. See Richard Serra, "Verb List, 1967–68," in Richard Serra, *Writings/Interviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 3–4.
3.   On the other hand, "to create" seems an exceptionally general action smuggled into this list of specific operations: like the last verb in Serra's long list—"to continue"—it is a meta-procedure.
4.   Serra is by no means the first artist to propose a transitive model of art wherein force generates form. A modern genealogy for such practices could easily be established that would span the manipulation of readymades (where perhaps "inscription" takes the place of "force") to Jasper Johns, whose paintings index the residue of actions taken upon or "in" them, to the various practices of the late 1950s and '60s in which scoring movements or actions was fundamental, including Happenings and Fluxus. The particular virtue of Serra's list is how clearly, directly, and uncompromisingly it asserts a "transitive" position.

OCTOBER

through a simple change of "direct objects." Relational Aesthetics, for instance, might be said to consist of learning how "to scatter, to arrange, to repair, to discard, to pair, to distribute, to surfeit" groups of people. Or, as I will argue below, the verbs "to enclose, to surround, to encircle, to hide, to cover, to wrap, to dig, to tie, to bind, to weave, to join, to match, to laminate, to bond, to hinge, to mark, to expand" may be applied to the behavior of pictures within digital economies. Such substitutions mark a shift from the manipulation of material (paint, wood, lead, paper, chalk, video, etc.) to the management (or mismanagement) of populations of persons and/or pictures. Under such conditions, "formatting"—the capacity to configure data in multiple possible ways—is a more useful term than "medium," which, all heroic efforts to the contrary, can seldom shed its intimate connection to matter (paint, wood, lead, paper, chalk, video, etc.).

Formatting is as much a political as an aesthetic procedure because the same image may easily be adduced as "evidence" in support of various and even contradictory propositions—determining a format thus introduces an ethical choice about how to produce intelligible information from raw data.[5] In digital economies, value accrues not solely from production—the invention of content—but from the extraction of meaningful patterns from profusions of existing content. As the term "data mining" suggests, raw data is now regarded as a "natural," or at least a naturalized, resource to be mined, like coal or diamonds. But unlike coal and diamonds, with their differing degrees of scarcity, data exists in unwieldy and ever-increasing quantities—it is harvested with every credit-card transaction, click of a cursor, and phone call we make. This reservoir of tiny, inconsequential facts, which is sublime in its ungraspable enormity, is meaningless in its disorganized state. Since such data is both superabundant and ostensibly trivial, what gives it value are the kinds of formats it can assume, which may be as wide-ranging as marketing profiles and intelligence on terrorism. Such a shift from producing to formatting content leads to what I call the "epistemology of search," where knowledge is produced by discovering and/or constructing meaningful patterns—formats—from vast reserves of raw data, through, for instance, the algorithms of search engines like Google or Yahoo. Under these conditions, any quantum of data might lend itself to several, possibly contradictory, formats.

The artist Seth Price has implicitly articulated—though never, like Serra, explicitly published—his own "list" of transitive actions appropriate to the epistemology of search. I will focus on three of Price's "routines"—or procedures of formatting—each of which lends itself to subdivision: "to disperse," "to profile," and "of effects." Together, they sketch an answer to the question: what to do with pictures?

5.   For me, one of the most powerful examples of the consequences of data formatting is Colin Powell's presentation of supposed evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to the U.N. in 2003. The question of evidence and documentary truth-value has been a major one in recent art practices. For an important account of this, see Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 129 (Summer 2009), pp. 51–84.

OCTOBER

To Disperse

Price's best-known work of criticism is probably his 2002 book *Dispersion*, which, like many of his texts, is freely downloadable, making it a model of dispersion as well as a theoretical account of it. In a sense, the title says it all: to disperse is to shift emphasis from creating new content to distributing existing content. As Price writes, "Suppose an artist were to release the work directly into a system that depends on reproduction and distribution for sustenance, a model that encourages contamination, borrowing, stealing, and horizontal blur."[6] Several aspects of this passage repay close reading: first, for Price, dispersal diminishes rather than enhances a work's value. As he puts it in a subsequent passage, "what if [the work] is instead dispersed and reproduced, its value approaching zero as its accessibility rises?"[7] In fact, while it seems logical that scarcity should enhance art's value (and conversely, that accessibility would cause it to drop to zero), this presumption is incorrect when it comes to actual contemporary image economies (including the art market),

Seth Price. Dispersion. *2002–.*

6.   Seth Price, *Dispersion* (2002), downloaded from www.distributedhistory.com, n.p.
7.   Ibid.

Price. Essay with Ropes. *2008.*

OCTOBER

Price. Hostage Video Still
with Time Stamp. *2005–.*

where the massive distribution of reproductions—whether of the Mona Lisa or Lady Gaga—is precisely what confers value. As Price defines it, however, dispersion is a drag on circulation, a form of counter-distribution, where value is purposely diminished as opposed to accumulated through the dissemination of images.

A list of three transitive actions is included in the passage I quoted above: contamination, borrowing, and stealing. One possible pairing of these three refers to destructive events (i.e., contamination and stealing), and another indicates the illicit or licit transfer of property (i.e., stealing and its innocent twin, borrowing). According to these characterizations, Price sees dispersion as a mode of transfer whose poles are marked by innocuous exchanges (borrowing) and their virulent converse (contamination). As the latter term suggests, dispersion can also carry a biopolitical connotation. And indeed, Price declares it to be "a system that depends on reproduction and distribution for *sustenance*" (my emphasis). Networks, in other words, provide life support for the individual images that inhabit them; and as in the human body, failure of the circulatory system will lead to death.

Finally, Price introduces the condition of "horizontal blur." Blur occurs when something or someone moves too fast from one place to another for it to register optically as a bounded form, making it a privileged figure of transitive action. Price stages such blur spatially in an ongoing series of works begun in 2005 titled *Hostage Video Still with Time Stamp* made on unfurled rolls of clear polyester film, known colloquially as Mylar, upon which are silkscreened degraded reproductions of an image taken from the Internet of the severed head of the American Jewish businessman Nicholas Berg, who was decapitated by Islamic militants. In these pieces, the physical effects of dispersion are manifested in three ways: first, a computer file—the germ of an artwork, as in many of Price's pieces— is rendered nearly illegible, the result of several generations of reproduction, as Price digitalizes, compresses, downloads, blows up, and then screen-prints original footage. Second, while bolts of the printed Mylar are sometimes unrolled flush to the wall, at some point in their installation the material is twisted or tied into crumpled configurations that serve as a spatial metaphor for the ostensibly "immaterial" traffic of images online—as though successive screen views on a monitor had piled up continuously like a disorderly comic strip rather than being constantly "refreshed." Finally, third, the grisly and horrible physical violation of

OCTOBER

Price. Hostage Video Still
with Time Stamp. *2005–.*

Berg is an explicitly biological form of "dispersion," in which a head is parted from its torso. The catastrophe of his decapitation results in the abject wasting of a body. It is the object of a perverse fascination for the artist (and the viewer) that verges on the erotic. As Price writes in another context, "Locating pleasure in benign decay is a perversion, for these structures are useless and wasteful, a spilling of seed, like gay sex, like gay sex."[8] While some gay people might object to this characterization (I am not among them), Price's romanticizing (and even caricaturizing) rendering of gay desire nonetheless asserts something important: a nonproductive relationship to distribution, the violence of which is aggressively expressed by Berg's decapitation.[9]

8.   Seth Price, *Was ist "Los"* [a.k.a. Décor *Holes*] (2003–05), downloaded from www.distributedhistory.com.
9.   In an era when demands for marriage rights have become the signature issue within gay activism, the characterization of "gay sex" as nonproductive feels a little nostalgic. I, for one, however, agree that one of the strongest political accomplishments of some gay and much queer activism is a critique of normative forms of *production* for which biological reproduction often served as a privileged model.

OCTOBER

(left margin, rotated) Galerie Chantal Crousel

The normative goal of distribution is to saturate a market. Once the dissemination of an image reaches a tipping point, it sustains itself as an icon (celebrity is the paradigmatic model for self-perpetuating images). Price, on the other hand, represents the failure to saturate, a perversion of distribution he calls "dispersion." Dispersion is slow, while standard forms of commercial distribution are fast. As Price puts it, "Slowness works against all of our prevailing urges and requirements: it is a resistance to the contemporary mandate of speed. Moving with the times places you in a blind spot: if you're part of the general tenor, it's difficult to add a dissonant note."[10] Staging different rates of circulation is one type of routine appropriate to art in digital economies—it's a tactic for escaping the "blind spot" that results from moving along at the same rate as the market. Forms of critique that once would have been conducted through dissonant content are here reinvented as variable velocities of circulation. In other words, the core of Price's project has less to do with what he represents—even when that representation is inflammatory, as with the Nick Berg decapitation—and more to do with the transitive actions to which he subjects this content. In Serra's art, transitivity is expressed as force—the force necessary to mold matter. But, following an important distinction that Hannah Arendt makes between violence as the exertion of force and power as the effect of human consensus, we can recognize a difference between Serra and Price's transitive art.[11] The latter's object is populations of images rather than quantities of matter: he seeks to format (and not merely "reveal") image-power. One way he does this is to slow down the circulation of images[12]: in *Hostage Video Still with Time Stamp*, Price curbs the frictionless motion and instantaneous spatial jumps characteristic of navigation on the Internet and allows them to pile up in unruly masses; the gruesome decapitation he represents is also the figure of an acephalous media.

To Profile

There are few things more ubiquitous in contemporary life than profiles: some are composed voluntarily to be posted on social-media sites, but many, and perhaps most, are involuntary, like the data trails left by every purchase, cursor click, and mobile phone call one makes. Silhouettes have existed for ages, but profiling is modern—dating from the nineteenth century.[13] A silhouette is a bounded

---

10.   Price, *Dispersion*, n.p.
11.   Arendt makes this distinction in her important essay "On Violence," in Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1972). In this essay, she writes, "*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (p. 143). On the contrary, "*Violence* . . . is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it" (p. 145).
12.   In my book *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), I refer to this as "slowing down the trajective."
13.   On nineteenth-century forms of aesthetic profiling, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), pp. 3–64.

OCTOBER

shape that sharply delineates an inside from an outside: the information it carries lies entirely in partitioning a field. The verb "to profile" denotes the imposition of such a finite shape onto a set of perceived statistical regularities, as when scientists plot a straight line through an irregular array of data points, disciplining and abstracting inchoate (or sometimes merely imagined) patterns. The implicit violence of such projections is conveyed by the connotation of profiling in police work, where persons who belong to particular groups—be they organized by ethnicity, age, economic status, or gender—are believed to be more likely to commit a crime and consequently are more frequently treated as criminals. Profiling imposes a profile on populations of data (including visual data).

In his highly inventive practice, Price has developed two tactics related to profiling. In one, which is closely related to his strategies of dispersal, he makes large centrifugal works generated from small "icons" drawn from the Internet—each picturing a gesture of touching such as lighting a cigarette, kissing, or writing. These motifs emerge unsteadily, like optical puzzles, on blank expanses of wall bounded by several irregularly shaped "continents" of rare wood veneers laminated behind clear acrylic plastic. Because these giant puzzle pieces, which resemble landmasses in a wall map, are themselves free-form, it is not easy to recognize—let alone to remember— the motif they partially delineate (I admit that the first time I saw one, I failed to

Price. Untitled. *2008.*

OCTOBER

recognize the generating kernel at all). Michael Newman has beautifully described the effect of these works as that of a "'frame' [that] invites the viewer to project an image into the emptiness, and this emptiness bleeds into the surrounding space of the wall with an extension that is potentially infinite."[14] As in Price's model of dispersion, where the circulation of images is slowed down, in this series of pieces the normative centripetal logic of profiling (which is aimed, as I have argued, at crystallizing a "concentrated" profile from an amorphous field of data) is opposed by a centrifugal form of dispersal, where the possibility of generating an intelligible silhouette is interrupted, slowed, and possibly even arrested. At the same time, the appropriated "icons" upon which they are based—all intimate moments of touching—deracinate face-to-face contact by transforming tactility into absence. Needless to say, this is precisely an effect of digital communication.

Price's second approach to profiling seems the opposite of his first in that it represents whole as opposed to fragmentary objects. A series of vacuum-form works are molded over things or human body parts (rope, breasts, fists, flowers, and bomber jackets); sometimes they literally encase readymade lengths of rope that might spill out below the vacuum-form surface. These illusionistic reliefs adopt the logic of packaging, where a plastic shell molded to a commodity's contours both protects that commodity and constitutes its seductive surface. But while these profiles may be "whole," they are hollow—functioning as what Price likes to call a "hole." In this sense, they resemble the wood and acrylic wall pieces, where form is organized around a structuring absence. Indeed, the "hole" for Price is precisely not an absence, in the sense of a passive empty space, but an "event" within a rich surface or field of data. A profile is simultaneously empty and full, a hole and a whole. As he states in his largely appropriated book, *How to Disappear in America*:

> There is the possibility that in the future people may be identifiable by their purchasing habits. Granted the point-of-sale data collected by computers would need to be immense, yet eventually pattern-recognition software may some day be able to provide authorities with perhaps 100 of the best possible "hits" on people matching your known buying habits. When—if ever—that becomes a reality, you can be sure you won't know about it until it's shown on cable television . . .

14.   Michael Newman, "Seth Price's Operations," in *Price, Seth* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier Kunstverlag, 2010), p. 44.

OCTOBER

Price. Cherries. *2011.*
Opposite page: Price. Vintage
Bomber. *2008.*

So alter your buying habits. You need to discard as many predictable
patterns as possible. One of the most common mistakes is maintain-
ing old habits. If you're a smoker, stop. If you don't smoke, start. If
you enjoy hot and spicy foods, stop purchasing those items and
change to mild foods. If you frequent bars, stop. This may seem an
unusual step but patterns are predictable. Break them.[15]

The theory of profiling is that human subjectivity is a pattern bereft of interi-
ority. The unconscious is a hole.

Of Effects

In *Digital Video Effect: "Holes"* (2003) and *Digital Video Effect: "Spills"* (2004),
Price frames found JPEGs and video footage with digital masking effects that gen-
erate autonomous "events"; a variety of "holes" (such as round paper punch-outs)
open in a black ground to reveal pinpoint views of a horrific image that is only
revealed in its entirety momentarily, when the different views fuse together for a
split second. A video image spills onto black ground and is succeeded by black
amoebic forms that spill back onto the image, rendering it a kind of liquid. The

15.   Seth Price, *How to Disappear in America* (New York: Leopard Press, 2008), pp. 37–38.

OCTOBER

*Galerie
Chantal Crousel*

Price. Digital Video Effect:
"Holes." *2003.*

ultimate expression of this amorphous, aqueous (literally mercurial) sort of image comes in *Untitled Film, Right* (2006), an endless four-second loop of a wave purchased as stock footage that is nauseating yet mesmerizing. Tim Griffin has described Price's effects in the following terms:

> as a simulation device, the "effect" posits a kind of chronology where there is none—suggesting some precipitant action responsible for the visual and aural phenomena taking place before the eye and ear. The "effect" creates nothing so much as a rhetorical hole in time, but only in order to fill that hole in advance with some false history or phantom memory for the individual viewer . . . [16]

Griffin's association of effects with an absent or invisible agency—a hole in time—is not only essential for understanding Price's work, it also points to a broader tendency in contemporary sculpture. In the open "scenarios" of artists such as Liam Gillick, Pierre Huyghe, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, who design environments that may or may not be activated through the presence of scripted or unscripted events, spatial structures are consecrated to hosting social effects. Such principles are also present in the new modes of sculptural composition exemplified by Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison, where tangential connections between things reverse the centripetal effect of earlier twentieth-century montage and assemblage (to use terms I have applied already to Price), in favor of centrifugal tornadoes of divergent associations.

I wish to supplement Griffin's definition with two additional valences of effect. First, "special effects," as practiced by Hollywood cinema, render narrative as pure motion—often a virtually unbroken trajectory initiated in the opening scenes of a film and coming to rest only with the last credit. Blockbuster plots are

16.   Tim Griffin, "The Personal Effects of Seth Price," *Artforum* 47, no. 10 (Summer 2009), p. 288.
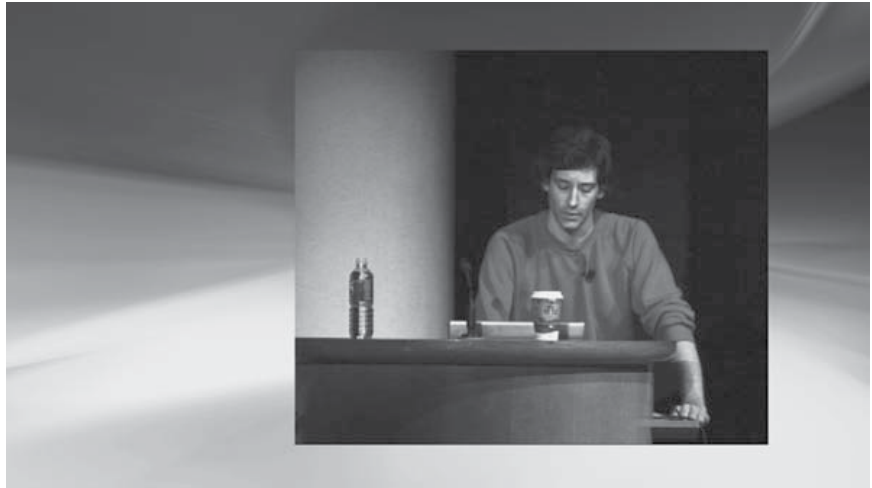
OCTOBER
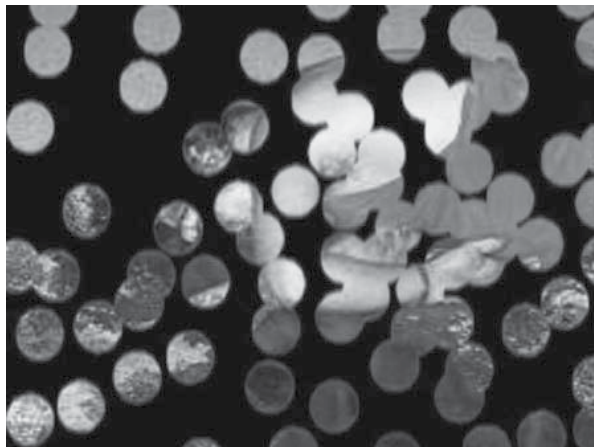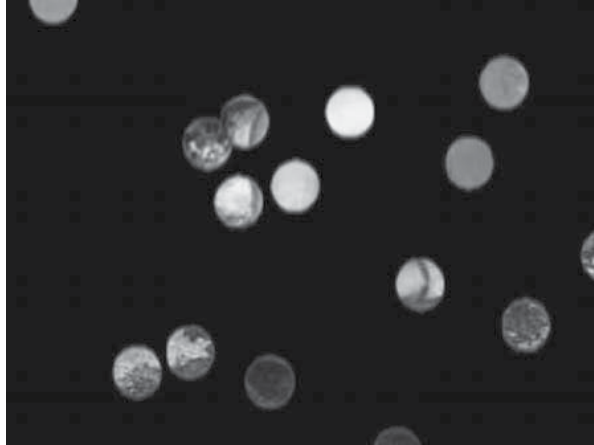
Price. Digital Video Effect:
"Holes." *2003.*

OCTOBER

Price.
Redistribution.
2007–.

OCTOBER

no more than conventional grids: what matters are the texture, velocity, and point of view with which spectators are carried through a standardized sequence of events. Such movies are not so much watched as navigated—like computer games where motion is frictionless, continuous, and defiant of gravity. The "effect," as Hollywood renders it, is almost pure transitivity in the absence of a direct object (unless that object is the spectator herself). Second, effects are literally a posteriori. They are, to put it plainly, consequences that cannot be fully anticipated during the phase of aesthetic production. And here, too, we may note a wider aesthetic shift. Artists like Price are primarily interested not in producing new content but in submitting existing pictures (moving and still) to various "ecological" conditions in order to see how they behave. This is why he can call *Redistribution* (2007–), a videotaped version of the kind of artist's talk given at art schools or museums, a work: in his practice, works are inextricable from their dissemination. It is also why he habitually reframes and remixes his texts, music, and

Price. Untitled Film (Right). *2006.*

images, as well as making many of them available online on his website. A contemporary art devoted to circulation, is, of course, a creature of a specific ecology: the market. But instead of either giving up or selling out, Price, like more and more artists, games the market by surfing it. This leads to all kinds of effects: variable velocities, catastrophic jamming, viral proliferation, etc., etc. [17]

17.   This is the model of aesthetic politics I attempt to delineate in *Feedback.*

OCTOBER

Coda: Image Power

If one subscribes to Arendt's definition of power as the effect of a public, then populations of images might possess their own species of image-power—by saturating markets, on the one hand, or "going viral" on the other. This implies a shift in how the relationship between politics and art is conceived. Indeed, significant changes have occurred in this critical relationship over the past century—from avant-garde modes of revolution in the early twentieth century to postmodern, or neo-avant-garde, critique in the late twentieth century, to what I would call image-power in the early twenty-first century (a time when divisions between commercial and fine-art images are more and more difficult to draw). This is an art devoted to seizing circulation as a technology of power: *to disperse, to profile*, and *of effects*.

REVIEWS: EUROPE

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Seth Price
Miam!

Chantal Crousel, Paris
12 March – 30 April

Thing in a Thing, 2011, UV-cured inkjet on
PETG vacuum-formed over rope, 114 x 118 cm

Miam! (literally 'yummy!'), Seth Price's first solo show in France, is a collection of a dozen vacuum-formed wall pieces (all works 2011), in which knotted lengths of rope are preserved in painted plastic. Most of these 'assemblage paintings' (if we shall categorise them as such; after all, they do hang on walls) present abstract bursts of colours or monochromes that were applied after the ropes were randomly thrown into the composition, except a few that display some figurative content – drawings of the artist that he digitally enlarged and printed on plastic sheets before the vacuum-forming packaging process, and that represent satirical sketches of characters eating, such as in *Shrimp*, *Indian Summer* and *Spago* (all works 2011). The show is completed by an audio piece, *Language Lesson*, a four-minute recording of a tale written and narrated by Price himself, and played continuously within the exhibition space along with projected subtitles (in French). The fable tells the story of a girl who falls under the spell of an evil woman in the middle of the woods and gets rescued by a man, who sets the witch's legs on fire. Incidentally (and this isn't as trivial as you may think within the broader context of the show), the lady's limbs happen to become some charred wooden stumps that sketch shapes and figures on the ground while she runs after the two fugitives.

For someone who isn't already familiar with the New York-based artist's body of works – which includes media productions with video and music, wall pieces using vacuum-form technology, drawing, performance and most importantly writing (his repeatedly revised essay *Dispersion*, 2002–), which has undoubtedly contributed to Price's great critical reception within the artworld) – his first solo show in Paris doesn't reflect much (at least at first glance) of the aesthetic challenge that his theoretical and plastic investigation of contemporary art and media distribution has presented since the beginning of his career. Nevertheless, considering Price's overall oeuvre, some recurrent aspects of his inquiry can be found in the interaction between the tale and the vacuum-formed assemblage paintings on show. What fuels his practice is seemingly the notions of boundless adaptability and recreation, which for that matter inform not only the elastic nature of plastic but also and more significantly our contemporary culture within the mutable form of web-based archives (where data can always be added, modified or removed). Accordingly, the fake or foolish origin that the fable suggests, by simple juxtaposition, for the sketches and colourful shapes spreading from one plastic wall piece to another finally strikes one as a sarcastic and brilliant irresolution.

In rejecting the notion of finitude, even the notion of authorship or clear origin (in this regard, his many collaborations with Reena Spaulings, the dealer/artist/gallery who represents him in New York, speak for themselves), Price systematically leaves holes (like empty packaging blisters) within his works that can be filled with false history over time through the spectator's experience or the evolution of the artist's thinking. Indeed, within the context of his show at Crousel, whether the drawings and tale originate from the artist himself matters very little, for only the continuing mythologies on which the artist's work is grounded must come forward. Leaving you with this thought: *bon appétit! Violaine Boutet de Monvel*

Galerie Chantal Crousel

PARIS

Seth Price
Galerie Chantal Crousel / 12 mars - 30 avril 2011

Des tableaux, enfin ce qui y ressemble ! Les formats rectangulaires sont accrochés soigneusement au mur, mais la surface agitée de tensions contredit cette première impression. D'un côté, une forme vaguement réaliste ; de l'autre, la texture plastique des enseignes publicitaires. Entre les deux : la forme fantôme d'une corde qui traverse la composition, s'étend, construisant courbes et contrecourbes. Au départ, ce sont des petits croquis figuratifs, rapidement esquissés, puis numérisés, modifiés, agrandis, dénaturés avant d'être imprimés sur une plaque en plastique. L'ensemble est ensuite thermoformé sur des cordes abandonnées selon les lois du hasard à la surface. L'application d'une couche d'émail, d'acrylique ou de polyuréthane constitue l'étape suivante. Autant d'événements successifs, de décisions faussement contradictoires et de mises à distance du geste initial, qui renforcent le caractère abstrait de la pratique. Seth Price s'interroge sur les ambiguïtés de l'œuvre d'art, jouant sur les niveaux critiques que peuvent receler les artefacts de la culture populaire. Cette nouvelle série d'œuvres, axée sur l'idée de figuration (c'est-à-dire l'idée d'un motif normalisé et standardisé rejoué autrement) et l'évocation du dessin satirique, fonctionne comme une machine à recycler, traçant des parallèles avec d'autres formes de monstration, d'autres possibilités de générer une forme autoritaire. C'est ce qu'indique l'œuvre sonore qui, en contrepoint, raconte une histoire plus directement liée au réel, comme si l'artiste éprouvait le besoin de répondre à une urgence du témoignage.

Damien Sausset

À gauche / *bottom left:* Bethan Huws. « Forest ». 2008-2009. 88 portebouteilles et néon (Court. de l'artiste et galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris/New York ; Ph. A. Morin). *88 bottle racks and neon* Ci-dessus /*above:* Seth Price « Indian Summer ». 2011. Jet d'encre sur polystyrène, ficelle. (Court. de l'artiste). *UV cured inkjet on high impact polystyrene over rope*

Well, anyway, what they look like is paintings! The rectangular formats are carefully hung on the wall, but the tension-roiled surface contradicts the aesthetic object. On the one hand a vaguely realistic form, on the other the plastic texture of advertising signs. Between the two: the phantom form of a rope that runs through the composition spreads out, forming curves and counter-curves. At first they form little figurative sketches, drawn quickly and then scanned, digitally manipulated, blown up and distorted before being printed out on a sheet of plastic. The whole thing is then vacuum-formed over ropes placed at random on the surface. The next stage is the application of a coat of enamel, acrylic or polyurethane. Each of the successive events—apparently (but not really) contradictory decisions and distancings of the initial act—reinforces the abstract character of this practice.

Seth Price interrogates the ambiguities of the artwork, playing with the critical levels these popular culture artifacts can acquire. This latest series, based on the idea of figuration (i.e., the idea of a standardized motif being used in a new way) and references to satirical drawings, works like a recycling machine, tracing parallels with other forms of display, other possibilities of the generation of authoritarian forms. This is the message of the audio piece that in counterpoint tells a story more closely related to reality, as if the artist felt the need to respond to an urgent call to bear witness.

Damien Sausset
Translation, L-S Torgoff