

Beg, Steal and Borrow

Curated by Jean Wainwright

Philip Colboert Haley
Morris-Catiero Milka
Shoniloare BE-OR
C. Gerslät Melinda
Gibson Stuart Hilton
Birgitta Flosea
Stefin Klenz Simon
Patterson Andreas
Schmidt John
Stezaker Gavin Turk
Jessica Vooranger

Beg, Steal and Borrow

Recycling, borrowing, stealing, shamelessly ripping off... artists scavenge. They remix. They find new pathways, links and meanings. They plunder from past or present to create debate. In steal this essay Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson poses the question: ‘What imagery is so pervasive that claims of ownership seem facile? And are artists in their ability and need to comment on contemporary culture, thereby somehow entitled to universal usage?’¹ This raises questions about copyright law as it comes under enormous pressure seeking to protect the rights of the artist as creator for seventy years. While art is enduring, it is also capable of transformation. In art history we can trace the lineage of Leonardo Da Vinci to Andy Warhol and Gavin Turk, Claude Cahun to Gillian Wearing, Diego Velázquez to Picasso and Manolo Valdés. Aided by the availability of digital imaging devices, smart phones, the accessibility of computers, the rise of social networking sites and the ever increasing speed of data transmission, work can be shared, parodied, appropriated, copied and memed in seconds. A particular feature of the Occupy movement has been their appropriation and use of imagery, primarily used to speak against the institutions that support global capitalism, from banks to governments. There is no distinction made between iconic historical photographs, popular film, television shows or artistic ‘masterpieces.’ We are exposed to so many often fleeting, visual influences and for many contemporary artists appropriation is about addition or reinterpretation, so that the new creation is unique, yet contains within it copies or traces of the original.

The artists in Beg, Steal and Borrow, remix and inventively recreate, they use what is already out there to fashion new work and raise questions. Interconnected in their dynamic engagement their work is multi-layered, mining references to other art works or contemporary issues, from art history to archival material, colonial history to online bullying.

¹ Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson *steal this essay* in Beg Borrow and Steal. Rubell Family Collection. New York 2009 p10

Philip Colbert’s paintings inhabit a supersaturated hybrid pop world. They are a frenetic interchange of the stimuli that he sees around him. Claiming that his ‘paintings are an orchestral celebration of appropriation’, Colbert’s paintings in Beg, Steal and Borrow are a vibrant, hyperactive clash of art historical cross references, intertwined with contemporary cultural symbols from our media saturated age. In Snake Hunt (2019) we see Colbert’s hybrid characters, his compositional aesthetic moves swiftly from one reality or internet search to another, throwing up random or sometimes surreal connotations. He spends time reworking, stripping away, reducing, and rebuilding again. Colbert confesses that he is a ferocious consumer, ‘I’m looking at art and Instagram all the time, it’s like a serious addiction, so therefore I’m trying to honestly paint a reflection of my own pop philosophy, hence why I saturate rather than super reduce, because I feel that we are living in an over saturated time’²

Gavin Turk’s work is quieter, but equally belongs to the ‘pop’ world. Pop Head (2011) finds its roots not only in Warhol’s screen-printed portraits, but also in a number of ‘borrowed’ identities. Turk inventively reproduces just a head shot from his previous iconic self-portrait waxwork, Pop from 1993, where he assumed the identity of Sid Vicious, in the pose of Andy Warhol’s 1963 screen-print series of Elvis Presley, from the 1960 film Flaming Star. Often appropriating Warhol’s self-portraits by replacing the artists face with his own, Turk’s Pop Head becomes strangely familiar. In contrast, his sculpture Between a Rock and a Hard place (2009) also appropriates, but this time Turk uses an anachronistic Panda collection box with the animal removed and just the rock, painted grey by the artist and signed remaining, a play on Duchampian modernism and endangered species.

Jessica Voorsanger also references Warhol in her photograph Amanda Root as Andy Warhol (2010) from her series Art Imposters (2010).

² Philip Colbert in conversation with Jean Wainwright London 2018.

Voorsanger’s collaboration with the Louis Vuitton Summer Academy, itself an irony as the brand has a vigilant policy in place on counterfeiting. Voorsanger suggests that the ‘wrongness’ of the Warhol imposter is highlighted in a very specific way. She chose Root, an actor, to represent him wearing a novelty shop white wig, while borrowed elements of Warhol’s oeuvre include references to his Self Portrait with Skull (1978) and his super bowl commercial for Burger King in 1982. Warhol’s own interest in drag and transformation and Voorsanger’s engagement with performance and celebrity culture become merged in her commentary on self-portraiture and identity markers.

In contrast **Yinka Shonibare’s CBE** Carriage Clock (2019) explores colonial appropriation and the interrelationship with Africa and Europe, the ‘residue of empire’ which formed Shonibare’s own identity as a British Nigerian. His adapted model of the Irish State Coach purchased in 1853 and used by the British Royal family for openings of parliament is transformed into a meticulously painted model of the carriage. The hybrid Dutch West African batik cloth on the seats and draped over the driver’s box of the State Coach both a commentary and an ironic reference. The carriage itself becomes a travelling clock reflecting time in a miniature mirror, a reference to the officer’s clock traditionally given for long service. The elements of the sculpture speak of hierarchies, tradition and power and the positioning on its plinth raises questions about post-colonial history.

Simon Patterson challenges us to think about history in a different way choosing philately for his commentary. He cleverly disrupts his late uncle’s 1939-41 stamp album in his artwork Mikrokosmos which consists of a series of inkjet prints presented in vitrines, accompanied by an index. The pages were taken from a borrowed stamp collection and inserted digitally into a facsimile of his uncle’s album. By selecting only European nations and territories from the past and present, he raises pertinent questions about alliances and history, while also commenting on the existence of physical stamps on letters in the post digital age of email and where fragile archival material

is often accessed through wirelessly transferred files or facsimiles. Reproduced as if torn from the album, often with the envelope fragments and clear franking marks, they track routes and journeys as well as national identities, and the course of empire as a clever collecting fiction. The title is very specific, Mikrokosmos referring to the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók’s work, which consists of 153 progressive piano pieces in six volumes written between 1926 and 1939 and often used as a teaching exercise. As we study the albums interconnecting pathways, intriguing and often disturbing histories are revealed particularly relevant in our contemporary political turmoil.

Ori Gersht’s photographic series On Reflection (2014) is concerned with art history, metaphor, traumatic events, and perception. Taking as his reference Jan Bruegel the Elder’s Seventeenth Century still life flower arrangements, Gersht meticulously recreates his paintings from artificial flowers. Building a set in his studio with large mirrors, he then smashes or explodes them, capturing each nano-second with his digital camera revealing what the eye is incapable of ‘seeing’, as the reflecting fragments fall and shatter. Bruegel’s cultivated cut flower bouquets in glass and clay vases would have been selected for their perfection, normally flowering at different times in different locations. On Reflection questions the very nature of perception and truth, the violent disruption of the imitation flowers speak not only of the fragility of life but are disturbing metaphors for traumatic political events.

In contrast to an art historical reference, **Steffi Klentz’s** images from her series Beun (2015-2016) began with an archival associated press photograph of a concentration camp in East-Germany. Meticulously reconstructing the disturbing image as a life size model in her studio, she then digitally photographed the result and consequently applied different digital software algorithms, which erased and deformed information, disrupting the image. The ‘detaching’ from the archival reference becomes a series of disturbing, uncanny and destabilised photographs, we no longer have a linear history,

but a corrupted pathway. We are reminded of the Freudian compulsion to repeat, seeing an unsettling fragmentation which de-stabilises our understanding of the historically charged site. Klenz subverts the language of the photographic image, creating a metaphor for our digitally disordered world and a powerful comment on memory.

Melinda Gibson disrupts contemporary photographic history in a different way with her photomontages literally taken from the 2nd edition of Charlotte Cotton's book *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (2009). Cutting into and pasting together combinations of illustrations from Cotton's influential textbook, which itself had an impact on the trajectories of the artists that were included, as they became 'canonised', Gibson creates her own new intriguing images. 'For me' she suggests 'taking this book apart helps to question these images, far more than when they are within the constraints of a book ...'By slicing, cutting and de-contextualising [them] I start to gain a greater appreciation of the works; I start understanding why and how these images have been created.'³ Gibson also wanted to provoke questions about copyright and ownership through the re-appropriation of well-known contemporary photographic artists. Her series is both surreal and intriguing, a fragmented memory and an intriguing reordering as she re-visualises the canon.

Andreas Schmidt also uses a book as his original starting point, Michael Wolf's *Real Fake Art* (2011) which contains portraits of Chinese copy artists posing with their faked artworks against typical Chinese urban backdrops. The iconic art works are from different centuries and eras but are all instantly recognisable. Schmidt's series *Fake Fake Art* (2012-20) appropriates Wolf's photographs, he selects artists such as Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, Richard Prince and Roy Lichtenstein, then scours the internet for images of the artists themselves. Having found and selected them, Schmidt then sourced a Chinese retouching firm to replace them back into the image so they are now posing with their faked artworks. His series question's

copyright, blatant fakes and the subversion of the commodity value of art works as the 'names' continue to command record saleroom prices. The resulting 'uncanny' likenesses are deliberately printed in low resolution for *Beg*, *Steal* and *Borrow* reflecting and exposing the mechanisms of appropriating from online sources.

Haley Morris-Cafiero's series *The Bully Pulpit* (2018) emerged from her previous work *Wait Watchers* where she set up her camera in public places in New York to capture passers-by reactions to her as she performed mundane tasks. When the Huffington post published an article on her work and the American habit of 'fat shaming' she went 'viral'. Morris-Cafiero was overwhelmed by online communities across social media taking it upon themselves to comment on her work and weight, she was repeatedly told she was 'fat and ugly'. Rather than seeing the tirades as negative she felt energised, collecting screenshots of posts and comments until she had over 1000. Intrigued by the sense of empowerment some clearly felt by the anonymity of cyberspace and its possibilities to be used as a bully pulpit (itself an American term coined by President Theodore Roosevelt) by 2018 Morris-Cafiero had resolved her project: Not only did she find images on the internet of some of her 'trolls' but fashioned herself in the same clothes they were wearing in their online profiles, posts or portraits and inserted their comments into her images. By taking back control and providing a powerful visual commentary, the images are composed to reflect back onto the people that posted the messages, cleverly providing a humorous and thought provoking response.

Birgitta Hosea's video installation *Out There in the Dark* (2008-10) experiments in a completely different way with authorship and performance. She projects pre-recorded animated footage onto herself in a live performance of stop motion animation. Riffing on the horror genre and Hollywood cinema, Hosea sits with a paper bag over her head which is replaced by an animated doll lip synching to a few lines of dialogue from the 1950 film *Sunset Boulevard* starring Gloria

Swanson. In a twist, Swanson as Norma Desmond is herself duped as she performs, not as she thinks for the film producer Cecil B DeMille, but rather the police. The multiple media combinations, underpinned with feminist critique on hysteria are both disorienting and uncanny. The film serves as a disturbing and surreal document of her live act. Similarly, in *Medium* (2012) Hosea also deploys her hybrid animations, photography and a sound track appropriated from snippets of Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) and Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) into another live performance. The work examines ideas of media/medium/mediate and the imagery relates to spirit photography. The disquieting film of the event attaches the living to the dead in a mysterious and tantalisingly referenced performance of electronic ectoplasm and spirit possession by mediated culture.

Stuart Hilton uses hybridity quite differently in *The Injured Expert* (2020), his experimental animated film, that appropriates sound from unremarkable 'adventure and exploration' genre documentaries coupled with his own drawn animation. Hilton's approach within his apparently abstract documentary plays with the idea of authenticity. His fragmented, non-linear narrative structure is anchored by selected visual and aural devices, such as episodic titles and snippets of dialogue. Hilton's found notes, his sketches and pictograms form the raw material for much of the drawn animation in the film, whilst other forms of 2D and 3D digital animation are incorporated alongside heavily processed live action extracts using all manner of convoluted or 'endangered' processes. The screen static, incidental noises, and found radio communications transport us to surreal travel experiences. We are reminded of 'armchair travel' and evocative short wave radio signals as the 'remote and the exotic' is shared with all its wonderful, tension and threat. The sound and images give us an odd sense of displacement as Hilton turns his disparate material into a provocative and gripping short.

John Stezaker has always collected and

appropriated photographic images from magazines film stills and postcards. By arranging his found images together in his meticulous collages, Stezaker creates new sets of meanings which can seem at the same time both visually harmonious, yet disturbingly enigmatic. In *Couple VII* (2018) which includes a film still from the 1939 film *Homicide Bureau*, the identity of the stars faces is obscured by a black and white postcard of the Aare Gorge in Switzerland, a tourist beauty spot. The distinctive rock formation of the gorge perfectly replaces the man's eye, while the footbridge follows the line of his smiling lips, creating a sinister and disturbing new narrative. Vintage film stills are imbued with romanticism and slight absurdity, which is what attracts Stezaker to them and he claims that he will often gaze for months at an image before he will cut into his increasingly rare and valuable Bromide prints. The very act is a violent intervention. Stezaker claims that his understanding of his own work can often emerge at a much later stage, but for the viewer it is the transformative power of the visual juxtapositions in his collages, which provide often subversive and always persuasive visual dialogue.

David Evans in his essay 'Seven Types of Appropriation' concludes that 'One of the most fundamental distinctions between appropriation art in the 1980's and post-appropriation art today revolves around history itself.'⁴ While in *Beg*, *Steal* and *Borrow* each of the artworks bears its own pertinent traces of its artistic coded pathway, we might also consider Stezaker paraphrasing Maurice Blanchot, suggesting that image and fascination 'is a necessary series of deaths, that an image has to go through in order to become visible and disconnected from its ordinary referent'⁵. This exhibition, and its artworks, is a celebration of meaningful borrowing in our hyper saturated digital world.

Jean Wainwright 2020

3 Quote taken from Aaron Schuman, Foreword for *The Photograph As Contemporary Art* by Melinda Gibson, p5, Self Published 2012

4 David Evans *Seven Types of Appropriation* in *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art.*, David Evans (ed) Whitechapel London/MIT Press. 2009 p22.

5 Michael Bracewell. *Demand the Impossible* Frieze No 89 2005 p89

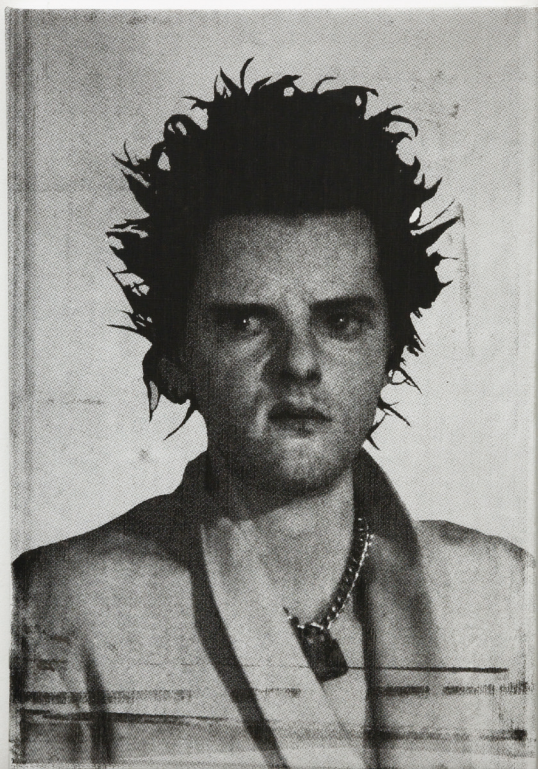
Haley Morris-Cafiero



Whale Watching (2018)
Archival inkjet print
53 x 76.2 cm
Courtesy the artist and TJ Boulting,
London



Treated Like Shit (2018)
Archival inkjet print
53 x 76.2 cm
Courtesy the artist and TJ Boulting
London



Pop Head (2011)
Acrylic paint on canvas
60 x 45 cm
Courtesy the artist

Gavin Turk

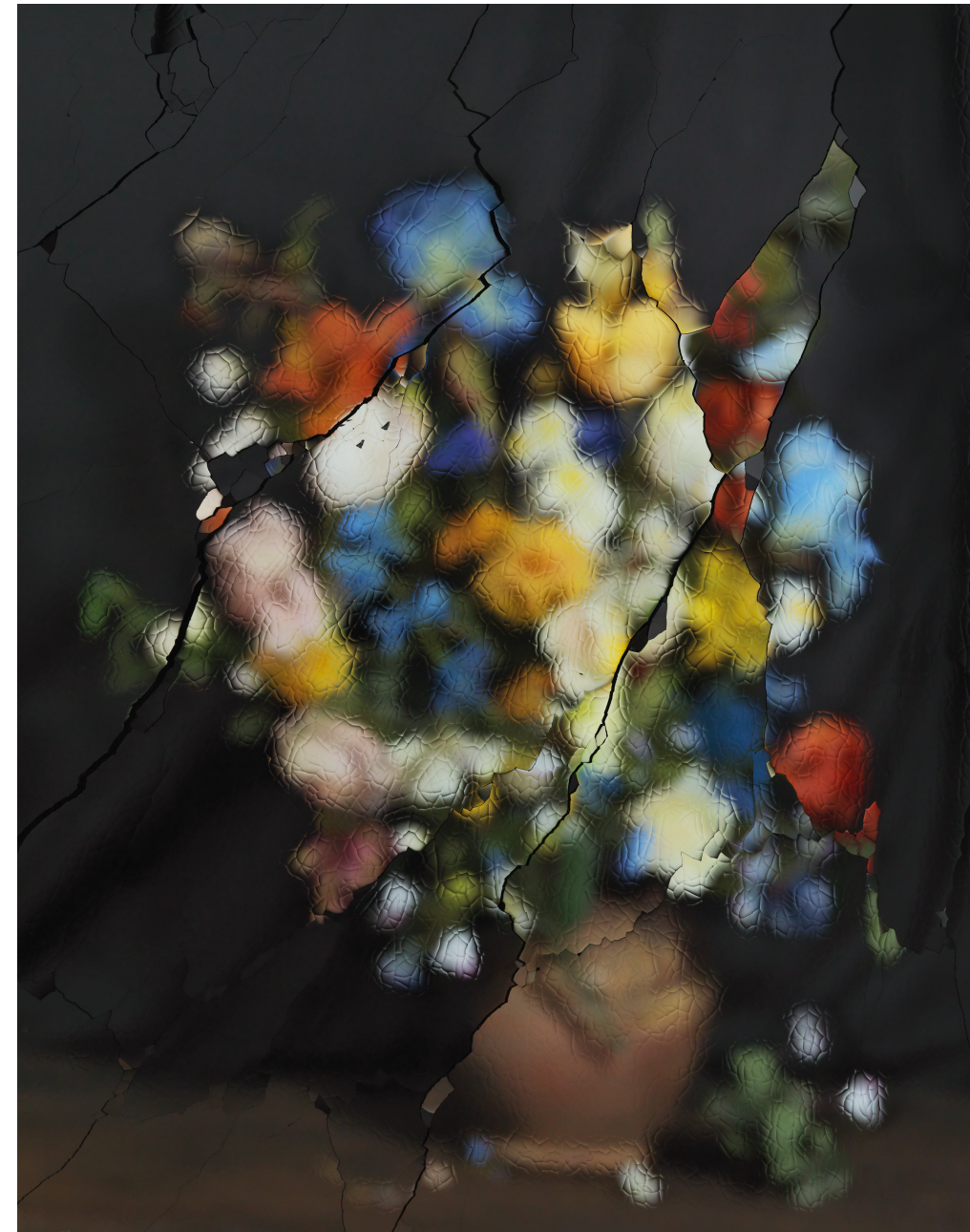
Yinka Shonibare CBE





On Reflection, Material B02,
(2014)
Archival Pigment Print
100 x 80 cm
Courtesy the artist and Yancey
Richardson Gallery, New York

Ori Gersht



On Reflection, Material B01,
(2014)
Archival Pigment Print
100 x 80 cm
Courtesy the artist and Yancey
Richardson Gallery, New York



Pair XXVII, (2015)
Collage
20.3 x 24.2 cm
Courtesy the artist and The
Approach, London

John Stezaker



Photomontage XVI, (taken from pages
133,169,196) (2009-2011)
Mixed Media
74.5 x 91 mm
Courtesy the artist ROSEGALLERY,
Santa Monica



Muse (Film Portrait Collage) XXI
(2018)
25.9 x 20.1 cm
Courtesy the artist and The
Approach, London

Melinda Gibson



Photomontage III, (taken from pages
106,136,202) (2009-2011)
Mixed Media
140 x 97 mm
Courtesy the artist and ROSEGALLERY,
Santa Monica

being me - being him

An insect that mimics a leaf does so not to meld with the vegetable state of its surrounding milieu, but to re-enter the realm of predatory animal warfare on a new footing¹

When I was twenty-five I trained to be a secondary school teacher. A few months in, and with my first teaching placement imminent, an impending sense of responsibility and several drams of Dutch courage found me press-ganging myself to the barbers to give up my then long hair to what I thought at the time might be a more respectable length. Half-cut, in terms of hair and intoxication, I watched in the mirror as my locks were shortened, slowly observing the image of myself disappearing in the glass. In a kind of reverse mirror-stage however, I began to see my twin brother emerge in front of me, reflected, his image as equally shocked as I was. Momentarily caught in a discordant sense of self, I sat disoriented, feeling myself present whilst seeing him as me in the mirror – where he shouldn't have been. He was in the wrong place and I was no longer in place as I should be. I was simultaneously both of us, mimicking without intent (if that's even possible), an exhilarated and delusional imitation.

Jacques Lacan argued that, “whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated,”² suggesting that imitation points past the thing being imitated. At primary school I remember being sent to see the headteacher, on account of some petty misdemeanour, and Mike, my twin, standing in for me, taking the rap on my behalf. In my mid-teens I shamefully recall returning the favour, standing in for him over the phone to break up with his then girlfriend, my pubescent voice mimicking his in its equivalence. More than simulation and its reproduction of functions, my mimicry created an appearance to serve completely different functions, including the displacement of guilt.



¹Brian Massumi, *Realer Than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari* (Copyright, no. 1, 1987), p. 2

²Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: Norton paperback, 1981), p. 100.

³Massumi op cit., p.2.

Mike recently told me how he has regaled stories of my minor childhood sporting achievements to his friends, passing them off as if they were his own, appropriating my history for himself. I've done the same on occasion, without any internal sense of lying; appropriating his history in a seemingly natural extension of our shared appearance – a duo of untalented Mr Ripleys, gaining miniscule social and cultural advantages.

When imitating him I'm both me and not-me, neither him nor me. My being him and his being me is less a question of resemblance than it is a strategic deception or camouflage, what Brian Massumi has called “a power inherent in the false.”³ no longer me and not quite him, but someone else altogether.

- Terry Perk, 2020

Stuart Hilton



Out There in the Dark (2008)
Video documentation of
performance
3 min loop. Courtesy the artist

The Injured Expert
(2020)
Digital Film
Courtesy the artist



Birgitta Hosea



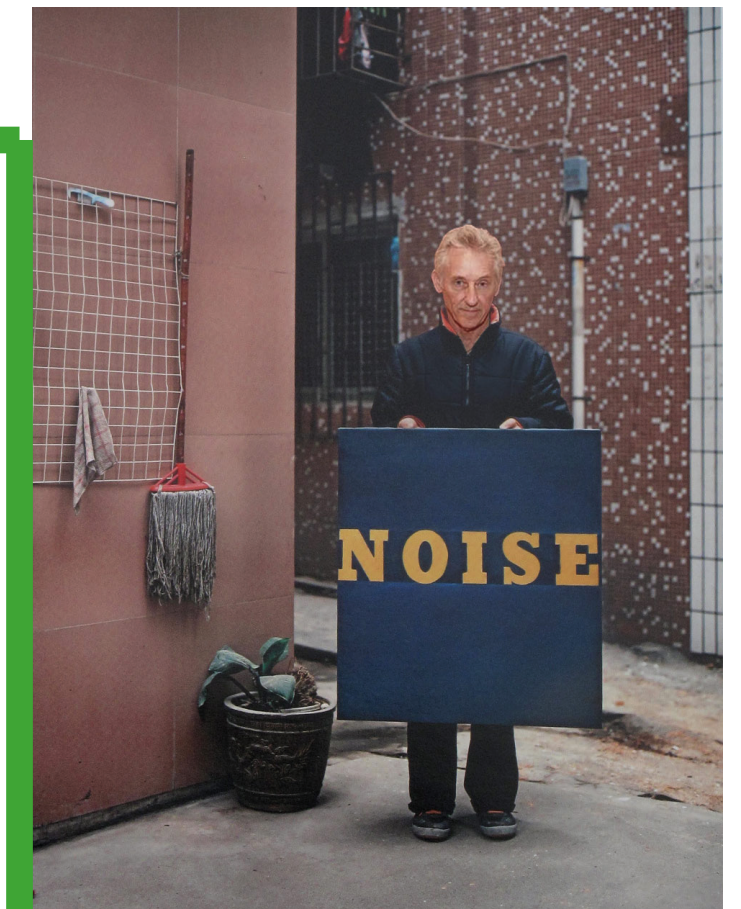
untitled from the series Beun (2015-2016), Digital C-Type print, 96.5 x 89 cm,
courtesy the artist and Kehrer Galerie, Berlin

Steffi Klenz



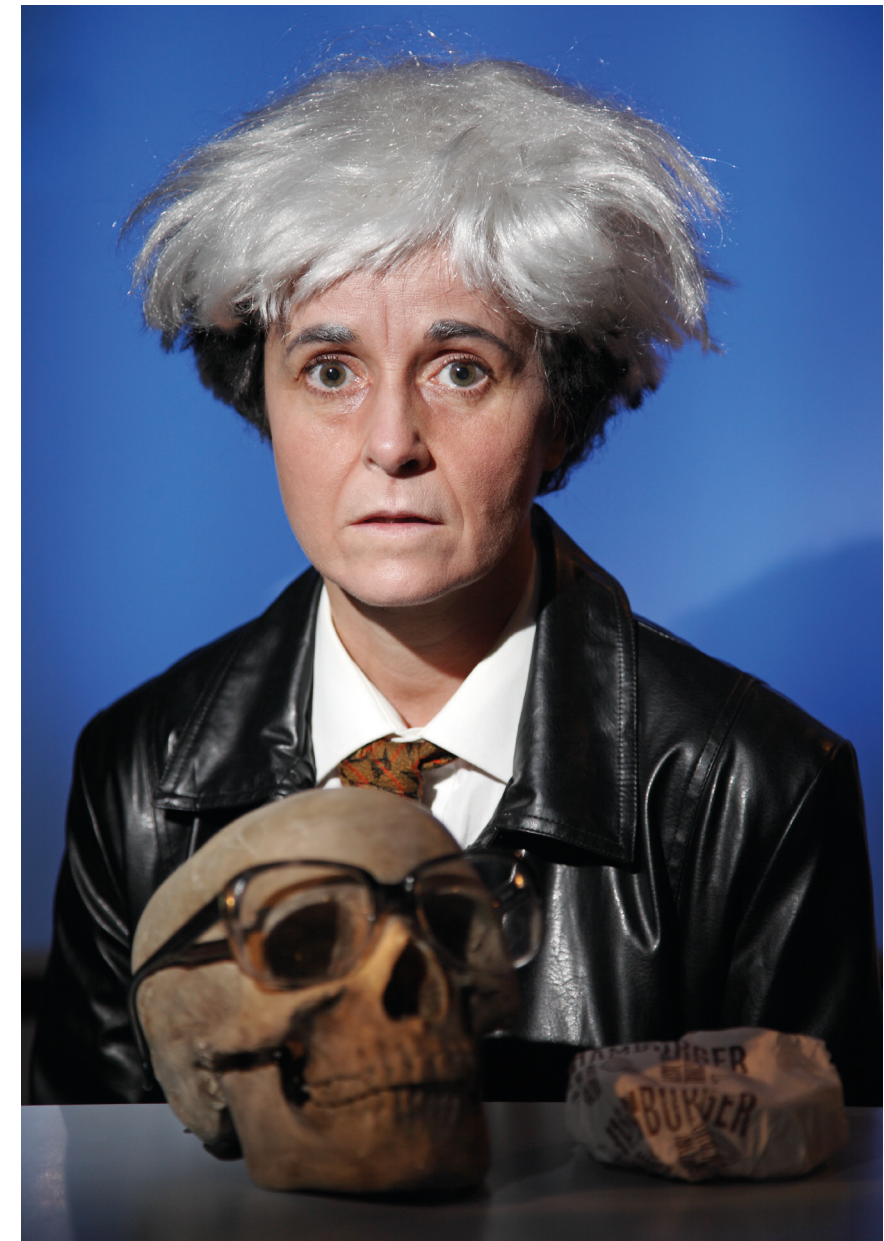


Andy Warhol and Ed Ruscha from Fake Fake Art (2012), Colour Inkjet Print, 30.5 x 24 cm,
courtesy the artist



Andreas Schmidt

Jessica Voorsanger



Andy Warhol (Amanda Root) (2010)

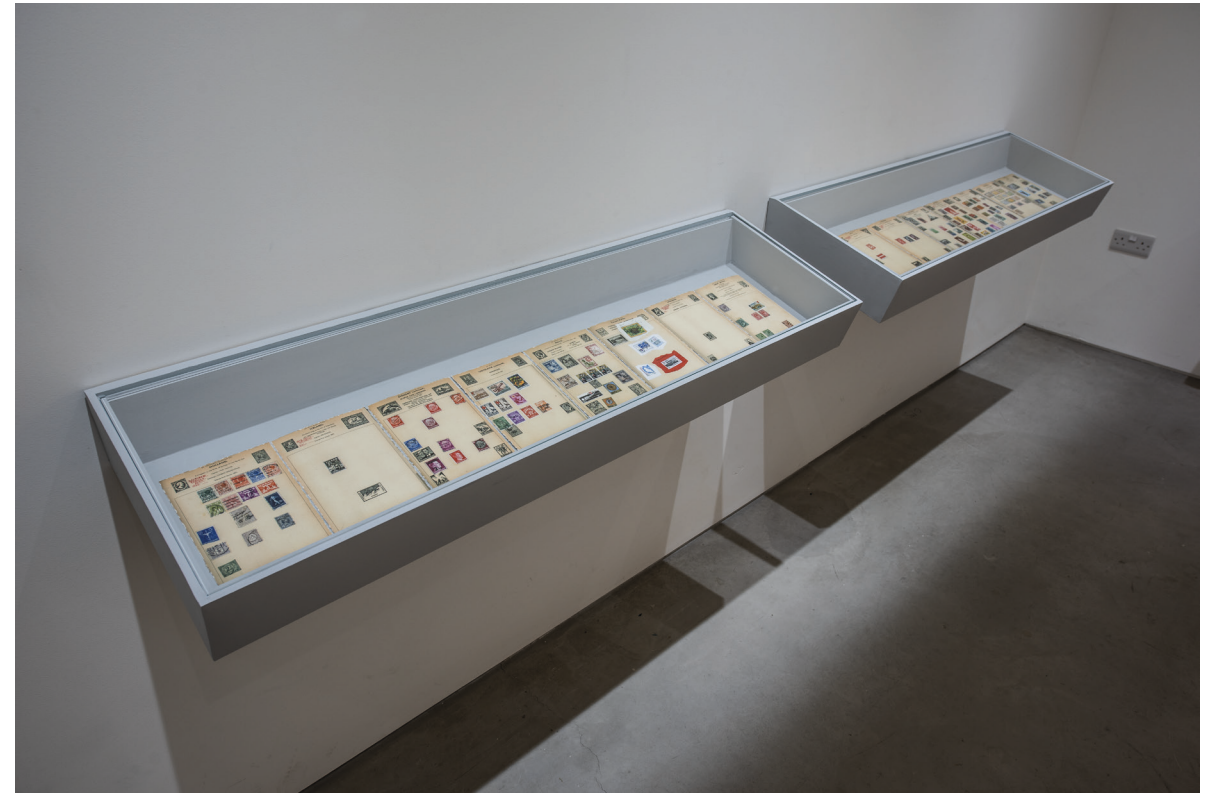
Inkjet print

124 x 86cm

Courtesy the artist

In association with the young people who participated in the Louis Vuitton Young Arts Project Summer Academy 2010.

Simon Patterson



Mikrokosmos
(2019)

Digitally collaged stamp collection and framed print
Courtesy the artist and School Gallery



Snake Hunt (2019)
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
145 x 200 x 5 cm
Courtesy the artist

Philip Colbert

Performing the memetic

All through Camera Lucida, the French writer Roland Barthes, writing in 1980 in his influential book on photography mourns for his recently departed mother. After her death, alone in the apartment they shared together, he studies all the old photographs of her that he can find – trying to find a particular image that will recapture her for him, trying to find out about the life she led, trying to know her. his mother. How disappointing the images seem to him as he searches, how incomplete, for how could these photographs re-animate the dead. These fleeting images preserve a mere shadow of time that has passed. The photograph contains a ‘defeat of time’ (Barthes 2000, p.96) - we see once living beings, but we are reminded that they are mortal, impermanent and that one day they will die. They are removed from their living, breathing, evolving context and embalmed in one pose, mortified for one brief moment of time.

Barthes argues that a photograph is indexical. It is defined through being a trace of that which once was. A photograph is a historical document, a ‘certificate of presence’ (Barthes 2000, p.87) a testament that something once existed. The correlation between truth and the visual has deep seated roots in our culture. Tom Gunning notes the original visual meaning of Eidos, the Greek word for idea (Gunning 1995, p.42), whereas Marina Warner points out that underpinning

of their ideas, the disembodied representations of who they once were. The works gathered together in Beg, Steal and Borrow show artists haunted by images and sounds from the mediated networks that surround them. From popular culture - the image of the rock star, the celebrity artist, the cartoon alter-ego, the classic Hollywood movie; from social media – the internet troll, the amateur adventurer; from history – the traumatic archival image, national or colonial symbol; from art history – the canonical work of art, these contemporary memes from Western consumer culture are echoed through the distorting mirror of the artists’ perspective and transmitted to the viewer.

The term ‘meme’ comes from Richard Dawkins book The Selfish Gene (1970) and is taken to mean a ‘unit of culture’ that behaves like a virus. A meme could be a visual symbol, a gesture, an idea, a belief, etc. It is a construct, not a truth and may have little basis in fact or evidence. The meme is hosted in the mind of an individual and then replicated and spread through culture until it is propagated in the minds of others as if it were a plague with a life force of its own. Transmitted via culture, the meme is, therefore, culturally (and historically) specific. Constantly infiltrating our consciousness, memes infect us to the extent that we internalise and embody them through repetitive rituals until they become real and idea becomes flesh.

The repetitive processes by which we form our gender identity from the cultural context we are part of has been theorised by Judith Butler as ‘performativity’. For Butler, performance is an act that defines our very being. The concept comes from her reading of linguistics in which a performative speech act is a phrase that has an audience and performs the act it

Western thought comes the deep rooted Christian notion that while magic and illusion are the work of the devil , the truth needs to be witnessed, to be seen with the naked eye. (Warner 2006, p.54) However, because something was once present in front of the camera and now appears in the photographic image, we are reminded that, although it was once true, it is from the past. Now the subject is absent and that time is no longer here.

Contrary to this idea of the documentary ‘truth’ of photography, the photographs and films included in Beg, Steal and Borrow certificate no presence. Rather they are testament and witness to borrowing, to stealing, to fakery. They do not attempt to present historical authenticity. In their re-presentation and re-performance of appropriated images and sounds, these works defy the logic of the indexical. Their reference is not to nature but to culture, not to self but to Other: to the ghosts of pervasive media that saturate our waking lives.

Interviewed in ‘Ghost Dance’ (dir. Ken McMullen, 1983, UK/ West Germany, Channel 4 Films), Jacques Derrida is asked if he believes in ghosts. He replies that in the film in which he appears he is the ghost. Furthermore, he says he himself is haunted by ghosts - haunted by the ghost of Marx, the ghost of Freud, the ghost of Kafka, the dematerialised body

describes, e.g. “I apologize”, “I bet you”, “I thee wed”, “I come out to you”. Butler develops this idea further. A performative act, in Butler’s terms, is an existential act in which one seeks to be- come that which one enacts. Butler further argues that our sense of self is a fragile construct that must be constantly performed as a role in order to be maintained.

Becoming celebrity, becoming artist, becoming imposter, becoming bully, becoming female, becoming cartoon – many of the works in this show directly engage with the physical re- performance of memes. The artist’s body becomes possessed by the meme: performatively embodying it rather than externalising it as representation.

- Birgitta Hosea, 2020

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