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On the heels of Modernism, I fall into a void where there is no individuality, no unique private world, no authorship or originality. I find myself not in utopia but dystopia. There is no space; there is no silence. All inventions have been invented and recombination replaces creation. I fight the void. Unable to focus on my present, I become incapable of representing my current experience except through things that already exist. I dredge the archives seeking new meaning through new combinations. A rapid rhythm of change accelerates as I move through the limited number of combinations. Empty space is filled up. I consume all. Time becomes fragmented. I become isolated, disconnected and discontinuous. Signifiers fail to link into coherent wholes. My mimicries of other styles and mannerisms are hollow. I pile up the appropriated fragments ceaselessly and empty them of their significance. The promise of new meaning evades me. The narrative stands still. My reality becomes that which is defined by media. Life is subordinate to the laws of the market. High and low culture merge. I sense loss. I drink Diet Coke “like a dog gets excited about going for a walk ON A LEASH.”¹ I define myself not by what I am but by what I am not. Who am I? I am Post modern.

SIGNIFIERS FAIL TO LINK INTO COHERENT WHOLE.

Post-modern art reflects post-modern culture. Two interrelated characteristics dominate Post-modern art—the pastiche and the allegorical.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs... [It is] the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion [devoid of its original meaning]...²

Where pastiche's borrowed imagery no longer references its original meaning because it has been lost to the common knowledge base, allegory's appropriated imagery is a form of extended metaphor in which an additional meaning, outside of the original, has been added. According to Craig Owens, the allegorist does not reinvent images but confiscates them and poses as interpreter. In the allegorist's hands, images becomes something other—not restoring original meaning but adding another often allusive meaning. The real meaning is often kept out of view and the viewer is left to collect the inten-

tions of the allegorist by the resemblance of the secondary meaning from the primary. Both Fredric Jameson's use of pastiche and Craig Owen's use of allegory can be seen in the Post-modern artists David Salle and Sigmar Polke.

DAVID SALLE | Salle was labeled a Neoexpressionist because of his appropriation of varied images and styles, attachment of real objects to canvases, and use of multiple canvases. Salle paints large-scale compositions [reference to the monumental works of modernism?] of oddly juxtaposed and layered images. These images are appropriated from soft porn, figure drawing courses, mass media, art history and everyday life. Within a single composition they are rendered in a variety of styles from gestural to photo-like. Additionally, objects such as a piece of furniture, a brassiere, and antlers are sometimes affixed to the canvas.

There is a complexity created from the appropriated images and styles that seems to create some kind of new meaning, some sort of personal narrative or reflection. No matter the source of appropriation, the original meaning is emptied from the compositions by these odd juxtapositions and combinations. Salle functions as an interpreter of some new meaning that seems to coalesce.

This can be seen in *An Illustrator Was There* (1981). On a large canvas (7x5 feet), in acrylic, are five images incongruously combined. Through transparency, style, and juxtaposition, it becomes unclear

as to which forms is foreground and which is background. The primary or central form, a nude female, replicates the look and feel of a black and white photograph. Composed in opposition to this form yet impinging on it is an upside down female with her back to viewer. It is rendered in the traditional style of figure drawing. An additional female form is presented gesturally. The gestural form appears as though sketched with pen and ink. It is offset to the upper right of the composition but still overlays the first two female forms. Another image, that of the grim-reaper, is painted in the New Image style of bad painting. It lies on top of the initial two forms as well but is positioned to the lower left. The final form, overlapping nothing, is a pale yellow dot.

The combined images and styles as well as the play between foreground and background seem to tell a story. There seems to be an added meaning beyond that of the images themselves. A sense of boredom, discontentment, hollowness and disillusionment has been created. Yet the viewer is thwarted in recombining the images into a coherent narrative—the overall meaning remains elusive. It appears to be an allegory with no conclusion.

The only meaning I find in this particular painting comes from the yellow dot. Salle seems to make an illusion to the German artist Sigmar Polke. Perhaps it is a confession that Salle appropriated [stole] his overall technique from Polke.

SIGMAR POLKE | Polke refuses to be defined by a particular mode or style. Skeptical of painting, image making, authority, rightness, and commodified art and artist, he makes the transition from Modern art to Post-modern art. He probes, explores, critiques, subverts and pokes fun at Modern and contemporary art via appropriation and recombination. Like Salle, or actually Salle like Polke, Polke uses images from contradictory or unexpected sources, historical and contemporary, and layers them one on top of the other. Things are further complicated by his use of various materials, traditional and untraditional, and various techniques.

This can be seen through a progression of his paintings. In *Moderne Kunst* (1968), Polke mocks high Modernism. He mixes a collection of signature styles—drips, geometric shapes, and the artists mark gestures—lumping them all together on a single canvas as though a kitsch poster display for Modernism. In *Bunnies* (1966), Polke uses the benday dot, the newsprint style halftone used in Lichtenstein's Pop Art. Unlike Lichtenstein, Polke's dots lose their uniformity and are subverted in order to manipulate the meaning of the image. This can be seen in the Playboy Bunnies' distorted red lips. Polke also placed his works in the everyday world by painting on decorative pre-printed fabrics. This can be seen in *Alice in Wonderland* (1971). The ground was composed of three strips of patterned (kitsch) fabric. It was drawn over with white appropriated images of classic etchings of Alice and the caterpillar as well as a basketball player. Within this painting Polke can be seen to be borrowing Francis Picabia's use of layering of a multitude of imagery. This layering liberates Polke's composition from coherent space/time/narrative. The mixing of second hand subject and style confounding the viewer.

The art of both Salle and Polke are dominated by these tendencies of pastiche and allegorical. They are characterized by the figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another...alluding to...referring to...something other than itself through the use of layered and oddly juxtaposed appropriated images from contemporary popular culture and history. They are Post-modern.

MY REALITY BECOMES THAT WHICH IS DEFINED BY MEDIA. I CONSUME ALL.

Post-modern art reflects post-modern culture. Post-modern art is also dominated by the reality created by media and mindless consumption. Artists embraced media and consumption as part of life or they explore/exploit/deconstruct the gap between the myth of the Moderne utopia of their birth and messy reality of life today.

CINDY SHERMAN | The self as an unfixed, perpetually shifting concept determined by culture, in turn, dictated by mass media is representative of Post-modern deconstruction. Within this context of deconstruction, Sherman presents herself via the photographic still in the series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980). In each image she recasts herself into a stereotypical role of a woman as shown in 1950s B-movies. The stop-action photographs appear as Hollywood publicity stills. The viewer is unable to determine who the real Sherman is because of the constantly shifting fictions of who she has reinvented herself to be. She wears an artificial construct culled from popular culture as a second skin—chameleon like. Bundle together, this series reveals an existing social order. Yet the social order

is not naturally occurring, but is an artificial construct of media. Media dictates reality. Sherman's work points out the falseness of this media reality. We sense the gap between the myth and real life. She has deconstructed our media reality.

ASHLEY BICKERTON | If Sherman deconstructs our media defined self, Bickerton embraces it as who we have become [with a bit of self-mockery]. With *Tormented Self-Portrait* (1987-1988), Bickerton created a slick machine-made looking box. He designed it to be self-contained with a built-in shipping cover, carrying handles, and mounting brackets. On the exterior he painstakingly painted a plethora of corporate logos of products he used or consumed. It looks similar to the back of an eighteen-wheeler truck that has every inch of the back doors plastered with assorted commercial logos. Bickerton mirrors our reality, "every space has been marked, touched, charted and cataloged... It's all been circumscribed and prepackaged and inscribed in the form of kitsch."³

Culled from the concepts of Duchamp's readymades, Warhol's mundane mass-produced goods, and minimalism's sculptures, Bickerton's constructs embrace, with a glossed sense of loss, our media defined selves.

JEFF KOONS | If Bickerton embraces our commodified culture with a bit of self-mockery, Koons embraces it with lust. Most critics characterize Koons' work as displaying our cultural lust for

commodities. This may be true, but at the root of that, I believe Koons commodifies lust itself. Koons' readymade, the *New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers* (1980) encased in minimalist structures reminiscent of display cases, taps into our lust for the new and pure. Do we really want the shampoo polishers? No. Do we want the new and pure? Sure. But it is not the highlighted, glamorized, everyday appliance or even what they represent that makes the piece work; it is our lust. He takes from popular culture things that can be had—ordinary consumer products—and remakes them into what appears to be luxury items. Yet the stainless steel of *Rabbit* (1986) and *Travel Bar* (1986) with their illusion of precious metal are a false luxury. They promise everything, but only deliver the reflection of the consumer being consumed. They are kitsch—low culture mimicking high. We buy into low consumer items billed as high art because of our lust.

Koons commodifies our lust. In the same way consumer products do, his art becomes manipulation, seduction and propaganda. "I believe in advertisement and media completely. My art and my personal life are based on it....advertisement defines people's perceptions of the world, of life itself, how to interact with others. The media defines reality." ⁴ Koons' art accurately reflects our culture in its "lust for." Yet culture does not always like to see its self reflection. We do not like to acknowledge our own lust. The *Made in Heaven* (1991) series pushed too far. The vulgar reflection we saw was not pretty or aesthetic, simply pornographic. Perhaps Koons was the excuse needed by congress to cut some of the funding to the arts.

I DREDGE THE ARCHIVES SEEKING NEW MEANING THROUGH NEW COMBINATIONS.

Post-modern art reflects post-modern culture. Aesthetic purity is no longer relevant. Utopia is not expected. Painting becomes accepted as viable within the plethora of artistic options. Abstraction carries meaning.

JESSICA STOCKHOLDER | Straddling painting and sculpture Stockholder's installations are assembled from found objects, commonplace consumer goods, and paint. She arranges these objects in such a way as to disconnect them from their initial function. Reality and fiction merge through her aesthetic gesture.

I place something I make in relationship to what's already there... I work on top of or in relation to stuff I collect... Form and formal relationship are important because they mean something; their meaning grows out of our experiences as physical mortal beings of a particular scale in relationship to the world as we find it and make it. I don't buy that formalism is meaningless. 5

The objects' shapes and colors interplay to create autonomous and formal abstractions. These abstractions are imbued with feels due to Stockholder's structural handling of color, both painted and that which is inherent in the objects. Electrical elements are also included with the connecting wires

becoming an active part of the artwork. This can all be seen in her site-specific installation at the Dia Center, *Your Skin in This Weather Bourne Eye—Threads & Swollen Perfume* (1995). The piece, filling the 4000 square foot gallery, was composed of readymade shapes and colors created by stacking crates, carpets, balls of yarn, yellow electric cords, stuffed shirts, plaster, paint, plus. A tension was formed between the recognizable objects themselves and the abstraction they create. It is as though one has entered an alternative abstracted world that has all the familiarity of home reflected.

INGRID CALAME | *Spalunk* (1997) goes the art in every since of the word. What appear to be expressionistic gestures and drips of black enamel upon Mylar are instead archived tracings of our human and mechanical footprint upon the streets [and sidewalks] of New York and Los Angeles.

I trace the lacy stains left by the evaporation of nameless liquids, their contours determined by the viscosity of the vanished fluid and the texture of the surface onto which it pools... Singling out the marks from the cement palimpsest of pedestrian life, I choose each for its aesthetic appeal, the expression quality of the organic or mechanical gesture, that it made. 6

Calame also measures each stain, recording its source location and retrieval date, and then archives the stain for future use. She then transfers the stains in a premeditative fashion to large transpar-

ent sheets of Mylar, tracing every splatter, trickle and drip of the original. The stains are arranged compositionally. The sheets are hung from the walls and are so large they cascade out on to the floor. Calame literally reflects back to us a portion of our culture.

POLLY APFELBAUM | Apfelbaum places her works directly upon the floor. These compositions, such as *Eclipse* (1996) and *Reckless* (1998), of hundreds of small irregular pieces of crushed velvet, saturated in color, are placed upon the floor in a chaotic but almost geometric arrangement. Calling to mind the beauty of subcellular elements that can be seen through an electron microscope, they appear to grow and move like a self-generating organism. Like Stockholder, Apfelbaum's pieces seem to be both painting and sculpture. The colors seem to be pulled from popular culture—TV, magazines, and product packaging. These colors are key elements in Apfelbaum's work. They function to enhance the chaotic organic nature and beauty of the works. Furthermore the organic shapes and color seem referential to the color plumes of the Color Field painters and Pollock's drip paintings. The pieces come across as intellectual and sensual. Let us hope that this is reflective of our culture.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Richard Phillips, "Ashley Bickerton," *Journal of Contemporary Art* 2, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1989).
- 2 Dana Padgett, "Contemporary Painting" Lecture Series. University of Houston, Spring 2004.
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Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism & Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic*.
- 3 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.
Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- 4 Phillips, "Ashley Bickerton."
- 5 Koons quoted in Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*.
- 6 Claus Ottman interview with Jessica Stockholder (1991), *Journal of Contemporary Art-Online*.
Retrieved May 4, 2004 from <http://www.jca-online.com/archive.html>
- 7 Ingrid Calame, statement from Selections Winter 98, New York: The Drawing Center, 1998.
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OTHER RESOURCES

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Ashley Bickerton

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Ingrid Calame

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