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JONATHAN MONK

02 – 31 October 2026

A game of concealments

In a world saturated by images, where the quest to prove one's identity becomes a matter of performance, Jonathan Monk reminds us that who we are is an accumulation of past lives and experiences, of our own and those of others. Identity is not a fragile concept in the sense that it cannot be broken. Identity is a matter of appropriation.

Known for his playful approach, Monk often questions the legacy of conceptual art by revisiting seminal works with humour and critique. Spanning from sculpture, painting and photography to film and installation, his practice challenges notions of originality in an attempt to demystify the creative process itself. Speaking in 2009, he said, "Appropriation is something I have used or worked with in my art since starting art school in 1987. At this time (and still now) I realised that being original was almost impossible, so I tried using what was

already available as source material for my own work."

At the core of Monk's work is his interest in signs and language. In his presentation in Athens, he invites the viewer to reflect on the value of art and consequently on the values that drive society. In *Used Cars*, the artist plays with the idea of social, material and cultural value. Revisiting the consumer's society own obsession with the sign-value of commodities vs their use-value, Monk sets up a playful installation where the sign is equated with its signifier. The prices of the colourful neon signs follows the prices of used cars in or around the specific area they are shown, fluctuating every time they are exhibited. Using the material culture of a city as a starting point, the artist comments on a social and cultural status always in flux.

Similarly, in his older series *People I have met*, also featured in the show, the artist uses correction fluid to erase the information displayed on a business

card. By concealing their information, Monk intervenes in the circulation of the cards while also changing the status of their subjects. In a world of appearances, where the image of a person is often more important than the person itself, what exactly do we choose to remember about the people we meet? The choice of cheap material in the framing of the cards further extends the ephemeral aspect that forms our social relations.

Adopting various, often ephemeral forms, Monk's practice is an ongoing exploration of the self. The last work in the exhibition, *Self Portrait in Blond Hair*, is an enigmatic figure with almost no features, an open form that gets completed by that which remains concealed. A work stays hidden inside the pedestal that holds the figure: the remaining "o's". Serving as a self-portrait the work takes us back to the artist's most pertinent question 'what next?'.