

REEL 2 REAL
Xenia Lesniewski
& René Wagner

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BLOWIN' MONEY FAST: ON REEL 2 REAL

“The best of the intellectual and creative speculation carried on in the west over the past hundred and fifty years seems incontestably the most energetic, dense, subtle, sheerly interesting, and true in the entire lifetime of man. And yet, the equally incontestable result of all of this genius is our sense of standing in the ruin of thought and on the verge of the ruins of history and of man himself. (Cogito ergo boom). More and more, the shrewdest thinkers and artists are precocious archaeologists of these ruins-in-the-making, indignant or stoical diagnosticians of movements useful for individual survival in an era of permanent apocalypse.”

Susan Sontag, “Thinking against oneself: Reflections on Cioran”, 1966

Santiago Serra, the Spanish conceptual artist responsible for dreaming a line of tattoos across the backs of seated women, designs for the Spring/Summer 2023 Balenciaga runway show an infernal environment composed of piles of peat and mud. This premieres in October of 2022. Models walk through this wasteland, focused, and increasingly corrupted, damaging hundred of thousands of euros worth of haute couture. This is the height of excess. These are the riders on the storm, these bodies and this laissez faire arrogance which comes only with the ironies of the theatrics of late neoliberal capitalism. In 2015, the Demna Gvasalia assumes control of the fashion house which has come to define the aesthetics of urban boredom and the posturing of “nothing for everything”. Near this year, Rene Wagner and Xenia Lesniweski both begin (in parallel) certain artistic practices which they emulate and annunciate to this day, and within this exhibition. Gvasalia advocates the protagonism which renders any wearer of his designs both important and equivalently forgettable. This contradiction in terms is what makes Balenciaga sellable. The label is the wearer and the wearer makes the label.

Perhaps, this is true of any mode of appropriating value; it is also the death a meritocracy which saw its decline in the post-war indecencies of mass production and the subsequent rise of corporate identities which implement ever convincing regimes of image, status, and function. Rene Wagner takes his position in the midst of the complexities of the “brand as fetish”. In using his own name as a privatised yet publicly accessible tuning label, the artist totemizes and advertises himself while hiding his artistic agenda. Using this strategy while wielding a high level of craftsmanship, Wagner also manages to reveal the epic descent of the cult of the artist, which sees its fragmentation in the bipolarity between the rhetorical state of authorship in 2023 and an imagined A.I. future. Spending time with Wagner’s colourful, iridescent, even flashy vessels and objects is to stand under the burning sun in an unwritten and holographic cross-edit between Mad Max, Koyaanisqatsi, and an assemblage of Young Thug music videos. Some score which combines broken

remnants of Erik Satie and A\$AP Rocky and is playing from speakers in the sky, and we are unsure where all the humans have gone. What is left behind, in the sand, is the warped label, “Rene Wagner”. These are artifacts of the last attempt of humanity to make sense of itself in Technicolor.

Meanwhile, a woman enters the scene searching for a way of documenting the unseen stars, the common celebrities that prove Kim Kardashian’s empire is a fake. Xenia Lesniewski, uses the word “ultra” and the phrase “ultra contemporary” to describe her role in this sea of displaced acts of self-promotion. Lesniewski uses her femininity as a weapon and shield, while robbing the public sphere of its titles of ownership. Finding Audis, Mercedes, BMWs or Land Rovers and using them as pedestals, sofas, chairs, backdrops, we see both a satire of a slavish Americanity and a direct confrontation of the logic “my life my rules, my Benz my power”. One could ask the question, “and if it’s not yours, can you still use it, and furthermore, can you make it into art?”. Lesniewski’s answer is perplexingly current, and her work coerces a radical affirmation of anything and everything being the material and the substance of an artwork; such that the elite aesthetics of “blowin’ money fast” are equivalently available (even if by proxy performance), to anyone, anywhere, anytime. It’s a photograph, and it can be stolen, just as the artist refuses to fully objectify herself while being the central subject of the work.

Wagner and Lesniewski incarnate critical intervention, both with their artistic practices and with the ideologies which guide their production. The public is affected, just as the artists let themselves become the material upon which interrogation can be enacted. Sometimes what can be taken apart can only be put back together differently and reconfiguring elements can be a radical form of generosity. Both artists offer tools for dissecting and composing selfhood in the tidal wave of commodity that includes consciousness as product. As Susan Sontag so aptly wrote in 1966, the artist is not only responsible for reflecting on uncertainty as a principle, but also uniquely qualified to devise strategies for managing social, economic, cultural, and spiritual decay. Attention itself is not a sufficient antidote to the seismic confusion of our times, and the return of the hero and heroine may be necessary. “Reel 2 Real”, is not a myth of an exhibition, nor is it a proposal for seeing differently, it is a luminescent answer to the problem of being contemporary.

Josseline Black / January 2023

Xenia Lesniewski & René Wagner **REEL 2 REAL**

Xenia Lesniewski (*1985, Frankfurt am Main) studied painting, experimental animation film and tapestry with Judith Eisler at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and visual communication at the HfG, Offenbach. Lesniewski has participated in numerous national and international exhibitions.

Solo exhibitions have included the Dortmunder Kunstverein, MLAG Bergen and Quartier21 in Vienna. She has presented her video works at the Berlinale, the International Film Festival Rotterdam and several times at the Rencontres Internationales Berlin/Madrid/Paris. Lesniewski's work with the artist collective Club Fortuna has been shown at the 12th Krasnoyarsk Museum Biennale in Siberia, as part of the collateral events of MANIFESTA 12 in Palermo, and most recently at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb.



o. T. (MB 02), 2022

Ed. of 3 + 2AP

Fine art-print on premium-photopaper on alu-dibond

119 x 84 cm



o. T. (A 02), 2022

Ed. of 3 + 2AP

Fine art-print on premium-photopaper on alu-dibond
84 x 119 cm



o. T. (LR 01), 2022

Ed. of 3 + 2AP

Fine art-print on premium-photopaper on alu-dibond
119 x 84 cm



o. T. (BMW 03), 2022

Ed. of 3 + 2AP

Fine art-print on premium-photopaper on alu-dibond
84 x 119 cm



o. T. (A 04), 2022

Unique piece

Fine art-print on 180 g nonwoven wallpaper

330 x 233 cm



o. T. (BMW 01), 2022

Unique piece

Fine art-print on 180 g nonwoven wallpaper

330 x 279 cm

Xenia Lesniewski & René Wagner **REEL 2 REAL**

René Wagner (*1983, Gera) lives and works in Kassel. In 2019 he graduated with honors in fine arts at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, already since 2016 he has been an artistic assistant to Prof. Stephan Balkenhol.

Wagner deals with the idea of branding, commercial framework and inspiration of sports teams and sponsors. He uses a multimedia approach that critiques the artist as brand. His particular use of ceramics restores a medium with historical weight; his vases are designed to carry narratives and emblems of mythical or social significance, but also serve a superficial decorative application.

Solo exhibitions by Wagner have included the Kreuzberg Pavilion in Berlin, 2021 and group exhibitions have taken place across Europe, i.e. at Kunstverein Kassel (2018), Kunsthalle Ost, Leipzig (2019), Museum auf Zeit (initiated by Heiner Blum), Offenbach and at the past Documenta fifteen, A Landscape MAP, both 2022. Early 2023 he will have a solo show at Fridericianum, Kassel.



o.T., 2018
Keramik, Lack, Sticker
45 x 33 cm



o.T., 2018
Keramik, Lack, Sticker
h 23 x Ø 17 cm



o.T., 2022
Metal, Lack
h 25 x Ø 15 cm



Meisten Felge, 2018
Ceramics, lacquer
Ø 44 cm



rotes Bild Volvo schneewittchensarg, 2022
Car paint on mdf
60 x 50 cm



T6 multivan, 2022
Car paint on mdf
60 x 50 cm



Niki Lauda, 2018
Car paint on mdf
50h x 59w cm



Suzuki, 2020
Ceramic, lacquer, stickers
37 x 15 x 15d cm



o.T., 2017
Ceramics, lacquer, stickers
25 x Ø 12.50 cm



o.T., 2022
Ceramics, lacquer
28 cm x Ø 14 cm



BMW, 2017
Ceramics, lacquer, stickers
30 cm x Ø 13 cm



o.T., 2022
Metal lacquer
25 cm x Ø 15cm



o.T., 2019
Ceramic, lacquer, stickers
24,5 cm x Ø 14,5 cm



Manta Manta, 2017
Ceramic, lacquer, stickers
30 cm x Ø 14 cm



Michelin, 2023
Ceramics, lacquer, stickers
23,5 cm x Ø 11



o.T., 2022
Car paint on Metal
56 cm x 46 cm



o.T., 2022
Car paint on Metal
56 cm x 46 cm



o.T., 2022
Car paint on Metal
56 cm x 46 cm