

*The Cable Guys* presents works by four artists: Alice Channer, Paul Sharits, Seth Price and Spiros Hadjidjanos. As indicated by its title, the exhibition relies on various appropriative tendencies, yet it does not seek to undermine the (already undermined) notions of creativity, artistic signature and unalienated labor. In this way it bypasses the institutional discourse of appropriation art and the outdated distinction between authentic, singular authorship and authorship as problematized or critical act.

The reference to cable television via the movie *The Cable Guy*, a famous 1996 Hollywood comedy starring Jim Carrey, provides the exhibition with a concrete historical atmosphere, taking us back to the foundational cultural moment before the Internet, wireless communication, and their derivative by-products went global. Due to additional political shifts and further technological developments, the world has become fully codified – digitally converted into basic, abstracted units of impersonal information, from which endless flows of detached and indifferent images are rendered. Today, when “raw data is regarded as a ‘natural’, or at least a naturalized resource to be mined,” in the words of David Joselit, the world can be perceived as an adjustable found image, a seemingly-diverse yet vastly equalized, all-encompassing bank of existing images.

The opening installation of the exhibition is Spiros Hadjidjanos’ *Network Sculptures* (2010-2014), lain across the floor of the gallery’s entrance hall. Each of the two sculptures is an arrangement of four pairs of curvy aluminum rods in a double-helix pattern, recalling a three-dimensional diagrammatic representation of sine waves. Ethernet cables emerge from either end of each sculpture, connecting them with each other and to the gallery’s LAN (Local Area Network), which is transmitted through the rods. The cables tell us that these sculptures are more than meets the eye; they are operative conductors of digital data, processing all the information that goes through the gallery’s network during the exhibition’s time frame. They are a spatial installation of moving bits, each a time-based performance of network information.

The works comprising *The Cable Guys* are generated by technologically predetermined processes, inherently devoid of positivist artistic engagement. Nevertheless, the intentional artistic disengagement from the programmed execution of the works enables the excluded artists to distribute and assimilate themselves into the operative logic of their applied technologies. These modes of desubjectivized artistic production follow the precedence of Andy Warhol’s silkscreen technique, but unlike Warhol, whose automated methods of self-mechanization incorporated the artist’s body reflexes into the procedure, these artists avoid any kind of productive bodily intervention. Their art practice is subjected to a system-like interaction between input and output, or in other words, blends the difference between art and non-art, only in order to redraw attention to

what eventually makes the difference.

Technologically modifiable images are quantitative, unfixed configurations of data. The circulation of an image through and between networks could be considered a metabolic transformation, where reproduction equals decomposition. In *Hostage Video Still with Time Stamp*, a series of works begun in 2005, Seth Price thematizes the different stages of an image moving inside and outside communication systems as a set of biological transitions. In the works the image of a decapitated head is employed to signify the physical implications of extracting a still image from video footage, which the artist found on the internet. He then stretches and pixelates the decapitated image up to the limits of legibility in order to signify its disintegration into transformed data units. The unrolled bolt of a transparent polyester film, upon which the image is screenprinted with roadsign paint, demonstrates the absorption, or the disappearance of the image's tissue through consumption. The crumpled accident-like installation of the printed transparent film spatializes the erosive distribution of the image.

Projected onto the wall in front of *Hostage Video Still* is Paul Sharits' 16-millimeter film *Mandala Piece / End War* (1966). Sharits, who died in 1992, was a leading figure in the history of American independent cinema and projected film installation. His radical experimentation with the medium of the filmic image comes from a pre-digital world, but in this context his work serves as a unique example of how material, technology, content, and cognition have become one. *Mandala Piece / End War* belongs to Sharits' early period of "flicker" films, during which he reorganized kinetic cinema and its illusion of uninterrupted motion. Rosalind Krauss described these films as a series of "optical pulsations caused by short bursts of visual information," with rapid shifts of chromatic patterns. Sharits insistently rejected the idea that projecting 24 frames per second would result in successive movement correlated to persistence of vision, and by relating to each frame as a separate field of color, texture, and information units, he emphasized the intermittent movement between light and darkness, motion and stasis, progression and repetition.

Alice Channer's freestanding printed fabrics are strange entities that blur the categories of the human, the vegetative, and the still. The images they feature are representations of representations, substitutes of substitutes. They are peculiar forms of alienation quickly converted into an act of actualization: images interact in real space, visual signs become tactile presences, and the flat fabric supporting all this printed material becomes a living area, a habitat. *Tidal Wave* (2013), Channer's installation for the middle space of the exhibition, is a long sheet of dress fabric pouring down from ceiling to floor. A crowded pattern of smooth hair is printed on top, giving the effect of hair tumbling down upon the fabric, into space. Images of two gigantic bottles of shampoo are printed on

top of the hair pattern, as if pulled from the water of the sea's rising and lowering tide. Channer's technological practice excludes the body from the processes but at the same time it generates embodiments of another, strangely divided, anti-hierarchical order.

#### References:

1. David Joselit, What to Do with Pictures, October 138, Fall 2011, MIT Press
2. Markus Kramer, Photographic Objects, Kehrer Verlag 2012
3. Rosalind Krauss, in Paul Sharits: Dream Displacement and Other Projects, exh. cat., Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York 1976
4. Susanne Pfeffer, Speculations on Anonymous Materials (exh. text), Fridericianum Kassel 2013

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