

Greene Naftali is pleased to present the group exhibition *Thinking of readymades belong to everyone*®. In 1987, the French artist Philippe Thomas (1951–1995) founded the agency readymades belong to everyone® as a conduit by which collectors became authors of the artworks they acquired. This exhibition brings together a group of figures who participated in this gesture, the attendant body of work that underwent this transaction, and ephemera related to the agency that marketed a place in art history in exchange for financial endorsement of an artwork. The exhibits in this show can be considered as pieces of fiction, variously attributed to Thomas, the agency, and acquirers, and thus represent the highly composed body of work of an artistic figure whose most decisive act was that of self-erasure.

The ideas that surround Thomas and his agency can be clearly connected to other related thinkers—including Marcel Duchamp and Marcel Broodthaers, as well as writers such as Fernando Pessoa and Maurice Blanchot—yet are updated to respond to the 1980s phenomena of the accelerated market and the figure of the art star. Moreover, Thomas’s strategies were disseminated within a market framework, debuting readymades belong to everyone® first at Cable Gallery, New York, then at Claire Burrus, Paris. Thomas reassigned the value of the commodity being traded—authorship supplanting art object—but never renounced the systems that kept art in circulation. Operating within the market yet subverting its capital, readymades belong to everyone® is also aligned with the strategies of institutional critique: in Daniel Bosser’s text Philippe Thomas declines his identity, the eponymous—and effaced—character recites Benjamin Buchloh’s defining statement that “the essential feature of modernist art is to criticize itself from within.”

Among the works on view at Greene Naftali are two triptychs, each a set of identical photographs of the Mediterranean Sea, titled *Sujet à discrétion (Subject to discretion)* (1985). Created two years prior to the establishment of readymades belong to everyone®, each trio is nonetheless rendered unique by the implication of a collector: Claire Burrus signs one photograph in one set, Jean Brolly does the same to distinguish the other group, each is accompanied by a title card declaring it a self portrait and *vue de l’esprit* (view of the mind). A second photograph is signed by Thomas and also designated a self portrait, a third is left blank and anonymous. With the collector, rather than the artist, distinguishing each work, *Sujet à discrétion* initiates the disappearance of Thomas behind the figure of the collector, and, more broadly, diminishes the myth of the artist’s original genius.

Representing the completed transactions facilitated by readymades belong to everyone® are enlarged, painted barcodes on canvas by Armand Bartos, Jr.®, Céline Cazals®, Yvonne Fischer®, and Vincent Wapler®. Adopting a widely circulated iconography that directly denotes commerce, yet also codes a singular identity, the collector-authors acquire an object that is at once serial and

one of a kind.

Also on view are works by the agency itself, including *La pétition de principe* (*The petition of principle*), 1988, an installation comprising the trappings of an office—a houseplant, a well-stocked display of business cards, a guest book, a promotional poster advertising the services of readymades belong to everyone®. Created for the launch of the French subsidiary of readymades belong to everyone®, the poster declares, “Avec nous, vous trouverez toutes les facilités pour laisser définitivement votre nom associé à une oeuvre qui n'aura attendu que vous, et votre signature, pour devenir réalité.”—“With us, you will find all the facilities you need to have your name definitively linked with a work of art, a work that will have been waiting only for you and your signature to be called into being.” *Thinking of...*, a 1993 work, also by readymades belong to everyone®, pictures a selection of collector-collaborators at an outdoor café in Venice, “*thinking of*” the collector-collaborators absent in the photograph. Attributing the work to the agency itself, readymades belong to everyone® is consciously implicated into art history.

Thomas’s output comprises a carefully staged narrative, one in which key figures are selectively foregrounded. The 1989 novel *Insights*, attributed to Laura Carpenter, offers the following assessment of art history:

The history of art is fiction ... Artists are seen as “characters” and their works as “events” which fatten the anthologies ... The one question the scope of this statement: where does the situation it describes begin and end? What if we question the “truth”? That is when its status as an affirmation begins to be undermined ... The same applies to the agency [readymades belong to everyone®]. I say it serves “a fiction in search of characters.” Does that imply that it remains outside that fiction?”

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