

Not With Symbols

Eberhard Havekost
Taro Masushio
Alan Michael
Josephine Pryde
Raha Raissnia

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The world of magazines and flat screens is a world that has been reframed, whose depiction favors the close-up and the telephoto lens; a world so zoomed-in that it ends up being two-dimensional with no depth of field. All planes have equal value, each one obliterating the next.

— Jean-Charles Vergne

Metaphor cannot supplant the legible image and assume the role of descriptor. Ours is a distorted reality, in which images are compressed, flattened beneath glass and gloss, and lit from behind. Here, images and their meanings or representations are slippery, as are the ocular and cognitive processes we rely on to perceive and comprehend them. Despite this, logic is not abandoned altogether in favor of a nonsensical miasma of free association. Rather image itself is probed and worked to such a degree that it both dissolves and reifies within (or in spite of) its own physical, technological, political and social structures.

Ideas of legibility and readability are often at odds with the level of access granted by each of these artists. Some achieve this internally by preventing a clear understanding of their content through omission, redaction, and dilution. Others pack in detail, clarity, and specificity to such a degree that viewers are subconsciously compelled to decode the image through pure visual recognition. No matter the approach, these artists each exploit the innate structures of *image* and *representation* to expose our social and biological compulsions for resolution.

Eberhard Havekost's *Flatscreen* paintings push representation and legibility to their visual limits, engulfing the surface in a flat expanse of black and grey. The monochromatic abstract field is interrupted, however, by slivers of information from the outside world which communicate a secondary condition of the image and its origins as a realistically rendered television screen. Existing somewhere between a mirror and a retina, these painted screens tease out many of the underlying conceptual motivations that permeate the artist's practice, including a reliance on and adherence to digital imagery; a negotiation between this digital source material and the analog, surface-conscious medium of painting; and a preoccupation with the manner in which people perceive and amass images in a digitally mediated society. Much like the video still burned into a plasma screen long after losing electrical power, these tropes and impulses continue to manifest as persistent images throughout Havekost's work.

Taro Masushio reveals the kinetic dimension of images by drawing attention to their various modes of circulation and subsequent transformations. His UV prints on cardboard emphasize their own material and indexical (un)reality, accumulating as much as they conceal as they are propelled through space-time. Each successive step in their creation — beginning with the images' initial capture by the artist's father — acts as a sort of doubling or reflection which amplifies their emotional content and perceived significance, while also further obfuscating the presence of any one person or position involved. Masushio's redacted inkjet print undergoes a similar temporal and arithmetic process of addition and subtraction, a reflexive sequence which produces and negates itself with each consecutive encounter or intervention. This oscillation charges the image and imbues within it a speculative potential energy that further thrusts it along its new trajectory.

Alan Michael is similarly concerned with perception and the place that images occupy within a culture of instability. In Michael's work, fidelity and legibility seem to function only insofar as signifiers which allow a spectator to comprehend the social conditions which have led to the painting's creation. In other words, the very nature of how Michael realistically renders his "proxy images" points to (and is indicative of) the conditions of labor, visibility, and socialized perception that enabled their making in the first place. The trio of friends depicted in two of his paintings on view are thus themselves a proxy for any number of social scenes and the intricate dynamics they facilitate, embody, and perpetuate. By exaggerating detail while stripping away context, Michael subtly manipulates our compulsion to assign meaning, value, and narrative to images. We are then confronted not by a vacuous, mimetic rendition of the surface world we inhabit, but by a societal structure within which we are already (perhaps unconsciously) situated, one which precisely determines our understanding and interpretation of these images with which we are inundated daily.

Josephine Pryde explores the conditions of image making and the effect that modes of display have on our unconscious reception of them. Pryde takes advantage of the iconographic and linguistic potential of images in tandem with their ever apparent (and at times confrontational) visual appeal. Her embrace and exploitation of seriality and the aesthetic codes of commercial photography (i.e. fashion, product, stock) elude immediate interpretation while also suggesting a broader analytical framework that undergirds her work. To identify with the expressionless guinea pigs in these portraits is to indict oneself; to be stirred by Pryde's emotive and meticulous staging is a further confession. Within these works we witness the reciprocal and simultaneous technological and biological processes which generate and interpret images. There is a reflexive nature at play between the apparatus of photography and the ocular system of the viewer, each of which are intrinsically bound up in conversations of inscription, translation, and projection. In many ways, and much like Havekost's paintings, Pryde's images seem to exist in a space between (or perhaps beyond) perception and cognition. She adroitly occupies this space, situating her images within a dissociative yet decidedly critical locus.

Raha Raissnia's paintings, drawings, and films also maintain a self-reflexive relationship, adopting subtle cues while also physically bleeding into one another. Raissnia's paintings are constantly informed by her filmic and photographic work in not only their content and form, but also by the very nature of their creation. Often developed through a prolonged series of direct exposure or transfer, elimination, negation, and modification, the images from which her drawings and paintings arise undergo numerous stages of transformation before their eventual display. In doing this, Raissnia considers the inarticulable and imperceptible qualities of image production through physical intervention. Images are layered and suspended within one another as the process of construction itself becomes yet another elusive act, hindering any holistic perception or interpretation. This layering of imagery also alludes to the "paradoxical structure" of film: that is, how film creates the illusion of movement through the rapid, successive perception and manipulation of stillness. Raissnia upends this linearity and compresses the durational element of film into a flat, material expression of time. This negation complicates not only the position that film holds within Raissnia's practice, but also the autonomy of images and our ability to comprehend them.