

Art Critical of the Art Market and its Surrogates

The exhibition *Art Critical of the Art Market and its Surrogates* features artwork by Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Andrea Fraser, Guerilla Girls, Hans Haacke, Vermeir & Heiremans, Cameron Rowland, and Hito Steyerl — artists known for their critique of market influences on art.

Vermeir & Heiremans' *Masquerade* (2015) and Cameron Rowland's *Pass-Thru* (2014) address the natural perversions of capitalist transaction. *Masquerade* highlights the peculiar nature of what Mark Fisher calls capitalist realism by applying commercial techniques to 'sell the artist' as a brand—an approach which we would otherwise take for granted if we were being pitched a vacuum cleaner for example. Vermeir & Heiremans direct the audience's attention to the element of capitalist transaction embedded in the global art market, unless capitalist realism has saturated so much of reality that the irony goes unnoticed. *Pass-Thru* invites us to consider a perspex bulletproof exchange carousel, removed from its normal context, and interrogate it as a manifestation of the necessity of inequality for capitalism to function. As a material artifact of the capitalist system,¹ the bulletproof exchange carousel enforces the normalized notion that property is at risk in environments afflicted by economic inequality. In environments where one could plausibly argue that poverty and other forms of inequality are imposed, enterprising capitalists will market an escape from poverty (through the sale of alcohol or lottery tickets for example) to poor consumers in order to profit from them. The bulletproof exchange carousel's existence simultaneously requires and perpetuates the condition of poverty. In contexts marked by structural poverty, the carousel facilitates transactions in which the product, the risk of theft, and the need for protection are all symptoms of the same socio-economic condition. Like Vermeir & Heiremans, Rowland displays the normalized elements and materials of capitalist transactions for our interrogation.

This notion of a necessary condition of inequality for capitalism to function also presents itself through Andrea Fraser's work *L'1%, C'est moi* (2011) which documents the modes of profit and philanthropic activities of the art market's leading collectors and how their financial power affects the art world, making it clear as she says that "If we look at the incomes of this class, it is conspicuous that their profits are based on the growth of income inequality all over the world." In this essay Fraser acknowledges that within a reality shaped by capitalism, "Any claim that we represent a progressive social force while our activities are directly subsidized by the engines of inequality can only contribute to the justification of that inequality – the (not so) new legitimization function of art museums."² In this cutting documentary work, Fraser investigates and calls attention to the art market's role in perpetuating structural economic inequality.

¹ Beyond material artifacts, social artifacts of capitalism that are produced by and bolster structural inequality include classism, racism and sexism for example. Economist Ruth Wilson Gilmore adds that "capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it." (Geographies of Racial Capitalism directed by Kenton Card, Digital video)

² Andrea Fraser, "L'1%, C'est moi" (2011).

Not unlike Fraser's presentation that appears less like a traditional artwork and more like a financial report, Marcel Broodthaers presents works that are framed by the language and the aesthetics of business and address the notion of 'value.' Broodthaers presents a gold bar that may be purchased for its material value as a commodity and its cultural value as an artwork simultaneously, implying that these two types of valuation are one and the same in the eyes of a capitalist. Broodthaers' paired prints, *Museum - Museum*, feature a grid of gold bars with names of artists (Magritte, Ingres, Duchamp, etc.) beneath the gold bars and in the accompanying print features commodities (gasoline, sugar, tobacco, etc.), representing artwork reduced to commodities. Capitalist commodification in the realm of business has seeped into art museums, which are rarely public. Although frequently presented as institutions driven by public interests, private art museums are influenced by the aims of boards often overseen by individuals driven by the interests of the market, as Fraser demonstrates. Private museums benefit from the market assigning monetary value to artworks when it validates the cultural value of their own collections and when their leadership uses their powers to benefit personally (lucrative tax write offs, raising the value of their own art, and art washing, for example). Broodthaers brings this reality into focus for the art viewer.

Additionally, *Museum - Museum* questions the value of originality imposed by museums. *Museum - Museum* includes along the bottom row of both prints the words "Imitation," "Copy," "False," and "Original," assigning an implied relational value to each object dependent on the viewer's understanding of what each term means in the museum space. Within a capitalist framework, the "copy" must be denounced as devoid of value to protect the capital of the owner. The cultural and monetary values of original artworks have thus become inflated, with museums and its scholars becoming arbiters of value. With this work, Broodthaers blurs this notion of authority. Throughout his career, Broodthaers' faux museums, text and image artworks, and installations, have critiqued economic and cultural constructs to challenge the presumed notions of value.

Similar to the irony of Vermeir & Heiremans's presentation of art as a financial instrument, Hans Haacke presents quotes from prominent business leaders designed for display. The quotes include Robert Kingsley's declaration that art is a "social lubricant" and Nelson Rockefeller's declaration, "My appreciation of art is esthetic rather than intellectual. I'm not really concerned with what the artist means." The presentation of matter-of-fact statements by business leaders simultaneously on the boards of museums and international corporations are concerned with art's capital utility. We might assume that in a museum context, audiences who understand the significance of art in our societies can discriminate between business interests concerning art's value and its actual power, however the satirical nature of the work may be lost within the paradigm of capitalist realism.

Asher's *Renovation = Eviction / Rénovation = Expulsion* (1991) addresses both materiality similar to Broodthaers' work and the question of utility as introduced by Haacke. In the interest of upholding a critique of the capitalist position on housing, Asher repurposed the metal of the furnaces of renovated residential buildings for underserved residents. With the material, he cast iron plaques with information inscribed that empowered the tenants and informed them of their

housing rights. In doing so *Renovation = Eviction* called attention to attempts of government authorities and real estate investors abusing their power to displace residents by initiating mandatory renovations in lived-in homes or by raising rent to amounts landlords know tenants can not afford. He repurposed the furnace iron to an art material for a specific audience with the aim of empowering them and in a sense elevating their own value as tenants. In line with Haacke, Asher's work underscores the need for a broader conception of what art's value and who art is for.

Hito Steyerl's lecture "Is the Museum a Battlefield?" (2013) highlights the institutional complicity in violence museums engage in by accepting funds from corporations that also support the military-industrial complex and illegal wars. Being financially driven to support its goals, art institutions are at risk of overlooking or ignoring moral failings as long as the utopian ideal that they have set for themselves is supported and presented. Steyerl's film shares her investigation revealing how inextricable art and war are in its proceedings through constant affiliations between sites of violence and sites for art dissemination.

The Guerilla Girls appropriate the authority of religion to present a "Ten Commandments" *Code of Ethics for Art Museums* (1990) to establish principles that capitalists who invest in the business of art should abide by in operating with or within museums and art institutions. For example The Guerilla Girls command, "thou shalt not permit corporations to launder their public images in museums. . . ." and "thou shalt not use thy influence to enhance the value of thine collection . . .". The works in this exhibition illustrate the immorality of a permeating capitalist mindset impacting art exhibition and reception. Like the other artworks in this exhibition, they remind us of existing systemic inequalities impacting art, including the drive for "[collector class] profits based on the growth of income inequality" and the complicity in violence among cultural institutions to question who determines art's value.

The works presented call on the viewer to reconsider the authority of art museums as cultural institutions and their influences, aims, and entrenchment in the capitalist system. The diversity in specific interests and mediums allows us to marvel at and appreciate where these artworks converge at the intersection between art and capitalist critique, and encourages us to reevaluate where art fits into our world as a driver of both cultural growth or economic exploitation.

List of Works:

- Andrea Fraser. *L'1%, C'est moi*, 2011. PDF.
- Cameron Rowland. *Pass-Thru*, 2014. Acrylic, hardware, 24-hour rotator disc. 23 x 20 x 21 inches (58.42 x 50.80 x 53.34 cm)
- Hans Haacke. *On Social Grease*, 1975. 6 plaques. Photoengraved magnesium plates mounted on aluminum. 30" x 30" (76.2 x 76.2 cm).
- Hito Steyerl. *Is The Museum a Battlefield?*, 2013. Video.
- Guerilla Girls. *Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums*, 1990. Posters.
- Marcel Broodthaers. *Museum - Museum*, 1972. Two screenprints. 33 x 46 1/2" (83.9 x 118.2 cm); sheet (each): 33 x 23 1/4" (83 x 59.1 cm)
- Marcel Broodthaers. *Gold Bar Stamped with an Eagle*, 1970-1971.

- Michael Asher. *"Renovation = Eviction / Rénovation = Expulsion"*, 1991. Cast iron.
- Vermeir & Heiremans. *Masquerade*, 2015. Video.

Goals:

- 1) Develop the Press Release design
- 2) Make sure the images are ready for posting with tags

Useful Research links:

- [Control Copy: Digital Reproducibility and the Valorization of Contemporary Art Bergs. Steyn](#)
 - [High culture in a bare art world the politics of direct art activism](#)
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1) Hito Steyerl,

Is The Museum a Battlefield, 2013

Video

According to the Art Institute of Chicago: "Hito Steyerl ponders the parallels between conflict zones and spaces where art is displayed . . . [and] the economic links between arms manufacturers that profit from such weapons and arts organizations that accept funding from those same corporations."

<https://vimeo.com/76011774>

(<https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/9828/hito-steyerl-is-the-museum-a-battlefield>) 'Duty Free Art'

2014. Steyerl makes work about the art market and politics of art. Video essays, books. Art stored at the Geneva Freeport is exempt from taxes.

(<https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/238031/hito-steyerl-s-left-to-our-own-devices>).

- research works she has made that is critical of the art market etc. Perhaps there is a more appropriate artwork to include in the exhibition.

2) Andrea Fraser

L'1%, C'EST MOI, 2011

https://monoskop.org/images/4/42/Fraser_Andrea_2011_L_1%25_c_est_moi.pdf

• **Andrea Fraser's *Untitled*, 2003/2004** is an audio installation created with the sound captured by the camera during the recording [Andrea Fraser "L'1%, c'est moi"](#) of the famous video artwork, *Untitled*, 2003 which documents an encounter between Fraser and an art collector, who pre-purchased the first of a limited-edition video, in which he appears to be having sex with the artist. For Fraser, *Untitled* "is about the relationship between artists and collectors, about what it means to be an artist and sell your work—sell what may be, what should be, a very intimate part of yourself, your desire, your fantasies—and to allow others to use you as a screen for their fantasies." *Untitled* has been interpreted widely as enacting the centuries-old analogy of selling art as prostitution. However, important to Fraser is that the collector paid for the video, not for the sex. With this, the work highlights the role of art commodities in mediating relations of exchange.

3) Cameron Rowland,

Cameron Rowland

Pass-Thru, 2014

Acrylic, hardware, 24-hour rotator disc

23 x 20 x 21 inches (58.42 x 50.80 x 53.34 cm)

In some places, businesses use a pass-thru, to pass cash or goods back and forth; this could be at a bank or a liquor store. The highest standard of pass-thru use bullet proof glass, although this material is far too expensive to be used as a protective measure by those business where it might be most effective.

Therein plastic is used in place of bullet proof glass. They are either made by a manufacturer or by the shop owner. This Pass-Thru was made by Rowland.

Text and Images courtesy of Essex Street, New York

4) **Vermeir & Heiremans,**

Masquerade, 2015, video

Look at <https://triennalebrugge.be/en/installations/masquerade> and <https://www.jubilee-art.org/projects/masquerade> to write a brief explanation of the artwork.
<https://vimeo.com/370198497>

5) **Hans Haacke,** [On Social Grease, 1975](#) (display as a carousel of images)

6) **Michael Asher, "Renovation = Eviction / Rénovation = Expulsion"** 1991. Two cast-iron objects made from old cast iron boilers from the Le Nouveau Museum, Lyon with text produced by Michael Asher. The text translation on one side is "This object comes from the old furnaces of Le Nouveau Musée at the beginnings of its renovation in February 1991. It is to be distributed for free to people of low income who have housing problems." and on the opposite side is "Housing is your right. Don't accept renovation or discrimination. [Inquire with:] Action Lyonnaise pour l'Insertion Sociale Parle Logement 78 39 26 38. Association Villeurbannaise pour le Droit au Logement 78 94 95 61)

Post images "Asher_Art Critical of the Art Market1" and "Asher_Art Critical of the Art Market2"

7) **Marcel Broodthaers**

Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Financière (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles, Financial Section)," 1970-1971.

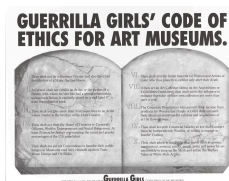
Gold bar stamped with an eagle.

From wikipedia: "As part of the Financial Section [of the exhibition titled Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, 1968], the artist . . . produced an unlimited edition of gold ingots stamped with the museum's emblem, an eagle, a symbol associated with power and victory. The ingots were sold to raise money for the museum, at a price calculated by doubling the market value of gold, the surcharge representing the bar's value as art.

8) **Guerilla Girls,**

Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums, 1990

Poster.



Possible Painting Show, that is Critical of Painting

An exhibition of art critical of the commercial art world and its expectations of art and value.

1) **John Baldessari**, *Tips for Artists Who Want to Sell* 1966-68. Acrylic on canvas
68 1/4 x 56 1/2 x 1 1/2 in. (173.36 x 143.51 x 3.81 cm)

Goal: See if Baldessari has made an audio or audio-visual artwork or any artwork directly critical of the art market?

2) **Paul Mc Carthy's video**: [Painter](#).

3) **Scott King**, 'My Painting', 2024 (Scott King has mentioned to Peter that he will make this video for the exhibition)

4) **Komar & Melamid**,

Goal: See if they've made an audio or audio-visual artwork or any artwork directly critical of the art market?

5)

The below artworks actively challenge the notion of an individual artworks value ([from Peter's Cambridge University seminar](#)):

1) **Wade Guyton attempted to devalue his "Untitled (Fire, Red/Black U)", 2005** artwork at auction by extending the edition and making multiple copies. From wikipedia:

The New York artist Wade Guyton, who produces his paintings on inkjet printers, was so disgusted by the enormous price expected for one of his 2005 flame paintings, "Untitled (Fire, Red/Black U)," that he went on the offensive over the weekend, printing multiple copies of the image from his original disk and posting them on the photo-sharing site Instagram. The painting, estimated at \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million, sold to an unidentified telephone bidder for \$3.525 million.

<https://greg.org/archive/2014/05/12/wade-guyton-and-anxiety-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction.html>

Goal: Email the Wade Guyton Studio (guyton_studio@mac.com) to ask for permission to display a "devalued artwork" ("Untitled (Fire, Red/Black U)", 2005)

2) **Maurizio Cattelan in which he manipulated the value of his featuring the artwork, "La Nona ora" 1999** by faking an art auction catalog cover featuring the artwork to increase its value.

Goal: Find a copy of the actual auction catalog that featured: "La Nona ora" 1999 in order to increase its value.

3)

4) **Damien Hirst's, "For the Love of God", 2007**

From wikipedia: For the Love of God is a sculpture by artist Damien Hirst produced in 2007. It consists of a platinum cast of an 18th-century human skull encrusted with 8,601 flawless diamonds, including a pear-shaped pink diamond located in the forehead that is known as the Skull Star Diamond. The skull's teeth are original, and were purchased by Hirst in London. The artwork is a memento mori, or reminder of the mortality of the viewer. In 2007, art historian Rudi Fuchs, described the work as "out of this world, celestial almost. It proclaims victory over decay. At the same time it represents death as something infinitely more relentless. Compared to the tearful sadness of a vanitas scene,

the diamond skull is glory itself." [1] Costing £14 million to produce, the work was placed on its inaugural display at the White Cube gallery in London in an exhibition Beyond Belief, with an asking price of £50 million. This would have been the highest price ever paid for a single work by a living artist. [2]

5) Banksy's auction work shredding itself
