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I N T E R V I E W

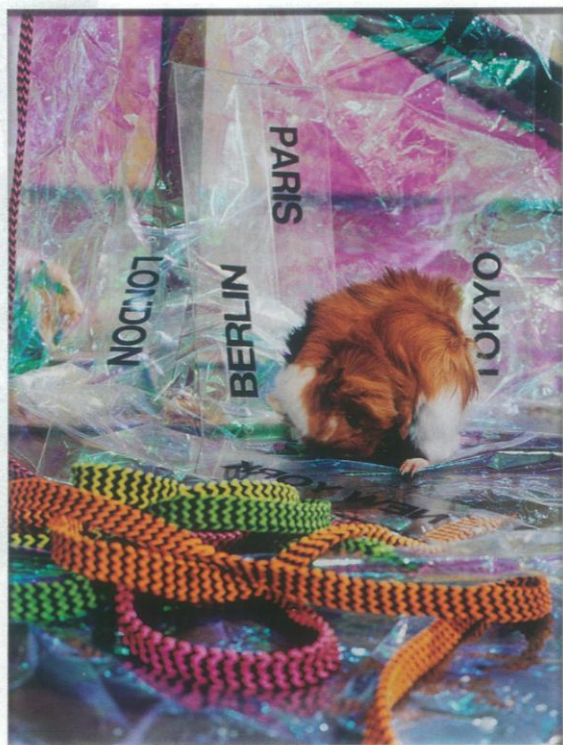
JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
ART AFTER NATURE
STAN DOUGLAS
JOSEPHINE PRYDE

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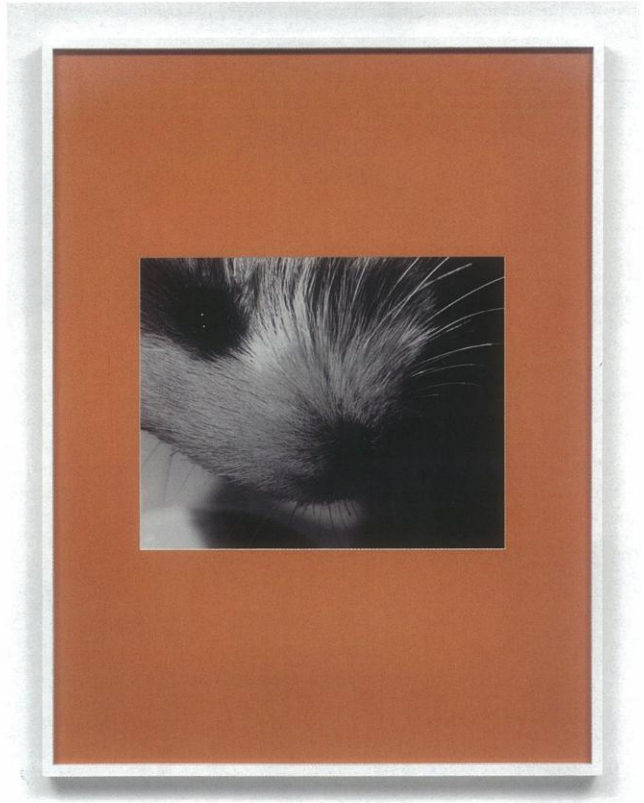


Test Subjects

TOM HOLERT ON THE ART OF JOSEPHINE PRYDE



This page, from left: Josephine Pryde, *Scale XVI*, 2012, color photograph, 41¼ x 31¾". Josephine Pryde, *Scale III*, 2012, color photograph, 41¼ x 31¾". Opposite page, from left: Josephine Pryde, *Scale IX*, 2012, color photograph, 41¼ x 31¾". Josephine Pryde, *Scale II*, 2012, matted black-and-white photograph, 41¼ x 31¾". All from the series "Scale," 2012.



WALKING ALONG DÜSSELDORF'S GRABBEPLATZ toward the grim gray Brutalist building that houses the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, visitors to Josephine Pryde's current retrospective were confronted with an image of disturbing cuteness—or, perhaps better, with a cute disturbance. An enormous poster, mounted prominently on the facade, stamps the show's ingratiating if ultimately inexplicable title,

"Miss Austen Enjoys Photography," over a black-and-white photograph of a guinea pig, staring unblinkingly at the camera—close-up, unavoidable, irresistible in its cunning vivacity. The image, like the lowest-grade kitty porn, tugs shamelessly at one's heartstrings; more appropriate for a pet-shop ad, a billboard coaxing parents to take their kids to the zoo, or a viral video, such pandering to the flagrantly adorable

lampoons whatever elevated expectations we might still have when it comes to the disinterested delectation of a serious art exhibition. The contemplativeness one brings to an institution established for the provision of critical aesthetic pleasure has been ambushed—before the viewer even walks through the door.

This sort of sneak attack on the viewer's entrenched position in the institutional settings of art (and on



Left: Josephine Pryde, *Scale XX*, 2012, color photograph, 41 1/2 x 31 1/2". From the series "Scale," 2012.

Opposite page: Josephine Pryde, *Adoption (6)*, 2009, color photograph, 39 1/2 x 29 1/2". From the series "Adoption," 2009.

those institutional settings themselves) might be seen as not only central to but even emblematic of Pryde's practice, and so its recurrence here, at the site of the artist's first retrospective, is both a necessity and an inherent irony. Herself participating in the presentation of a retrospective view of two decades of her work, Pryde frames the exhibition within a criticality that is also a refusal. The retrospective itself becomes the subject of a new work, precisely as it becomes the object of the artist's critical practice.

BORN IN NORTHERN ENGLAND, Pryde now lives in London and Berlin, where she has been a professor of contemporary photography at the Universität der Künste since 2008. Long a prolific writer, she has exhibited her artwork since the late 1980s, thus having reached the stage we typically, if problematically, call midcareer. As if on cue, two major institutions—the kunstverein in Düsseldorf (as noted) and the Kunsthalle Bern, in Switzerland—have offered shows to Pryde this year. The artist appears to have treated the invitations as an occasion to mount a two-part retrospective. ("Miss Austen Enjoys Photography" is said to "continue" in Bern this summer, under the title "Miss Austen Still Enjoys Photography.") The institutions' recently appointed directors, Hans-Jürgen Hafner and Fabrice Stroun, respectively, apparently sensed that the time was ripe to present Pryde, more prominently and visibly than she had been before, as a major figure on the contemporary art scene.

Not that she hasn't availed herself of opportunities to exhibit her work over the past two decades. Solo shows at various galleries (including Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York; Galerie Neu, Berlin; Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne; and Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles) and noncommercial institutions (such as the Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany; the Secession, Vienna; and the Chisenhale and Cubitt galleries, London) have witnessed the development of a distinctive lexicon of themes and motifs in a production predominantly organized into series. If one traces Pryde's oeuvre through the sequence of her exhibitions, all of which are carefully titled and accompanied by poignantly phrased press releases (some of which are penned at least partially by the artist herself), a certain modularity begins to loom as she delineates themes and subthemes that engage the institutionalization and commodification of art, therapeutic systems of domination and control, mechanical and biological reproduction, experimentation, gender, and animal- and childhood. She uses a serial approach to explore such concerns in greater depth, while carefully calibrating the balance between the series as alleged whole and the single picture as alleged part, "suggesting possible dissociations among narrative or thematic readings," as critic Rhea Anastas aptly put it in a 2010 review.¹

In this regard, the Düsseldorf show is paradigmatic. On climbing the stairs to the kunstverein, one is greeted by "Scale," 2012, a wholesome parade of guinea pigs. The twenty-one photographs thus far in the series, framed alike and hung in a line, are printed in two sizes, the smaller images augmented commensurately by colored mattes. These pictures cover the walls of the kunstverein's reception area, an awkward passageway in which it is difficult to place any kind of work at all; to compensate, Pryde plays the cards of seriality, repetition/difference, and near-sickening cuteness (a note already struck on the building's exterior).

Another challenge, taken up deliberately in this series, is the depicted animals' limited range of expression. Obviously, guinea pigs don't know how to pose; their gaze into the lens (or, simply, at the camera) is uniform. Those insufficiently attuned to the subtleties of rodent psychology may be hard-pressed to discern any change in mood or feeling from this unvarying blank stare. To donate variety to these images, therefore, the artist, a well-versed portraitist, had to deploy the magic of props and shifts in camera angle and focal length.

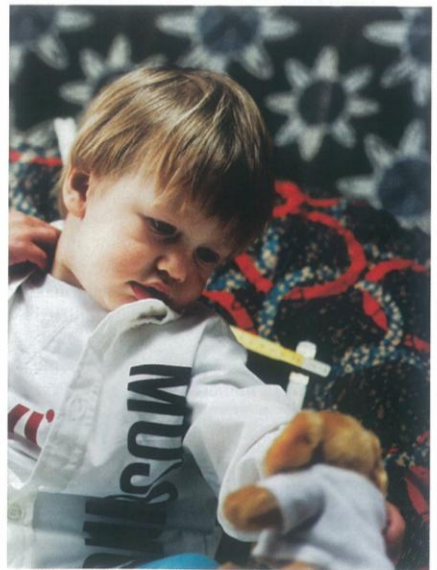
The animals were photographed on-site, in the main gallery of the kunstverein, in the weeks prior to the opening. The results, as described above, are displayed in the serial fashion Pryde has established as her preferred mode of operation, and while referencing, if obliquely, the Minimalist legacy of seriality, the pictures counteract the purported sobriety of their precursors' rigorous repetitions by the very choice of furry pets as their subject. (An ancestor of "Scale" might well be Andy Warhol's *Cow Wallpaper*, 1966.) Within the series, however, each image is an attempt at singularization and individuation, a striving for uniqueness in terms of color or positioning or through the combination of animal and inorganic stuff. On the other hand, with its promise of endlessness, the series as such suggests the potentially infinite number of pet images stored on hard drives around the world or uploaded to Flickr. One thinks of a kid fumbling around with her mother's smartphone, taking hundreds of pictures of the newly arrived pet, the proud father then rushing the files that document this amazing display of creativity to the photo lab, where he will order jumbo prints. Pictures of guinea pigs instantly fall victim to the status of child art. Infantilized and, so, infantilizing, are they not merely visual junk?

Pryde's luscious shots of the little rodents jocosely shuffling around packing paper, shipping tubes, and other material remnants of an art exhibition's installation evoke the prototypical ornamental device for contemporary affect architecture, such as hospital waiting rooms or day-care-center playrooms. Typically, the intended effect of such a display of furry little animals

The production of cuteness should be acknowledged as a powerful, "all-consuming folk religion" that reduces, transforms, and anesthetizes reality.

is sedation and pacification, silent surrender to some pastoral power of disempowerment, feelings of comfort or even of blithe contentment.

Here, however—in the realm of contemporary art, that is—a carload of guinea-pig pictures runs against the grain of serious art practice and seemingly counter to any aspirations to criticality. So "Scale" must be considered provocative, even ridiculous. Yet the aesthetics of "cute, quaint, hungry and romantic," to quote the title of critic Daniel Harris's treatise on the "repressed aesthetic data of our lives," are not as harmless as they seem.² During the past several decades, artists such as Jeff Koons, William Wegman, Mike Kelley, and Cosima von Bonin have trenchantly explored the nastiness of cute. Their probings, as well as Pryde's somewhat thwarted continuation of these projects in her Düsseldorf show, were arguably instigated by insights into the politics of this particular aesthetic. One also thinks, in this vein, of "Adoption," Pryde's 2009 series of thirteen studio photographs (plus another of the same year, titled *I Love Music*) of a toddler, a two- or three-year-





Left: Josephine Pryde, *Do You Want Children*, 2010, color photograph, 57 1/2 x 75 1/2".

The conspicuous accomplishment and prettiness of much of Pryde's work doesn't seem to add up to a wholehearted embrace of photography as a medium.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Josephine Pryde, *It's Not My Body* (15), 2011, color photograph, 34 1/2 x 23 3/4". *It's Not My Body* (12), 2011, color photograph, 34 1/2 x 23 3/4". *It's Not My Body* (10), 2011, color photograph, 34 1/2 x 23 3/4". All from the series "It's Not My Body," 2011. View of "Josephine Pryde: Miss Austen Enjoys Photography," 2012, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf. Foreground: *The Idea of Caprice*, 1995. Background, from left: *Untitled* (H2), 2001; *Untitled* (H3), 2001; *Sawn-Up Throne IV*, 2002; *Sawn-Up Throne II*, 2002; *Money*, 2002; *Untitled* (H1), 2001; *Untitled* (H4), 2001.

old boy who, need it be said, strikes a wider (and more contradictory) array of poses and expressions than the guinea pigs.

The fact is that cuteness is regularly deployed to generate and orchestrate condescension and humiliation, reinforcing the superiority of humans in relation to animals, and of adults in relation to children. The anthropomorphism that is a central strategy of the narcissistic "cute worldview," Harris says, "is one of massive human chauvinism, which rewrites the universe according to an iconographic agenda dominated by the pathetic fallacy."³ So the production of cuteness—from the *kawaii* to the *jeune fille*—should certainly not be dismissed as innocuous, irrelevant, and artless but acknowledged as a powerful, "all-consuming folk religion" that reduces, transforms, and anesthetizes reality.⁴ Then again, images of pets, especially when they're distributed online, might be considered generous gifts, accessible to everyone; and this kind of democratizing approach to imagemaking turns against the humiliations allegedly inflicted by the "cute worldview."

Troping cuteness as a specific visual regime is, however, just one of numerous registers in Pryde's practice. For instance, the artist has also flirted with an aesthetics of opulence, as with the three large-scale color photographs of sumptuous Issey Miyake plissé fabrics from her 2010 Reena Spaulings show "Thérapie Thank You," which are included in the Düsseldorf exhibition, and ventured deep into an aesthetics of the drastic, as with her series of close-up

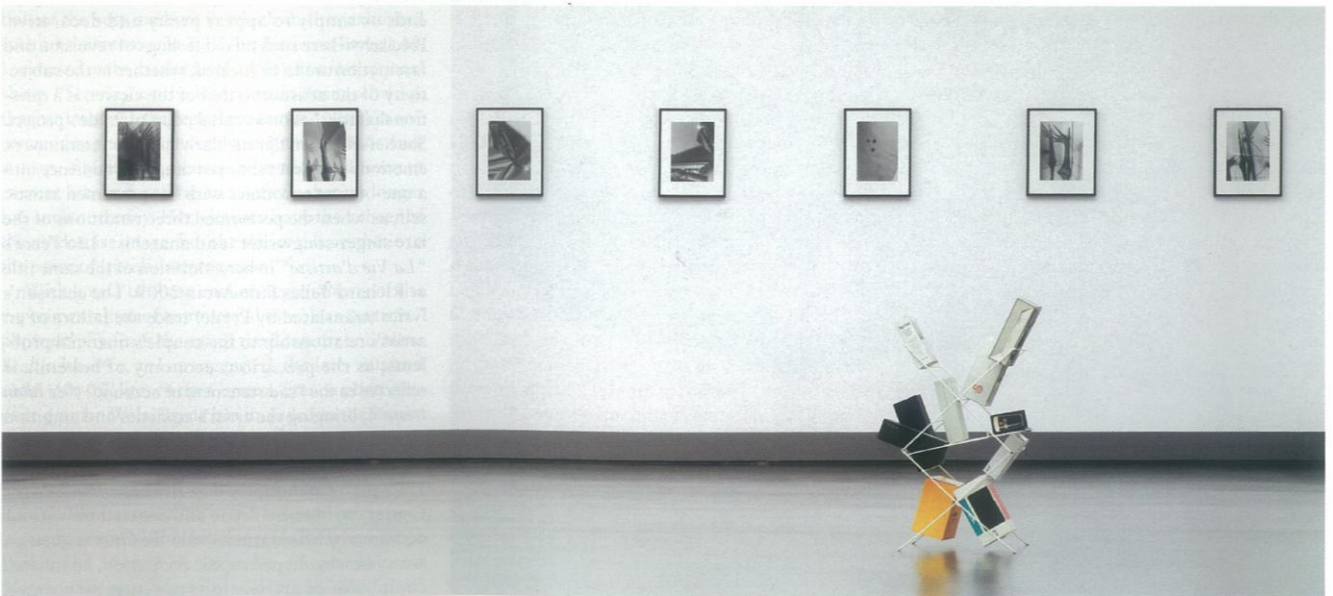
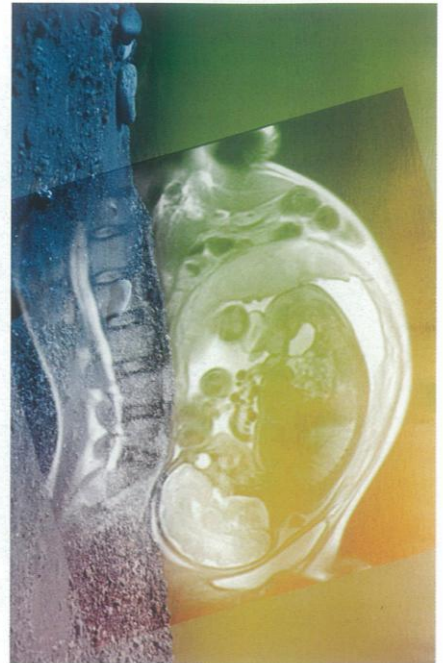
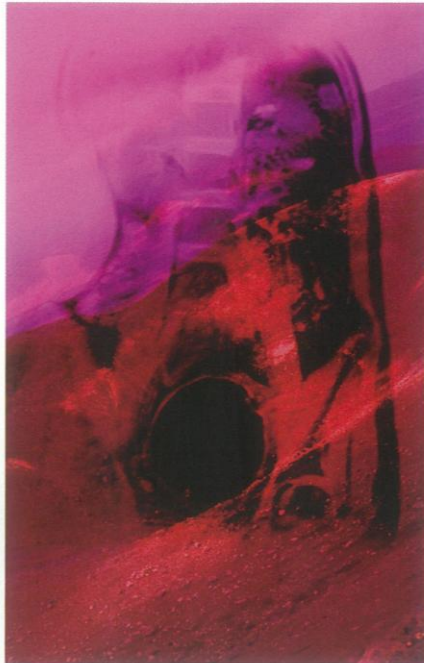
black-and-white photographs of assholes ("Anus," 2004), her still lifes of raw liver incongruously on display in a bank branch ("Liver," 2006), and her colorful Photoshop juxtapositions of MRI scans of a human fetus and macro-lens desertscapes ("It's Not My Body," 2011). Pryde consciously deploys such variances of look, mood, and tonality (and there are more) into institutional contexts and architectural environments whose characteristics are of major importance to the artist, who, as she puts it, "imagines" them intensely, dreams them up while conceiving a new body of work or a rearrangement of existing material. Indeed, it is doubtful whether her images fully signify—can be "read" coherently—stripped of the institutional contexts for which they were originally conceived. Removed from dialogue with their museal setting, Pryde's portraits of guinea pigs, say, are at worst irredeemable kitsch, at best stubbornly withholding, even inscrutable.

Given the undecided status of these images, it should not go unmentioned that Düsseldorf is, of course, a major center of art photography, thanks to the Bernd and Hilla Becher "school" and its acolytes' successful international careers. With this in mind, Pryde's exhibition—her guinea pigs in particular—must be regarded as a site-specific intervention transgressing the likes of Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Ruff on their home turf. It should come as no surprise, then, that the skillfully staged and photographed guinea-pig pictures were professionally printed at Düsseldorf's storied Grieger

Fotolabor, thus linking Pryde's own practice to the production site of these once-local photo artists.

PRYDE'S POSITION within contemporary photography in a fine arts context is one of ongoing negotiation, oscillating between self-doubt and aplomb, desublimation and affirmation. Accordingly, critic Sabeth Buchmann detects a "certain idiosyncrasy" in the artist's relationship to the "institutionalisation and marketing of photographic art."⁵ Indeed, the conspicuous accomplishment and prettiness of much of Pryde's work does not seem to add up to a wholehearted embrace of photography as a medium. Rather, she has been exploring *by way of photography* the trappings of a visual culture predicated on the subjectifying and subjugating powers of the photographic.

Since Pryde moreover questions, rather relentlessly, the widely held view that it is the function of visual artists to produce a valid critique of the position they inhabit (voluntarily or not) in this visual culture, the congeries of issues and themes discussed thus far result in an altogether complicated yet well-rehearsed constellation. If the critical function of contemporary artmaking is one of reexamination—of the historical legacy of modernism, of art's relation to capital, of the social role of the artist, of a particular medium's actuality and legitimacy, etc.—then Pryde has clearly striven to fulfill this function. But that said, she does not simply surrender to a prescribed performance of criticality that reduces art's functions to the task of reflexivity or of allegorizing





Although each of Pryde's images is carefully conceived and composed, their very singularity is constantly threatened by the throbbing pulse of the series—and by a nagging undercurrent of mesmerized disgust.

its commodity status. In Pryde's case, photography may be problematized, but its aesthetic values are not rejected altogether; instead, the artist seeks to rework and reconfigure the image with all the artfulness and technical facility at her disposal, while at the same time rethinking the image in relation to the institutional and architectural conditions of its display, thereby sidestepping the twin pitfalls of capitulation to commodity culture and capitulation to (mere) *de rigueur critique* thereof. Pryde thus explores ways to strategically acknowledge her practice's complicity with the aesthetics of fashion or stock photography while attempting to keep both nihilistic self-flagellation and ironic (or purely cynical) acquiescence at bay.

Although each of Pryde's images is carefully conceived and composed, their very singularity is constantly threatened by the throbbing pulse of the series—and by a nagging undercurrent of mesmerized disgust in the face of images that look as if they might have been made, like the myriad other images that confront us every day, to serve vile ideological ends or simply to appear pretty and decorative. Precisely where such mixed feelings of revulsion and fascination are to be located, whether in the subjectivity of the artist or in that of the viewer, is a question that touches on a crucial point of Pryde's project. She herself doesn't particularly hide her intentions or emotions—at times she even drags her audience into a one-on-one encounter with her presumed artistic self, as when she performed three renditions of the late singer-songwriter (and anarchist) Léo Ferré's "*La Vie d'artiste*" in her exhibition of the same title at Richard Telles Fine Art in 2009. The chanson's lyrics (translated by Pryde) trace the failure of an artist's relationship to the couple's financial problems, as the precarious economy of bohemia is reflected in the "sad statement of account" ("*ce bilan triste*"), bringing the artist's anxieties and ambition into focus. But who is really being talked about in Pryde's rendition? It seems—as was the case in the 1999 performance/play *The Bear, the Duck & the Oyster*, written by Pryde and enacted on various occasions by fellow artists—that the artist in question is a somewhat hypertrophic projection, an inflated composite of art-world types (macho painter,

careerist, romantic Conceptualist, hunger artist, etc.), all figures from Pryde's inquiries into art history or encountered by her in the art scenes of London, Cologne, New York, Berlin, Vienna, and elsewhere.

This performing of the artist and of the psychic and economic dimensions of artthood is also at play in the portrait (photographed by Simon Lamb) adorning the invitation card for "Miss Austen Enjoys Photography." Pryde, sporting a Burberry trench coat, sits before a black background, head bowed, a melancholic expression on her face. The "enjoyment" alluded to in the title seems absent or displaced, meant to be taken with a grain of salt. Pryde told me that she was thinking about Virginia Woolf's observation, in *A Room of One's Own*, that Jane Austen had to write her novels in the midst of the family life going on around her. Thus the reference to Austen speaks again of the austerities, past and present, of *la vie d'artiste*. Of course, the real, historical Miss Austen died (in 1817) before she could even have had the idea of enjoying photography. Inevitably, the counterfactual fantasy leads back to the enjoyment of photography experienced by the artist.

BEGINNING IN THE MID-1990S, Pryde has worked hard to become the accomplished photographer she is today. Her ease in making and taking pictures, using and manipulating not only the camera but the entire apparatus of photographic technology and history, relates, if elusively, to the deadpan humor and irreverence she frequently deploys and that so often seems to be directed against the traditions and potentials of the very medium in which she has exhibited such a keen interest. In 2001, art historian Pamela M. Lee mused in the catalogue of Pryde's first institutional show, "Serena," at the Kunstverein Braunschweig, that her images in the vein of modernist "New Vision" commodity photographs of the 1920s and '30s "evince a deep, if tacit, skepticism about the conditions of current art, by recalling an aesthetic that no longer has such currency. Her pictures have the veneer of the modernist image, but she skews this aesthetic to the point of its self-interrogation."⁶

With a nod to these earlier negotiations of the experimentalism of commercial as well as "artistic" photography from the era of the Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit* or, as Lee suggested, the late-'30s and early-'40s still lifes of the German-French photographer-painter Wols, Pryde has included in the kunstverein retrospective's main gallery a color photograph of a cigarette lighter staged in the style of Edward Steichen's advertising work of the 1920s (*Untitled [Gold]*, 2002), as well as seven black-and-white photographs from 2001 (*Untitled [H1-H4]*) and 2002 (*Sawn-Up Throne II*, *Sawn-Up Throne IV*, and *Money*). The post-Surrealist still lifes of lathed chair

legs or gesticulating prosthetic hands (probably used to display gloves), replete with mirror effects and cast shadows, were hung deliberately above eye level, as if to force the viewer to recognize their strangeness while taking a position of looking up from below. Pryde's engagement with the modernist image goes back many years—that is, as I understand it, to long before the moment when the critical reconstruction of modernism became massively in vogue in art production and curating (i.e., around the time of the Fifth Berlin Biennale, in 2008).

Pryde also seems to have been taken by the experimental character of much modernist imagemaking, by its progressive and often quasi-scientific drive to test out new technologies, new procedures, and new limits. Her own work not only engages the methods gleaned from the repertoire of experimental photography such as double exposure, superimposition, color filtration, shooting with an underwater camera or through frosted glass, solarization, lith printing (see, for instance, the portraits *VD1* and *VD2*, both 2001, included in "Miss Austen Enjoys Photography"), and photograms (as in the "Molasses" series, 2004, made using honey, syrup, and treacle) but also embraces the actual, material practice of experimenting with and developing new techniques.

What are the results of Pryde's tests? It is revealing to connect her experimentalism—especially given the artist's acute awareness of the historicity and ambiguity of the very concept of experimentalism in modernism—to László Moholy-Nagy's teaching at the New Bauhaus and the School of Design in Chicago (now the Institute of Design). In his programmatic, posthumously published *Vision in Motion* (1947), Moholy demanded "to deal more with the direct sensory impact of photographic values than with the reproductive, illusionistic function of portrayal."⁷ He also famously presented a list of "eight varieties of photographic vision" that would be the outcome of such an intrinsic understanding of photography, among them "abstract seeing" (enabled by photograms, e.g.), "exact seeing" (realized in photographic reportage, etc.), and "intensified seeing" (facilitated by means of macro- and microphotography, light filters, and bird's-, frog's-, and fish's-eye views).⁸ In some respects, Pryde might be seen as reenacting this program of systematic visual experimentalism and thereby actively taking up the role envisioned by Moholy of a "research worker,"⁹ while obviously resisting the Bauhaus pedagogue's prescribed (and utopian) farewell to the "function of portrayal."

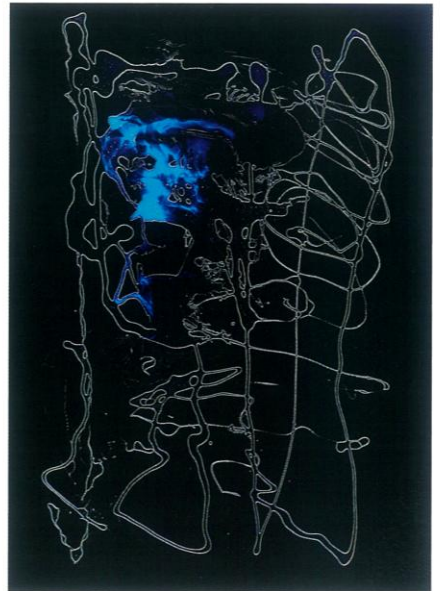
"Scale," the guinea-pig series, is experimental in ways that Moholy would not likely have appreciated, because it is nothing less than a string of portrayals. Instead, it seems to experiment with the animals, using the artless genre of pet photography to reflect



Opposite page: Josephine Pryde, *It's Not My Body* (3), 2011, color photograph, 34 1/4 x 23 3/4". From the series "It's Not My Body," 2011.

Above: Josephine Pryde, *Hamilton*, 2001, color photograph, 15 1/2 x 15 1/2".

Josephine Pryde, *Molasses 10*, 2004, color photograph, 42 1/2 x 31". From the series "Molasses," 2004.





Pryde acts as both research worker and guinea pig, as subject and object of the testing, assessing, therapeutic gaze.



Top: View of "Josephine Pryde: *Hollow Inside*," 2007, Galerie Neu, Berlin. On wall, from left: *A sheep: vocals*, 2007; *A sheep: bass*, 2007. On floor, front to back: *Don't fence me in (Natarajāsana)*, 2007; *What else was happening while I was in a (Back Bend)*, 2007; *I don't care about material things (Warrior Two)*, 2007; *Year after sexy-yet-practical year (Warrior One)*, 2007. Photo: Gunter Lepkowski.

Right: View of "Josephine Pryde: *Miss Austen Enjoys Photography*," 2012, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf. Foreground: *The Mystery of Artistic Work VII*, 2010. Background, from left: *VD1*, 2001; *VD2*, 2001.

on the very (im)possibility of portraiture and the constraints associated with being the object of a portraitist's gaze. After all, the common understanding of *guinea pig* is as test subject—an expression introduced into English language at the turn of the twentieth century. Consumers' Research directors Arthur Kallet and F. J. Schlink's 1933 book *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs: Dangers in Everyday Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics* demonstrated early on the intelligibility of the metaphor, in an attempt to prove that the American population was being used as "guinea pigs" in a mass experiment conducted by food and consumer-goods manufacturers.

The subject matter of "Scale," the guinea pigs themselves, thus allegorizes theories of manipulation and victimization on a mass as well as on an individual scale. Knowledge or foreboding of biopolitical abuses of animals and humans is potent stuff, which can lead either to political action or to paranoia and even psychosis. For Pryde, the psychology of the subject of contemporary capitalism, especially of the subject dwelling in the art world, has become a theme in itself. Arguably, she is acting as both research worker and guinea pig, as subject and object of the testing, assessing, therapeutic gaze. It is no accident that Pryde had already made images of animals. In her 2007 exhibition "Hollow Inside," at Galerie Neu, Berlin, she presented a number of multiple-exposure color headshots of a highbred sheep (taken that same year) in tandem with sturdy diagram sculptures of yoga positions made of chains and mounted on freestanding aluminum-framed panes of Plexiglas. Comparable to the pictures of the toddler in "La Vie d'Artiste," these images of guinea pigs and sheep could possibly be interpreted as self-portraits or, in fact, as the fruits of a project of displaced self-portraiture that does everything in its power precisely to dispel any such psychobiographical reading.

THE MAIN GALLERY of the Düsseldorf kunstverein, in which Hafner and Pryde have assembled a tiny selection of works from Pryde's production of the past eighteen years (the earliest of which, *The Idea of Caprice*, 1995, a rack of empty packaging for a coffeemaker, a hair dryer, a whiskey bottle, pens, and so on, was exhibited in her first solo show, at Galerie Neu, that same year), is dominated by photographs of fabric and spinning basketwork (*The Mystery of Artistic Work, III, VI, and VII*, all 2010) hanging from the ceiling on metal hooks (or, in one case, from a blue ribbon). When these images and objects were first exhibited, in 2010, in "Therapie Thank You" in New York and "Therapie Thank You Thank You" at Berlin's MD 72, they were discursively attached to the "possibility" of a therapeutic function of making and consuming art (objects and practices). "Basketweaving" is, of



Josephine Pryde, *A Lifetime of Self-Sacrifice Can Be Blown in One Unguarded Moment (II)*, 2007–2008, color photograph, 19 x 13 3/4". From the series "A Lifetime of Self-Sacrifice Can Be Blown in One Unguarded Moment," 2007–2008.

course, synonymous with therapeutic busywork, so it is not of incidental interest to note that Pryde and her students handwove the baskets on display. The works in these shows were, moreover, framed by the somewhat shadowy figure of a woman, probably an art collector, as sketched out in the press release. One of many avatars in Pryde's work, this "creative lady, tough because responsive,"¹⁰ moves through the universe of psychologically and economically charged artifacts, dressed in clothes "not immediately readable as selected from a terribly recent collection by a famous designer."¹¹ These clothes (the aforementioned Issey Miyake garments) have been photographed, close-up, and framed as subtle diptychs in which the aligned edges of the prints are nearly invisible—all of which results in images of impressive splendor, abstract and delicious.

"The artist" supposedly chose to photograph the clothes instead of the person because they would carry more information for "the viewer" than any image of the lady herself. But do they really? The photographs, dating from 2010, bear such titles as *Do You Want Children, I Don't Want to Take Away Your Creativity*, *The Hour as a Dream*, and *Strong Feelings Can Be Hard to Bear*, which point to the crossover between therapeutic discourse and dinner conversation. They charge the nonfigurative albeit representational images with psychological meaning, emulating the psychodrama of abstract painting and promoting the psychic activity of seeing in, of projection. Then again, the curving and arching textures reveal no more and no less than physiognomy; fantastically distorted bodies to be looked at, they gesture back at the beholder. The (deliberate) German signifier *Therapie* is hard to place exactly in relation to these photographs, to the spinning baskets, or to any of the other works in the show. For the images and objects are both about the possible therapeutic nature of the psychic attachment to art (whether through its aesthetic pleasures or its social dynamics) and at the same time serve to model a therapy that positions the works as ersatz analysts and the viewers as patients. Here as elsewhere in Pryde's exhibitionary proposals, the ultimate task is to acknowledge one's own potential place in the force field of theoretical intimations, historical references, feminist criticism, and fictional allusions that the artist is mapping out. It's a tough job, especially since sooner or later we come to realize that, without fail, it is the role of the test subject, the guinea pig, that awaits us. □

"Miss Austen Enjoys Photography" remains on view at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf through Apr. 9; "Miss Austen Still Enjoys Photography" will be on view at the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, June 8–Aug. 12.

TOM HOLERT IS AN ART HISTORIAN AND CRITIC BASED IN BERLIN.

For notes, see page 237.