

CRASH

INFINITY MIRROR

meeting josephine meckseper

GERMAN-BORN, NEW YORK-BASED ARTIST JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER PRESENTS HER FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION IN PARIS, RUNNING THROUGH DECEMBER 21 AT GAGOSIAN GALLERY. PARTLY INSPIRED BY WALTER BENJAMIN'S "THE ARCADES PROJECT," SHE DISPLAYS A POLYMORPHIC INSTALLATION IN THE GALLERY'S VITRINE, VISIBLE ON STREET LEVEL FOR PASSERSBY TO CONTEMPLATE. IN A SIMILAR SPIRIT, MECKSEPER ASSOCIATES ELEMENTS FROM ART HISTORY AND TOKENS OF OUR CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER SOCIETY IN A SPACE WHERE MIRRORS REFLECT BANAL OBJECTS, PAINTINGS RECALL THE TORN POSTERS OF JACQUES VILLEGLE, AND THE STREET OUTSIDE BECOMES AN ACTIVE INFLUENCER OF THIS UNIVERSE. ON THIS OCCASION, SHE TALKS ABOUT THE CORE OF HER WORK AND THE PLACE OF THE ARTIST IN OUR SOCIETY.

Your work is exhibited at the Gagosian from October 19 to December 21. What is the significance of this solo show in Paris?

The exhibition developed from a desire to interrogate the narrative of the window display, or vitrine, on the street level of the gallery. The window space is an open-ended, interpretive space to passersby. The mirrored space that I created reflects an infinite display of orthopedic footwear, a car wheel, red toilet seat rugs, abstract sculptures and a painting of fragmented advertising. The window was inspired, in part, by Walter Benjamin's "Arcades Project," which he wrote during his years in exile in Paris, and describes a new form of urban life with shopping arcades and the rise of the modern *flâneur*. Other works in the upstairs gallery extend the notion of the shop window to a group of vitrine and shelf works. The idea of collecting is examined in works that incorporate Bauhaus-inspired metal sculptures, cement cast mannequin legs and broken mirrors. Some of the titles of the new works stem from Gertrude Stein's automatic writing. Stein, a prominent collector of key artists such as Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso in the early twentieth century in Paris, produced writings in parallel with her modernist peers, that remain radical to this day.

In your exhibition you show a series of paintings, like "She says. It has. Charm." or "May she. Have hear. Birds." What was your process with these pieces? Did you experiment with a connection between artists like Jacques Villégé or Mimmo Rotella with this series?

The paintings on silver linen canvases depict images of torn-off advertising posters in the streets of New York. Conceptually, street advertising's proximity and affinity to the shop window extends the signifier of consumer display to advertising imagery into a "pedestrian narrative." The aesthetics of merchandise and advertising become a new form of contemporary still life. The reproduction and application of the advertising image onto a canvas also brings to mind Walter Benjamin's key essay "The Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which he describes "the manner in which human sense perception is organized, and the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well."

"I SEE MY WORK AS A WINDOW ONTO, AS WELL AS A FRAGMENT OF, OUR CURRENT TIMES. IT IS AN ARCHEOLOGY OF THE PRESENT."

I feel that your work is very sensual and also very cerebral. It is seductive but also political. What do you think of this paradox?

I see my work as a window onto, as well as a fragment of, our current times. It is an archeology of the present, in which the mirrored displays create a tension between the materiality of the objects and the illusion of a specific urban landscape of infinite demand and supply within a larger economy. It's like looking at culture through collective eyes, and also the eyes of future generations. My work, to various degrees, questions and reflects upon the role of the artist in our current consumer society. How does one reconcile the symbolic and the monetary value of cultural production? How does one make visible real economic and political realities without simply mimicking them? Is there really still a subculture or subversiveness in art? It's always been interesting to me how artists made art in the midst of war. The works of Georg Grosz, and Otto Dix's paintings of mangled veterans from the 1920s, are great examples of how artists depicted urban street scenes in times of unrest.

Do you want to play the game of seduction with your work, as a way to create a disturbing beauty?

"In the affluent society, the authorities are hardly forced to justify their dominion. They deliver the goods; they satisfy the sexual and the aggressive energy of their subjects. Like the unconscious, the destructive power of which they so successfully represent, they are this side of good and evil, and the principle of contradiction has no place in their logic," Herbert Marcuse wrote in *Eros and Civilization*. References to the "body" in my work mainly relate to a Marxist argument about capitalism being the second iteration of the original Christian notion of the "fall of man." The presence of a mannequin, either male or female, becomes the body "without function," separated from nature and incorporated into a work force. In a similar way, the fragments of advertisements in my work, such as male and female underwear ads, speak to the explicitness of advertising and commercials in a culture of mass media spectacle and universal capitalism. "The fall of man in times of primitive accumulation is a persisting drama which takes place in the breach of this contract."



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Do you play with the codes of fashion and luxury to disrupt beauty in the art world?

My work is fundamentally conceptual. I use found materials, detritus from the street, junk mail, and advertising images in order to create a record of an environment or situation, and make it into an archeology of the present. It is a fascination that I share with artists like Martin Kippenberger or Marcel Duchamp — artists who have resorted to the most banal objects in order to undermine the exclusivity of art. My steel and glass vitrines combine retail display forms with artifacts of historical and political events, as well as the implicit status of traditional shop windows as tenuous symbols of consumerism.

Do you think seduction is also a way to softly share your political point of view?

The toilet brush, the mannequin, or the shoe stand are signifiers of the tension between the objects displayed in the vitrines. They also explore the relationship of the vitrine window and the objects to viewers, as well as to an abstract world outside of our human perception. Shop windows, art historical, and political artifacts are placed together as they are in everyday life. They are fragments of our time, and take into consideration "the split second" that allows us to shift our perception and to imagine a counter-universe. Philosophically, the conflicted and specific yet ambiguous nature of the objects in my work points to the question of whether there is a "world as a whole," or just an infinite chain of correlations between pure matter and objects. At the same time, it is also about perception and the dialectic between "being as a whole" and "specific beings," as suggested by Heidegger. The drama and tension between the objects creates the essence of what "time" or "the thing" is.

You have reorganized the street-level window at Gagosian on Rue de Ponthieu in Paris. Is this the perfect place for your work and all your concerns? You have always been interested in objects displayed in windows, such as in New York... What is your relation to consumerism?

The shop windows and vitrines in my work reflect the role of the artist in our current consumer society, and point to the instability of capitalism and Post-Fordian society. My works are investigating platonic, nondescript objects such as bathroom rugs, clothing racks, liquor bottles, and underwear, in order to exemplify Hegel's dynamic Platonism: "generic universality, differentiated specificity, and individual singularity as the three syllogistic terms which, by their interrelations, explain organic and inorganic being." The implicit threat within the architecture of commerce evokes a sense of instability and fragility that betrays the mirrored surfaces and the seemingly benign objects reflected in them, suggesting that the reason for their existence anticipates their own destruction.

Why do you use so many mirrors in your work?

I am looking for industrial and sociological endpoints as a signifier of our present state. In a world that is saturated with images, the mirror is a material that creates an image of our surroundings without being a true representation or reproduction — it becomes a metaphor for "reflection." The mirrored surfaces in my work are often also the consumer products themselves, such as chrome car wheels, metallic stands, or mirrored sunglasses. Their reflective surfaces function as a way of "emptying out content" and creating a sense of de-fascination. Inside the mirrored vitrines however, the collective performative aspects of consumption appear

frozen, and the flip side of capitalism is literally demonstrated on the back of displayed objects and made visible in the mirror reflection. The vitrine's mirrored interiors also bring into play a concept of "living" photography, in which the viewer, as a reflection, is implicated in the narrative, thereby creating a dialogue between the exhibited items and the self.

You used to publish a magazine called "FAT." Can you talk about this project?

When I moved to New York in the nineties, I started a conceptual project in the form of a magazine. Several artists and writers that I knew from Cal Arts were involved and contributed to the magazine, for example Sylvère Lotringer, the publisher of *Semiotext(e)*. The magazine was distributed at regular newsstands and in supermarkets, but also exhibited in galleries and museums in the form of wallpaper. It was inspired by political theorist and radical publisher Jean-Paul Marat's newspaper from the French Revolution, *L'Ami du peuple*, and the avant-garde tradition of breaking down barriers between art and life. "FAT" has featured numerous internationally prominent artists and writers addressing critical issues in unexpected ways. Dan Graham, a neighbor on Spring Street at the time, did an interview with us, and his early magazine insertion pieces were reframed in the magazine's tabloidesque layout.

Does it mean something to you to be a female artist? Or do you simply want to be an artist?

For me, making art is an experiment with an uncertain outcome. It is most interesting when it is not merely reacting to an environment or historical framework but when forging new territories and frontiers. Gender, as a social construct, should not be a criteria by which an artist's work is defined. That said, there is infinite potential to claim new grounds and territory when the framework and acceptance of gender equality in our society is still very much under development.

What is your personal connection with fashion?

In the movie "The Time Machine," there is a scene that always fascinated me. When the protagonist finally gets the machine to work, he speeds through time and looks out through the window of his laboratory, and then witnesses the fashion on the mannequins in the shop window across the street changing in rapid pace. It is at this moment that he knew he was traveling through time. "Fashion, like architecture, inheres in the darkness of the lived moment, belongs to the dream consciousness of the collective. The latter awakes, for example, in advertising." — Walter Benjamin, "The Arcades Project."

INTERVIEW BY ARMELLE LETURCO



JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER
MAY SHE. HAVE HEAR. BIRDS.
2016
Acrylic and inkjet on linen
94x70 inches, Gagosian gallery
Phot: Zarko Vijatovic

JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER

WATER RAINING

2016

Pigment print on anodized aluminum,
glitter on canvas, crystal, metal fixtures,
acrylic mirrored MDF slatwall with
aluminum edging.

23 3/4 x 23 3/4 x 11 1/8 inches

Gagosian Gallery

Photo: Robert McKeever



JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER

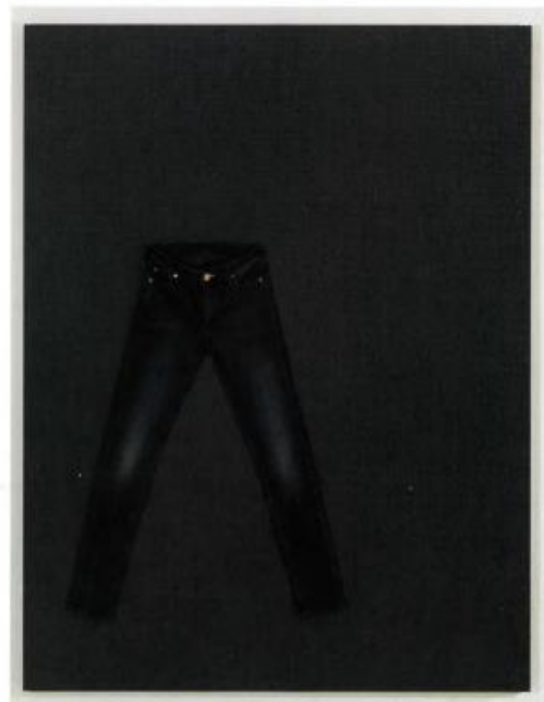
THEY MUST BE WEDDED. TO THEIR WIFE.

2016

Mirror installation and fluorescent lights,
vinyl lettering, inkjet print on linen,
acrylic sheeting, painted steel stand, fabric,
chrome car rim on acrylic mirrored pedestal,
acrylic on wood, shoes, chrome stand,
cast concrete, acrylic on wood

Gagosian Gallery

Photo: Thomas Lannes



JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER

SHE SAYS, IT HAS, CHARM.

2016

Acrylic and inkjet on linen
94x70 inches, Gagosian Gallery

Photo: Zarko Vijatovic

JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER

IN BETWEEN

2016

Jeans and denim on stretcher,
72x55x13/4 inches
Gagosian Gallery

Photo: Robert McKeever