

THE BIG BANG OF ELECTRONIC ART: MERGING ABSTRACTION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL IMAGING

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In the society of the spectacle, the art of the mass media changes the Modern relationship between art and its audience. The art resides in the shaping of this unseen, diffuse spectatorship where the medium is the masses. Co-opted imagery in massmedia challenges the meaning of Abstraction & Representation. Artists who appropriate and decontextualize mass media images from consumptive value to the sublime is a form of utopian remediation.



"objet petit" #2 & #3. Diptych by Anat Pollack 2010

In the society of the spectacle, the art of the mass media changes the Modern relationship between art and its audience. The art resides in the shaping of this unseen, diffuse spectatorship where the medium is the masses. In mass media, context transmutes image from scopic to semiotic. The onslaught of media-images sublimates the image to the message, and renders it meaningless. In my work, I transmute semiotic to scopic.

In the "objet petit a" series, digitally modified images taken from television commercials shift the meaning of classical notions of Abstraction and Representation: the definitions of which are fungible within this context. Ads sell an abstraction: desire, fear, and or an idea, but not concrete matter. In the ads that I use, that which is represented, that is, the supporting signs and signifiers used to sell something are, at best, indirectly tied to the generic product at hand. They represent an idea, not the image represented, or even the product being sold. The connection is tied as a consequence of the context- nothing more.

This paper brings attention to my process of employing the appropriation, compression, and decontextualization of mass media imagery. The “objet petit a” series is comprised of digitally layered images that result in the erasure of an idea or commodity, taken out of context from what a TV viewing audience would consider normalized and concrete. I re-appropriate the signs and signifiers that were co-opted by advertisers to sell predictable and normalized commodities to an original state of sublime beauty.

Information systems within the context of capitalism, or, as Fredric Jameson calls “millionairism” has resulted in the normalization and commodification of all components of life. This has created great confusion regarding the very nature of our existence, destabilizing our perceptions of self, body, desire, and the social.

My artwork encourages interaction, offering the opportunity to engage thought, and a space for the individual to check and consider conditioned responses: like trauma. While automatic response and recognition is necessary for advanced thinking and rapid placement of information moment by moment, it also leads to automata – mindless, thoughtless behavior.

The ever-heightened velocity of images and ideas presented to us by mass media discourages analysis and promotes amnesia. The pleasure reflexes gleefully consume data like sugary soda pop. Memory doesn’t fail- it is merely unnecessary. I use signs outside of their trusted, codified systems, devoid of time, stripped of context, and re-present nothing but what is in the image. Frozen video stills of blurred landscapes forces at the very least interpretation and analysis, and at the most, pure experience. For some, to experience the Real is an experience of the sublime, through a momentary revelation of the immense power of the natural world or of the divine.

The blurred image is as desirable and untouchable as the ad. And yet, unlike advertising, which render us always incomplete, this traumatic experience of an encounter with the sublime distances the individual from their habituated modes of perception and response.

Using the familiar is meant to create an oscillation between the habitual and the existential. By using the language of a purely contemporary experience, in this case, exploited data that has been created for entertainment, for supporting market capitalism and fear in television ads, I hope to refer the audience back to their own experiences, to disrupt it, to “expose it; ... [that I] might reveal its automatism, even its autism” (Hal Foster, Return of the Real), and to offer a space for conscious action and choice. The experience of an encounter with beauty thus reveals the flattening of the human soul caused by exposure to mass media.

It is here I wish to create a space for the audience to come in contact with themselves, to feel themselves *experiencing* and room to reflect on their conditioned responses. Codified media images are sublimated to market whims, and create a self-loathing rooted in existential malaise. My work aims to strip the images of their consumptive value in order to offer new experiences that will contribute to new ways of seeing oneself. The resulting images epitomize the ineffable. An exquisite little object to own called experience. The “objet petit a” series is meant to be a return to the flesh.

As in JMW Turner’s famous painting *Snow Storm: Steam Boat off a Harbour’s Mouth, 1844* (coll: Tate Modern) where the only sign of Modernity is blurred and thus reveals the luminous brilliance of Nature, contemporary artists resist cultural amnesia and objectification through deliberate attempts to fight the

inversion of the human spirit. This process is one of utopian remediation towards memory instead of cultural amnesia and the objectification of the human to presence within the flesh. The space provided by these contemporary artworks redeem the soul and offer a transcendent experience of the sublime.

The collapse of time, space, and matter has been a desire of scientists and inventors for centuries. The time machine, transcendental mediation, and metaphysics, are all means of escaping the corporeal, the gravitational pull of the earth, and a freedom to exist in/on new planes of consciousness. In Buddhist practice, there is a constant move in the direction of experiencing the Real, to let go of earthly attachments, to let the pain in and to let it flow through, rather than being pushed out. For some, to experience the Real is an experience of the sublime, through a momentary revelation of the immense power of the natural world or of the divine. Through art, I seek to create a space for reflection, and an opportunity both for the audience to leave their bodies and to return changed. All images end at the flesh.