

Press Release

October 2004

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Manufactured Self

Museum of Contemporary Photography

Columbia College Chicago

January 10 - March 3, 2005

CHICAGO - From January 10th through March 3, 2005 the Museum of Contemporary Photography is proud to present *Manufactured Self*, an exhibition that investigates how humans reconcile the need for individual expression within consumer culture. Carrying on the Museum's reputation for introducing both international and emerging artists to the Midwest, *Manufactured Self* will present photographs by Philip Kwame Apagya, Walead Beshty, Shannon Ebner, Yeondoo Jung, Orit Siman-Tov, Tomoko Sawada, and Brian Ulrich. Works by renowned artists Martin Parr, Tina Barney, Nikki S. Lee, Meridel Rubenstein, aerial photographer Alex MacLean, and commercial photographer Peter Menzel also make a rare Chicago appearance, rounding out a fascinating exploration of how we as a society can be manipulated, identified, and occasionally satisfied by what we consume.

Through a critical lens, *Manufactured Self* explores personal and collective consumption from a variety of angles: cultural history, personal identity and aspiration, global economy, and the influence of mass marketing. Martin Parr's (United Kingdom, b. 1952) series, *Sign of the Times*, documents England's quirky sense of home decorating during the early 1990s. This British sense of the social order, similar to America's "Keeping up with the Jones's," takes on a national question of taste by documenting the way the English have identified what they like and what they try to project with regards to their home and identity.

Going along the same procession as Martin Parr, Yeondoo Jung (South Korea, b. 1969) photographed 34 middle-class families in their respective living rooms in one typical apartment building in Seoul. He documented each family from the exact same camera angle to emphasize the standardization of each living space--the only difference is how the families are posed and their selection of furniture and taste of décor, emphasizing the uniqueness, or lack there of, within each family. Similarly, commercial photographer Peter Menzel (United States, 1948) photographs the homes and possessions of families around the world who represent the median income of their nation. Participants place all of their household belongings in front of their dwelling for unique family portraits that, side-by-side, offer a lucid illustration of global economic disparity. Alex MacLean's (United States, b. 1947) aerial perspective of housing is an effective way to survey where and how Americans choose to live and critiques both individual and cultural values.

Other photographers within this exhibition have taken images concerned with the consumer's role in manipulating, following, and creating trends. Meridel Rubenstein 's (United States, b. 1948) portraits of "Lowriders" in northern New Mexico focus on the members of a Southwestern subculture as they show off their highly stylized cars adorned with small murals, messages, and religious symbols. Also observing particular American subcultures and ethnic groups, Nikki S. Lee (South Korea, b. 1970) physically transforms herself to fit in with specific social groups. From schoolgirl to senior citizen, punk to yuppie, rural white American to urban Hispanic, Lee's characters traverse age, lifestyles, and culture. Tomoko Sawada (Japan, b. 1977) makes a similar statement utilizing the standard format for professional studio portraits used to arrange marriages in Japan, offering herself as thirty different possible candidates for matrimony. All of these projects propose questions regarding identity and social behavior. Do we choose our social groups consciously? How are we identified by other people? Is it possible for us to move between subcultures?

One's aspirations can be fundamentally different based on economic and cultural values. African artist Philip Kwame Apagya (Ghana, b. 1958) enjoys a Chicago debut with his casual studio portraits of Ghanans posed in front of a variety of painted backgrounds that reflect aspirations of his clients: boarding a private plane, standing in front of a dream house in the Suburbs, pointing to a new television. Tina Barney 's (United States, b. 1945) pictures, on the other hand, capture Western affluence through portraits of European families infused with the entitlement and privilege Apagya's portraits fundamentally lack. Yeondoo Jung 's second series on view, entitled Bewitched, displays two portraits of the same person in a dual slide presentation, one image from their present circumstances and the other reflecting their aspirations. Taken in many different countries, these portraits not only stand for personal wishes, but also represent different social-economic situations in each country.

Personal aspirations are greatly influenced by corporate handling of 'target-marketing'. Photographer Brian Ulrich (United States, b. 1971) documents the everyday activities of consumption and explores the roles we play in over-consumption and as targets of marketing and advertising. Walead Beshty (United Kingdom, b. 1977) further investigates the physical shopping space by photographing himself with his head completely inserted into merchandise and store displays, offering an absurd reflection on the meaning of "consumption." Orit Siman-Tov (Israel, b. 1971) images of people exercising in a spa, lounging around a pool, or skiing on manmade snow reflect how everything including personal experience has become a commodity. And lastly, Shannon Ebner (American, b. 1971) offers a striking series of images of a variety of people wandering the streets of L.A. depicting a letter on his or her shirt. When the images are put together they spell "SELFIGNITE". Clearly reacting to the "War on Terror" this image also represents the individuals' disassociation from society through the manipulation of the media.

A brochure will accompany this exhibition with an essay written by associate director, Natasha Egan.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography will host an opening reception on Thursday, January 13, 2005 from 5 pm until 7 pm.

The exhibitions, presentations, and related programs are sponsored in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs/After School Matters; LG Electronics; American Airlines, the official airlines of the Museum of Contemporary Photography; and our members.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography is free and open to the public weekdays from 10 am until 5 pm (Thursdays until 8 pm) and Saturdays from noon until 5 pm. The Museum is located at 600 S. Michigan Avenue on the corner of Harrison Street. For additional information please call 312-663-5554 or visit us at www.mocp.org