

Holte, Michael Ned, "Slight of Hand," *Kaleidoscope*, Issue 10, Spring 2011, pp. 58-65

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KALEIDOSCOPE



Jean-Léon Gérôme
Bushman Warrior (Boy of the Bushman Tribe), 1872
Collection: Terence and Katrina Garnett,
San Mateo, California

JEAN-LEON GÉRÔME
KATHRYN ANDREWS
ART FACES THE ECONOMY
HAEGUE YANG

LEIGH LEDARE VS. HILARY LLOYD
CHANTAL MOUFFE

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HIGHLIGHTS: KATHRYN ANDREWS



SLIGHT OF HAND

Bringing other subjectivities into her practice to expand the idea of the artist and complicate—or contaminate—authorship, Los Angeles-based artist **KATHRYN ANDREWS** explores the legacy of the readymade and the symbolic value of props.

interview by **MICHAEL NED HOLTE**

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Friends and Lovers, 2010
Courtesy: David Kordansky,
Los Angeles

ARTIST'S BIO

KATHRYN ANDREWS (b. 1973) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her work recently appeared in solo exhibitions at Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin, and the Los Angeles Central Library, and has been featured in group exhibitions at the Rubell Family Collection, Miami; Autocenter, Berlin; and Thomas Solomon Gallery at Cottage Home, Los Angeles.

BEFORE TALKING ABOUT YOUR MOST RECENT PROJECTS, I WANTED TO ADDRESS YOUR OUTINGS AS A CURATOR, WHICH INCLUDE TWO GROUP SHOWS IN 2007 AS WELL AS THE OCCASIONAL USE OF YOUR LOS ANGELES APARTMENT AS A GALLERY, *APARTMENT 2*. IT SEEMS LIKE THESE SHOWS MARKED A SIGNIFICANT TURNING POINT IN YOUR WORK BECAUSE THE CONTEXT OF OTHER ARTISTS GAVE YOU SOMETHING TO REACT TO—OR AGAINST. CONTINGENCY, IN A WORD.

I had a realization that I could use other artists' output as part of my own. In the first exhibition I invited ten artists and made responses to their contributions, with their permission. I made "works" and hung them a bit too close to what was on view, yet these things didn't have language. I didn't put my name to them and they didn't have titles.

THEY WERE VERY AMBIGUOUS. THEY FUNCTIONED AS EXHIBITION DESIGN, BUT AS AUTONOMOUS OBJECTS, TOO.

Basically, I was creating frames for the other artists' pieces, but they were non-linguistic frames. Viewers could see these things clearly, but their nature was vague: *Are these works and what's their relation to what they're next to?* They had no traceable author.

I didn't assign language to them because at that moment, I was unsure of my own relationship to style; I felt uncomfortable taking a particular stylistic position. I wanted to frame someone else's position, and somehow be relieved of the responsibility of...

SHOWING YOUR HAND?

Yes. I didn't want to be fixed by the viewer in terms of, "Oh, that's Kathryn Andrews. She does X."

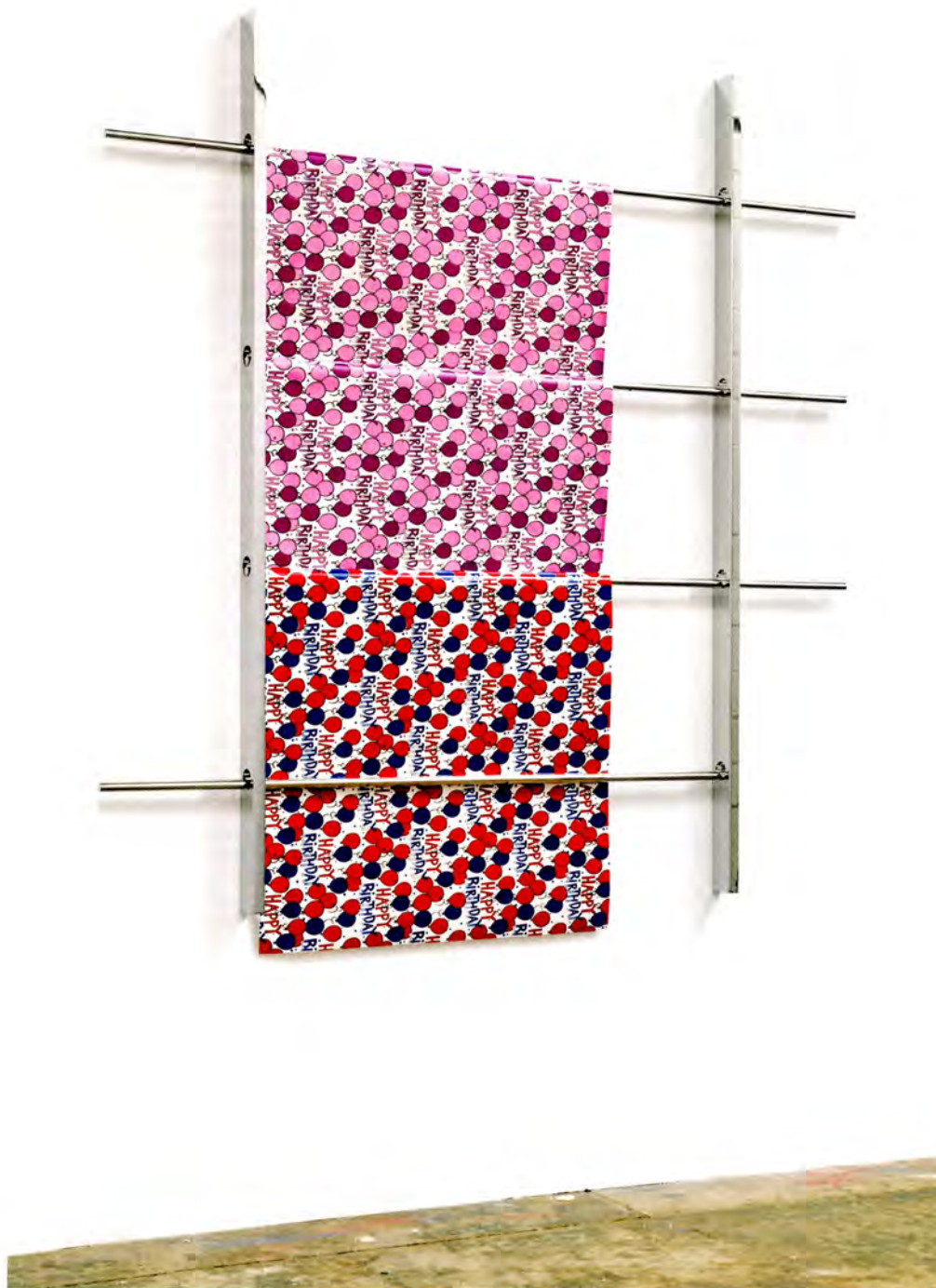
THIS SEEMS TO LEAD US TO YOUR NEXT CURATORIAL PROJECT, "MONGREL," IN WHICH YOU ALSO PARTICIPATED AS AN ARTIST. FOR THIS SHOW, YOU RENTED A STUDIO PROP—A NEON SIGN OF A STRIPPER, WHICH YOU SHOWED ALONGSIDE A "RESPONSE" WORK IN THE SAME MATERIAL. AT THE TIME I WAS PROBABLY TAKEN WITH THAT COMBINATION'S CLEVER PILE-UP OF ART HISTORICAL REFERENCE: POP, MINIMALISM, OR "LIGHT AND SPACE," AND THE LEGACY OF THE READYMADE. SO, I DIDN'T IMMEDIATELY SEE THAT THE RENTED OBJECT WAS ALSO A WAY OF COMPLICATING AUTHORSHIP.

In that work, I was further exploring what would happen if I used something that had a built-in aesthetic logic—the creation of which had nothing to do with me. I was interested in bringing other subjectivities into my practice, expanding the idea of the artist. I wanted to disrupt the viewer's tendency to imagine the artist in relation to what he or she had "made." Our conjectures about the artist limit how we perceive art. I wanted to talk about this.

THIS SEEMS TO TAKE US DIRECTLY TO THE READYMADE. DUCHAMP'S STATED HOPE FOR THE READYMADE WAS A SHIFT AWAY FROM A RETINAL UNDERSTANDING OF ART. BUT SURELY IT WAS ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUBVERT AUTHORSHIP; LET'S NOT FORGET HIS USE OF PERSONAE, R. MUTT AND RROSE SÉLAVY. BUT YOU'RE INTERROGATING AUTHORSHIP

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IN QUITE DIFFERENT WAYS, SOMETIMES AS AUTHORSHIP IS NETWORKED OR DISTRIBUTED BETWEEN ARTISTS. AND YOU'VE MENTIONED THAT AUTHORSHIP ITSELF CAN BE A KIND OF READYMADE.

Yes. Last summer I was invited to be in an exhibition in Berlin and I called a friend and asked him to submit a work for me. I didn't tell him what to do. I just asked him to put in something, anything made or found, that would merit my name. After the opening the curator sent me a picture. My work was a wooden sawhorse with stickers of butterflies that spelled out my first name. I would never make this!

THIS REMINDS ME OF YOUR NEGOTIATION WITH GAYLEN GERBER IN THE "SUPPORT GROUP" SHOW. YOU MADE A GIANT BILLBOARD TITLED *GAYLEN GERBER* THAT BASICALLY POINTED TO HIS ABSENCE IN THE EXHIBITION.

That was funny business. When I first started using other artists' works, I saw that it can get complicated because the artist's name, hand, and so on are valued as precious. The market trades these signifiers as commodities, and when an outside force interferes, essentially contaminating these trademarks, the involved parties can get hostile because they have something to lose.

Page 60:
National Holiday, 2010

Page 61:
Untitled, 2010

This page:
'Pushing Daisies' (2007), 2010

Next page:
Ashton, detail, 2010

All images courtesy:
David Kordansky, Los Angeles



When I've made works like this, I've been able to do so as a result of building a relationship of trust with that artist. In the one you mentioned, I was making a joke, with Gaylen's permission, about an interest I believe we share: *How can a solitary artist insist that "authorship" be understood as a complex event?* What I'm talking about is a catch-22. When a solitary artist defines a work's "author" as something non-unified, something bigger than himself, at the end of the day he still has to deal with the fact that his proposal, his artwork that attempts this, is attached to his name.

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO YOUR USE OF RENTED PROPS? DOES SUCH AN OBJECT COMPLICATE—OR CONTAMINATE—AUTHORSHIP IN THE SAME WAY?

After working with artists' works, I started looking for other things in the world that would be easier to access, that I could use in a dynamic of dependency. I realized that props—the kind you can easily rent in Hollywood, which get returned at the end of the rental—would afford a "truer" readymade experience. Scholars still debate whether or not Duchamp really found his objects. The rented props sidestep this problem. They sug-

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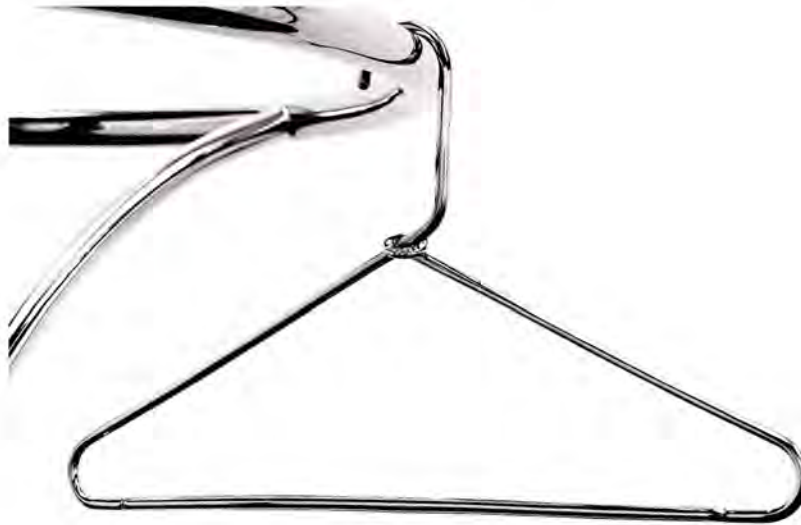
gest an imminent return to their regular type of use, one that's not art-related. They can be subsumed by my authorship temporarily. They can briefly have something to do with "Kathryn Andrews," but then they are what they are.

THAT'S THE CONTINGENCY FACTOR.

Yes. And by lending my name to them while they are art, they somehow exceed being just décor. One actually *sees* these objects. They're relics of all kinds of kooky cultural histories. I'm interested in these histories and how they represent some form of collective authorship.

I THINK THE WORD "PROP" IS FASCINATING BECAUSE IT HAS A REAL SCULPTURAL KIND OF RESONANCE TO IT. IN THE PAST, WHEN YOU'VE USED OTHER ARTISTS' WORK, IT ALSO FUNCTIONS AS A PROP, IN THE SENSE OF PROP AS A SUPPORT STRUCTURE.

What I do might be the inverse of what Gaylen does in his work: He frequently constructs a backdrop or support and then invites other artists to make a response or some kind of gesture on this surface, and that cooperation in its entirety becomes his work.



I go the other way around, which is to say, something preexists me, and then I make a move in response to that support. That relationship in its entirety becomes a Kathryn Andrews work.

RIGHT. THE BALDESSARI PIECE YOU MADE FOR THE RUBELL SHOW *HOW SOON NOW FITS THAT PARADIGM.*

For that, I borrowed a painting by John Baldessari owned by the Rubell Family Collection. In the past, I would usually ask the artist directly for his or her permission, but in this case the ownership of that work had already passed on to another party. When collectors own a work, they can more or less do what they like with it. There, I tried to make something dependent that also allowed Baldessari's painting to exist unto itself, with its separateness intact.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE RUBELL COLLECTION COULD JUST SHOW HIS PAINTING—*GOYA SERIES: THE SAME ELSEWHERE*—WITHOUT SHOWING YOUR ACCOMPANYING WORK, OR THEY COULD SEND HIS PAINTING OUT

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING
KATHRYN ANDREWS' next solo presentations will be at Statements at Art42Basel next June, and at David Kordansky Gallery later this year.

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INTO THE WORLD ON ITS OWN, BUT IF YOUR WORK IS TO BE SHOWN, IT HAS TO BE SHOWN WITH THE BALDESSARI PAINTING?

Yes, though it would be great to see my response without Baldessari's painting. It would carry forward a history of having existed in proximity to his work, while reflecting new things, essentially bringing them into the context of Baldessari through the work's title.

YOU SEEM TO LIKE PUTTING THE READYMADE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER GESTURE THAT MIGHT LOOK OFF-HAND, CASUAL—OR, CONVERSELY, IN A COMPLEX, TIME-BASED, OR EVEN CONTRACTUAL SITUATION. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE READYMADE AND SUCH GESTURES IN YOUR WORK?

I like to use readymades that have a remarkable history or that have a presence in the world that can exist relatively uncomfortably under the aegis "Kathryn Andrews." The examples we've been talking about—using another artist's work, whose authorship is compromised if it exists in a piece with my name, or rented props that have to be returned at the conclusion of the rental—these examples do this.

THE BALLOONS IN YOUR WORK *JANUARY 23* SEEMS TO OPERATE IN A SIMILAR MANNER

That sculpture, titled for the date it was completed, juxtaposes a hyper-produced object with something that took half a second to buy on the street, something that cost no money. Half of the work is this

lasting durable fabricated thing that will last for decades, and the other half is a fragile found thing that will have a very short lifespan. I think of the balloons as active agents, like living beings.

THE BALLOONS ARE POTENT, BECAUSE THEY INITIALLY APPEAR TO MAKE THE WORK FUNNY OR BUOYANT, BUT IN THE END THEY ARE QUITE MELANCHOLY.

In some ways, the piece may be a lamentation about how "high art" has perhaps killed off the pleasurable experience that certain popular things have to offer. I'm talking about disposable things that have very little value in an economic sense, but that are very rich symbolically because they lack value.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE RING IN THE WORK *ASHTON* IS THE OPPOSITE OF A THROWAWAY OR EPHEMERAL GESTURE.

Yes, for *Ashton* I made a work using a ring that Ashton Kutcher wore in the movie *The Killers*. I put this ring in a context that ultimately points back to me, the artist.

THE RING IS PLACED ON A HANGER, WHICH IS THEN HUNG ON A CLOTHES RACK. BUT THOSE AREN'T NECESSARILY OFF-THE-SHELF DEPARTMENT STORE DISPLAYS, RIGHT?

Right. The ring was put onto an object that was very carefully fabricated, although at first glance it looks like something simple that you'd find at a department store or in someone's house. But when

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you look closer at it and go further to the language that supports it—the material list and the title—you find out that it contains a certified film prop and bears a specific individual's name. From here, one might gather that the ring has a historic significance: it's not simply a piece of shiny metal. It's a piece of history that now has a value based on that history.

A SYMBOLIC VALUE.

Exactly. In this moment, your perception of the work transforms from being about pure materiality to being about pure image (the image of the celebrity and the image of the artist). A tension is set up between what's handmade and what's readymade, and this informs the relationship elsewhere between Kutcher and myself. Very literally, the "icon's hand" and the "artist's hand" are wedded, yet they're at odds.

SO IT'S AN UNHAPPY MARRIAGE?

Unfortunately, yes. I think the celebrity's identity is experienced as such an intense event that to put it into a work bearing the identity "Kathryn Andrews" creates a tension. Once the art object is identified with the artist, everything it represents gets identified in relation to the artist's name. Its signifiers get assimilated, categorized, pigeon-holed...

IT'S BRANDED.

Exactly. In this case, that just feels wrong. That's a weird thing to do to Ashton Kutcher. Why should he be understood in relation to "Kathryn Andrews"? Who the hell is that anyway? My interest in these contingencies has been about deferring that question. ◇

AUTHOR

MICHAEL NED HOLTE is the author of several books and catalogues and has written on art and culture for periodicals such as *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *Interview*, *North Drive Press*, and *X-Tra*. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

INFO

For the exhibition "Support Group," in Los Angeles's Chinatown, Andrews utilized two blank red signs on the outside of Cottage Home gallery, which formerly served as a movie theater. She used the official Cottage Home font, which is called Brush Script, along with a chain link fence motif that relates to another work she installed inside. The painted text reads, "it's all about... / gaylen gerber!" referring to Gaylen's assertive yet elusive participation in the show, which consisted of painting three of the gallery's four walls gray and covering all of the florescent lights with medium gray gels—hardly as neutral as the color gray usually implies. Andrews's response is bold and ridiculous. I love the exclamation point with lowercase letters: The work signals its own contradiction in every way. MNH

Previous page:
Gaylen Gerber, 2010

This page:
Baldessari, 2011

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David Kordansky, Los Angeles

