



**Defacement, curated by Amanda Schmitt**

July 14 - August 31, 2018

L u c a s  
Ajemian  
R i c h a r d  
Aldrich  
M a r i a  
Eichhorn  
Brook Hsu  
S u s a n  
Howe  
N i c o l a s  
Guagnini  
Jacqueline de Jong  
Leigh Ledare  
RH Quaytman  
Gerhard Richter  
Betty Tompkins  
Andy Warhol  
**Video Screening:**  
A video  
screening  
to

accompany the exhibition, *Defacement*

**Location:**  
The Club

GINZA SIX  
6F, 6-10-1  
Ginza  
Chuo-ku,  
Tokyo,  
Japan

**Dates:**  
2018, July  
15

**Artists:**  
Stan Brakhage  
Aleksandra Domanovic  
Storm de Hirsch  
Isidore Isou  
Gordon Matta-Clark

Pilvi Takala  
Naomi  
Uman

**Defaced Court**

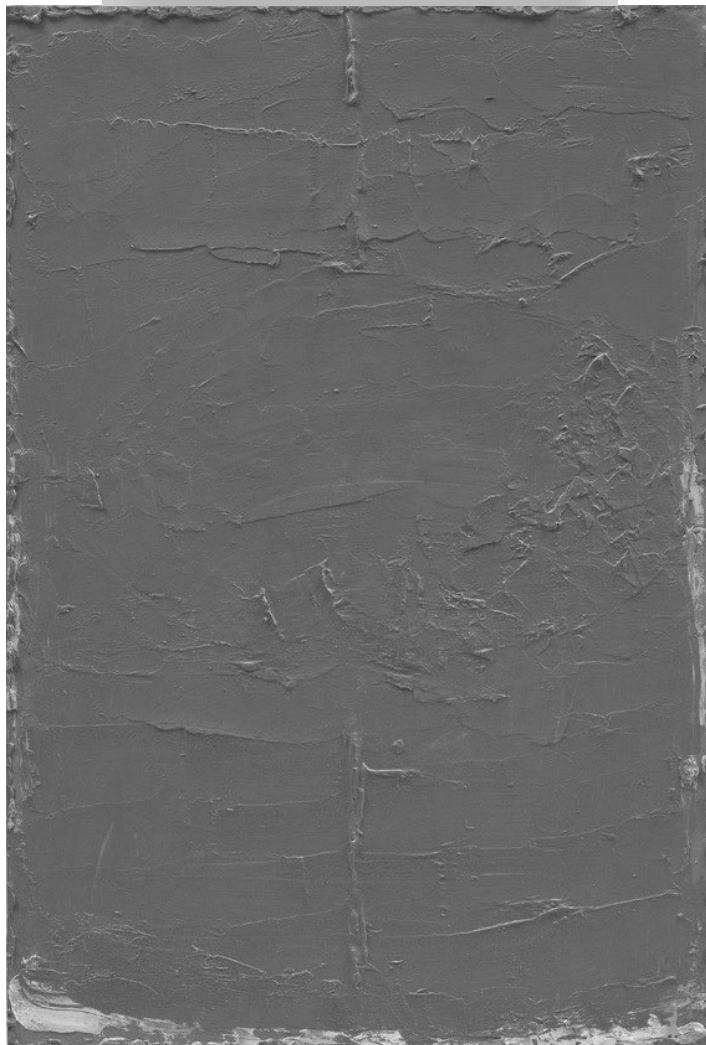
"Fnu Lnu is a stand-in; he's the missing man; he's the defendant you know exists but cannot name," said Steven M. Cohen, a former federal gangs prosecutor.

But the designation, at once mysterious and common, has taken on a life of its own in courts around the country, with Fnu Lnus being mistaken for an actual name, confusing nowling is... at intervals by special revelations

## INTRODUCTION

In 1961, Asger Jorn and (and original members of International) began publication of photographic *Institute for Comparative* understand how the Northern European edifices could alter and the artifacts that were The Institute was illustrating how this by aesthetic, artistic concrete reasons: an without political, revolutionary Jorn's purview, this with the classic of *détournement*, the present or past into a superior milieu,"<sup>1</sup> and was the publication *The* (published and edited 1962-67).

In Jorn's own words, game made possible devaluation. Only he devalorize can create to us to devalorize or according to our



Jacqueline de Jong (artists the Situationist working on a multi-volume picture books called the *Vandalism* which aimed to evolving defacement of cultural objects and supersede the meaning of vandalized (per se). focused on vandalism was driven forces without any artistic vandalism violent, dictatorial or motivations. In concept is aligned situationist strategy "integration of artistic production construction of a further explored in Situationist Times by de Jong from

"Détournement is a by the capacity of who is able to new values...It is up to be devalorized ability to reinvest in

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<sup>1</sup>McDonough, Tom. "Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents". October Books, MIT Press, 2002.

our own



culture.”<sup>2</sup> In short, one must sacrifice the past to make way for the future.

Détournement is closely related to defacement –as illustrated in this exhibition-- in which both the source and the meaning of the original subject or object are subverted



to create a new work. The artworks in *Defacement* thus fulfill Jorn’s premise of vandalism and the collective situationist notion of détournement, while also investigating the concept as explored by anthropologist Michael Taussig in his eponymous book, asking what surfaces when an artist defaces the surface?

One of the most notorious examples of defacement is illustrated in Guy Debord’s graffito, “Ne Travaillez Jamais,” scrawled on a public embankment in Paris in 1963. In order to understand Defacement, we must understand the complex term, vandalism, an action involving deliberate destruction or damage to public or private property (such as a graffiti). Vandalism connotes a dirty word, as does appropriation: the action of taking something for one’s own use, typically without the rightful author or owner’s permission. To vandalize is to steal or destroy; the works in *Defacement*, however, détourn the connotation of this action and investigate both the meaning of an image or object’s destruction and its revalorization. Defacement, as diametric to vandalism, iconoclasm or desecration, revalues, rather than devalues. Presented in *Defacement* is work by twelve contemporary artists in which the artist has executed an incisive attack on the surface or original image in order to alter, subvert, or deface: to revalorize a new form, reading or meaning.

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<sup>2</sup>Jorn, Asger. *Détourned Painting*, 1959.





SHUTTERED, 1986  
100



SELF-DESTRUCTION, 1986  
101

## EXHIBITION WALK-THROUGH

**Jacqueline de Jong** is an original member of the Situationist International and subsequently initiated The Situationist Times, for which she was editor/publisher from 1962-1967. Who better to illustrate the act of defacement than an original collaborator of the SI and a master of “Potato Blues,” photographs of the most earthly beings, shriveled potato sprouts, and proceeds to elaborate upon the image with fantastical illustrations in acerbic colors such as fuschia and lime green, rendering the sprouts

Stan Brakhage, *Reflections on Black*, 1955

(様式 4)  
輸入禁制品該当通知書  
Notice of Prohibited Imports

平成 12 年 11 月 07 日  
送付通知書番号 第 43 号  
Notice No.

早川昌孝様 殿  
(氏 名)  
(住所) 東京都渋谷区  
虎ノ門一丁目1番30号  
東京税関長 御買掛 御  
税関支署長 御  
Director of the Tokyo Customs  
Branch Customs  
Director of the

貴税関が輸入しようとした下記1及び2に掲げる物品は、下記3の理由により、関税  
定率に附加税第14条第4号に該当すると認められますので、同条第3項の規定に基づ  
き通知します。なお、この通知について不服があるときは、この通知があったことを  
知った日の翌日から起算して2月以内に東京税関長に対して異議申立てをすることが  
できます。

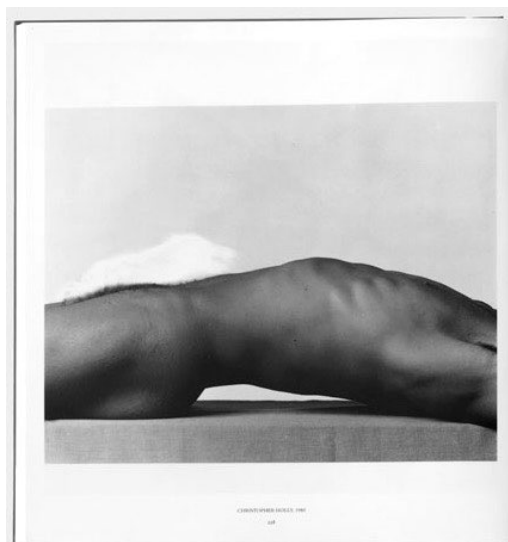
You are hereby notified under the provisions of Item 3, Article 21 of the  
Customs Tariff Law that the importation of the article(s) given below (List 1,  
shall not be permitted as it is (they are) found, by the reasons shown below  
3, to fall under the Provisions of Item 3-4 of the same article.

In case you are not satisfied with this Notice, you are entitled to file a  
protest with the Director of the Tokyo Customs within two months from the  
day following the date of acknowledgement of this Notice.

記  
1 品 名 別 紙 に 示 し  
2 数 量  
3 理 由 異議を唱へべき物品と認められる。

Reasons for applying Item 3-4, Article 21 of the Customs Tariff Law:  
(備 考) 本通知について、異議に異議がなく、当該物品を放棄せられるときは、送付  
の「伝票(異議書)」の所定の欄に異議を記入し、添付の「伝票」を添付して送付  
し、  
(Remark) If you have no intention to file a protest, please send the Declaration  
for abandonment of article, enclosed herewith to the undersigned  
customs.

所 在 地 〒107 東京都港区新橋 3-2-4 税関  
税 関 長 関税支署長 御買掛 御  
Name and address of the Customs office. TOKYO AIR CARGO SUB-BRANCH, TOKYO CUSTOMS.



SHUTTERED, 1986  
100



WILSON BRIDGES, 1986  
101

unrecognizable in the compositions' final forms. The act of defacement transforms the humble potato into a great work of art. De Jong, along with Jorn, has long held a fascination with "primitive" mark-making, going back 10,000 years and more, for what could be more primitive than a potato spud? Ironically, coinciding with the timeline that the Vandalism focused on, the agriculture, is dated back approximately 10,000 years (on the South American continent).

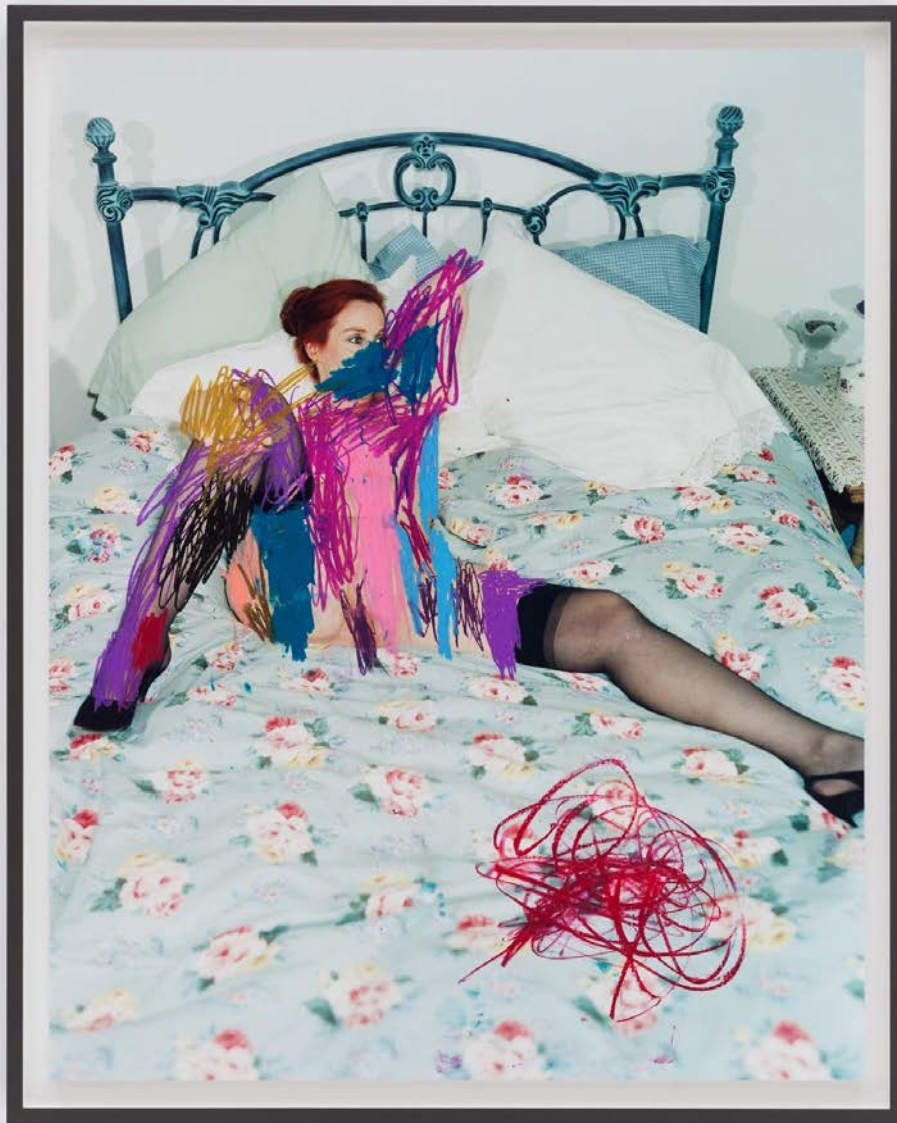
Also demonstrating that the détournement is alive and presents a new work by de Jong, *The Shredded*, a destroyed facsimile publication of six Situationist Times.



situationist strategy of well, this exhibition Jong, *The Shredded* copy of Boo Hooray's 2012 issues of the original

Unsatisfied with various —and unauthorized— outcomes of the facsimile edition, de Jong presents a completely destroyed copy of the work along with accompanying *erratum*, demonstrating where the facsimile went wrong and leading her to denounce

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modern world.”<sup>3</sup> Illustrated here, in the work of **Betty Tompkins** and **Leigh Ledare**, we are posed with examples in which the artist has defaced one of the most sacred of figures, the mother. In *Orion*, Ledare invited children (young enough to be supposedly

publication as a “Fakesmile”. In case, the artwork is created through vandalism of a published volume of books that were commercially purchased for occasion of its destruction.

Related in connotation to act of vandalism concept of desecration, an which a sacred object or image treated with violent disrespect or violation. Taussig reframes this stigma however, proclaiming that “Desecration [is] closest many of are going to get sacred in this

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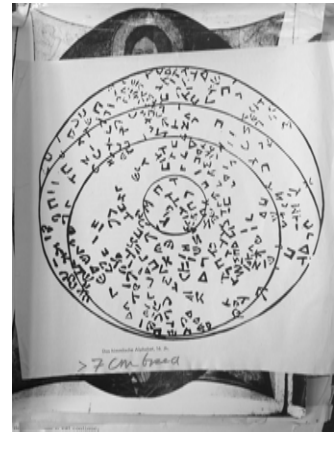
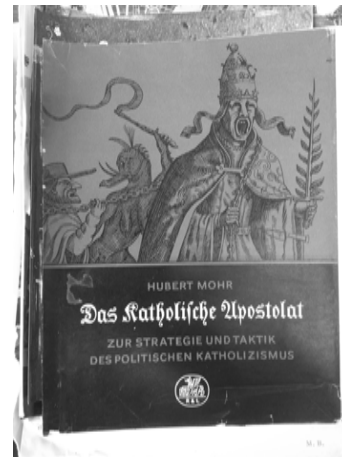
<sup>3</sup>Taussig, Michael. “Defacement”. Stanford University Press, 1999.



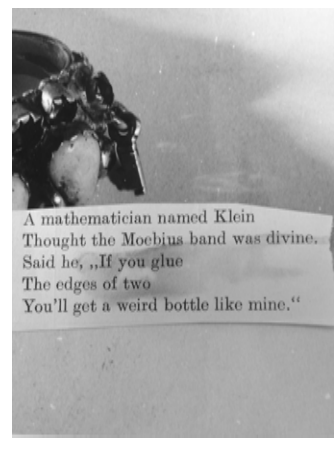


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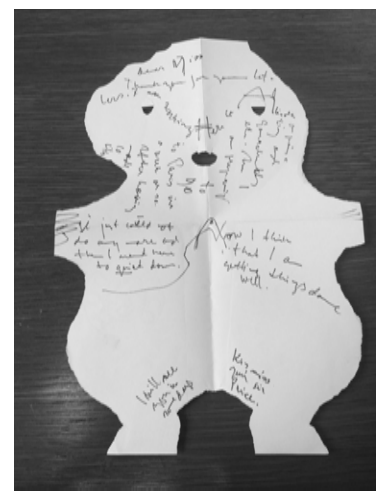
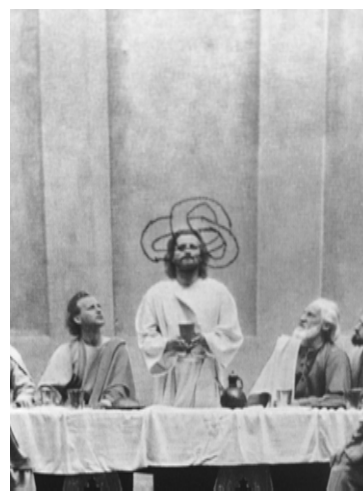
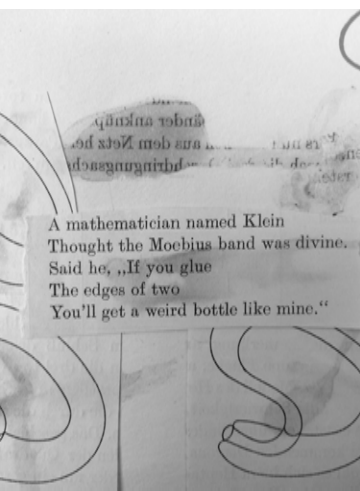
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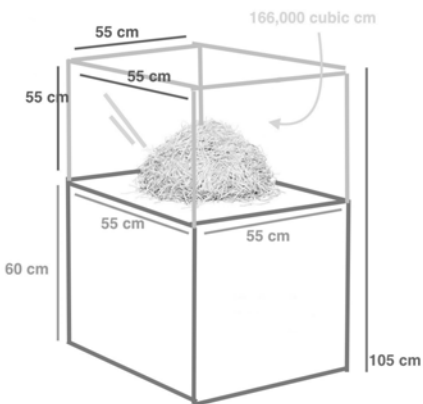
presentation of the



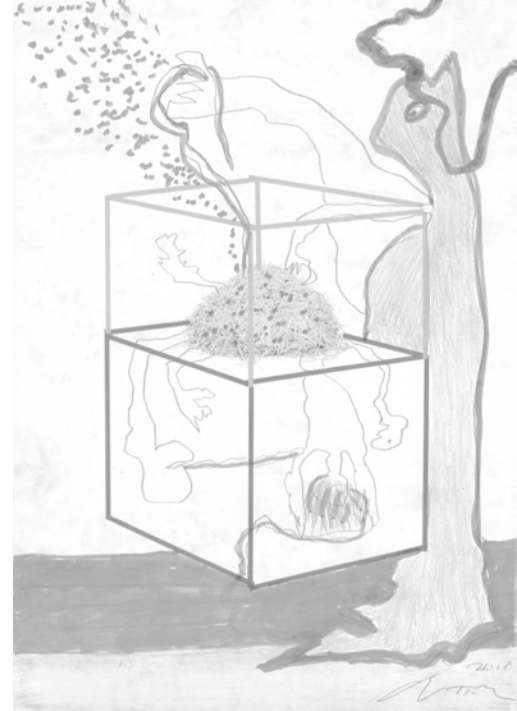


full-frontal female nude, thereby oblivious to the sexualize nature of the object) to scribble over a representation of the artist's own mother. **Tompkins** has torn a reproduction of Titian's Virgin Mary, the most famous of all mothers, from an art history book and has obscured the figure of the female with words compiled from a collection of subjective testimonies retrieved by Tompkins from

thousands of female colleagues around the world.



In another work from this series, **Tompkins** again conceals the figure of the woman, in this case a reproduction of the Venus Rokeby, as painted by Diego Velázquez in 1647 --and perhaps more infamously-- as defaced by the suffragette Mary Richardson in 1914. Both Tompkins and Richardson sought feminist activism in  
t h e i r



defacement, Richardson by means of a meat chopper, and Tompkins by means of another tool, the paintbrush.

In other instances, figures are cut off or obscured, or even the artwork itself is defaced. **Richard Aldrich** has often acted to define and reexamine what







makes a painting and specifically what happens when the act of painting is turned on  
i t s head,



Storm de Hirsch, *Peyote Queen*, 1965



attacked, or *détourned*. *Untitled*, demonstrates the negation of paint by more paint, relating to Piero Manzoni's concept of *Achrome*, in creating a composition devoid of any sign that might imply a meaning. As stated by Guy Debord, "Titles themselves, as we have already

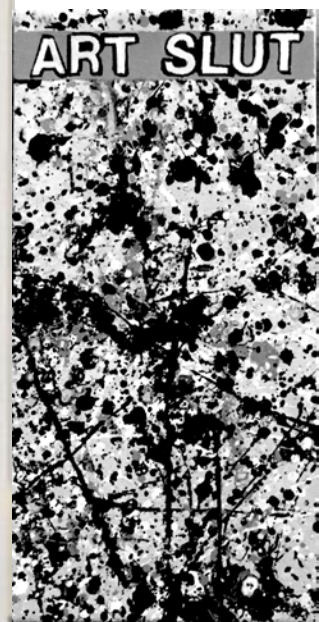
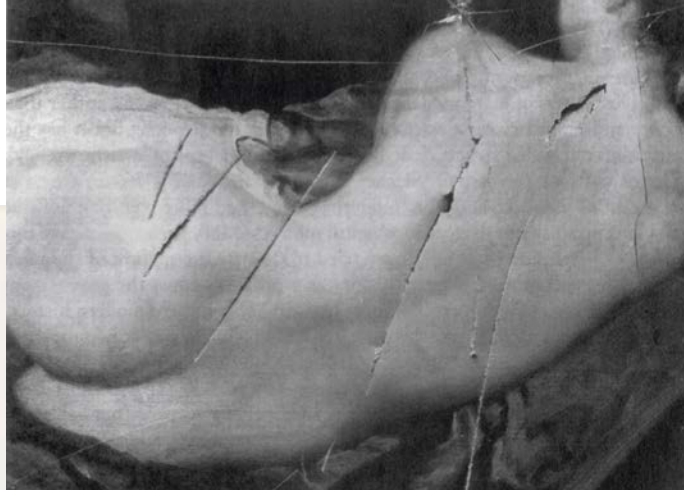
seen, are a basic element of *détournement*."<sup>4</sup>This statement is self-reflexive when considering the full title of Aldrich's painting in this exhibition: *Untitled (Mirror)*.

Accompanying this painting is *The Electric Space Between Sonny and Linda Sharrock*, a photocopy of a photograph, implying decapitation of two figures, where Aldrich has intentionally framed and defaced the figures



<sup>4</sup>Debord, Guy and Gil J. Wolman. "A User's Guide to *Détournement*", 1956.





of the  
supposed  
Sharrocks,

rendering them anonymous.

In some cases, the defacement isn't completed by the artist themselves, but simply entrusts bureaucratic structures to censor items of presumed profanity, as is the case in **Maria Eichhorn's**



*Prohibited Imports.* In 2003, Eichhorn mailed to her gallery in Japan a selection of monographs by artists including Robert Mapplethorpe, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Jeff Koons, anticipating that they might be judged as pornographic and thus reviewed by censorship officers. Indeed, the books were seized at the Narita airport and the profane elements (such as genitalia) were defaced with sandpaper, rubbed down to the raw whiteness of the paper. First exhibited in Japan as books, the project is re-presented in this photograph.

The poet



**Susan Howe**

effectively  
by slicing and splicing words  
poems, essays and captions,  
other

defaces the English  
from



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sources.

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*Tom Tit Tot.* Within the  
the words *Fnu Lnu*, an



Presented  
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obscure  
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plaintiff or defendant whose  
unknown. An individual  
*Fnu Lnu* is effectively  
the legal system is put to a  
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articulated. In the words of  
know, which is the most powerful form of knowledge.

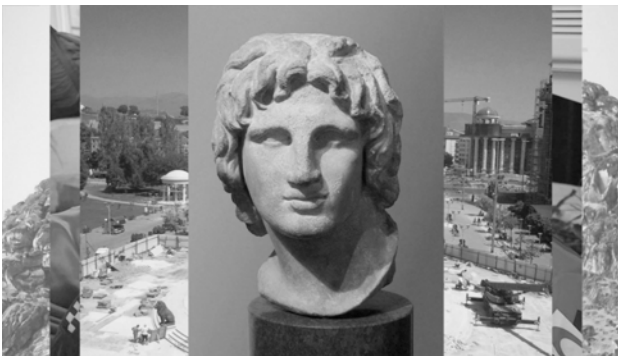
challenge in acknowledging a public  
a system where the identity must be  
or another, cannot easily be  
Taussig, they are knowing what not to

**Nicolás Guagnini** collects faces who identities have succumbed to history,  
rearranging their features to create a sort of Exquisite Corpse, alluding to the  
cacophony of historical record and inconsistencies in documentation. The red ink

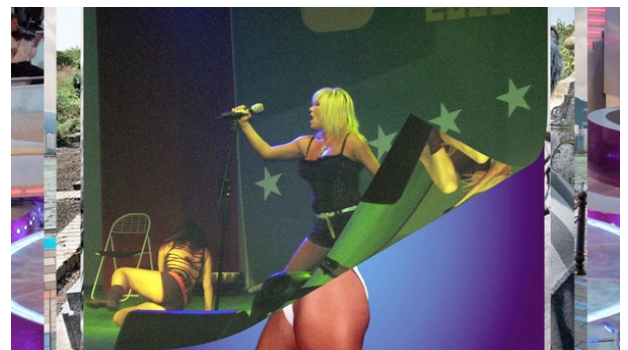




Naomi Uman, *Removed*, 1999



alludes to the violent maintenance of civilizations and societal powers to assert their



preferred versions of historical truth, endlessly insistent on cementing one version of historical fact without recourse to interpretation or revision. This work, *Incest Aggregator*, itself is defaced by the work of an emerging artist, **Brook Hsu**. Possessed of the image of Japanese supermodel Devon Aoki, Hsu endlessly interprets new

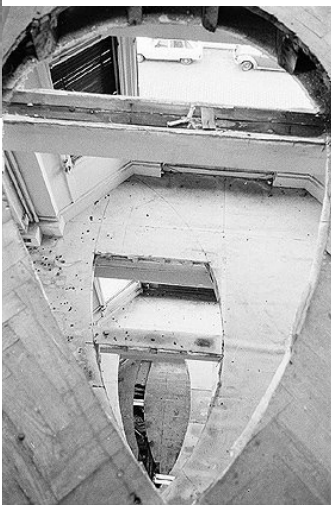




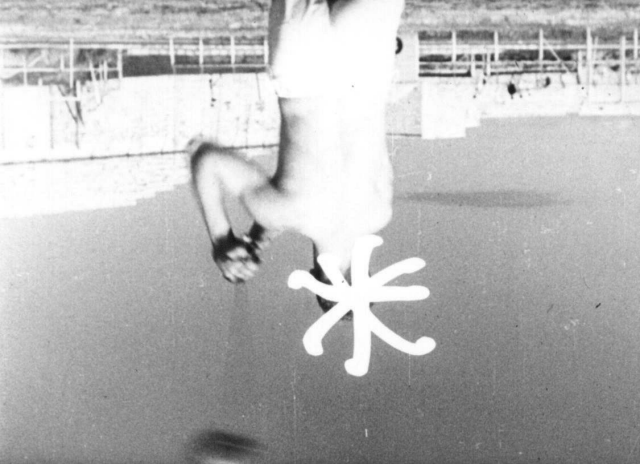
readings of the face. Hsu is of course not defacing Aoki in the public sense of shame, however using the model's face, which has freely been given to the camera's gaze, as a sort of template in which to imbue new meaning, almost as if Aoki is defaced simply through repetition. This could be interpreted by way of the proverb, "Familiarity breeds contempt," or rather we could focus on the additive, enhancing aspect of defacement.



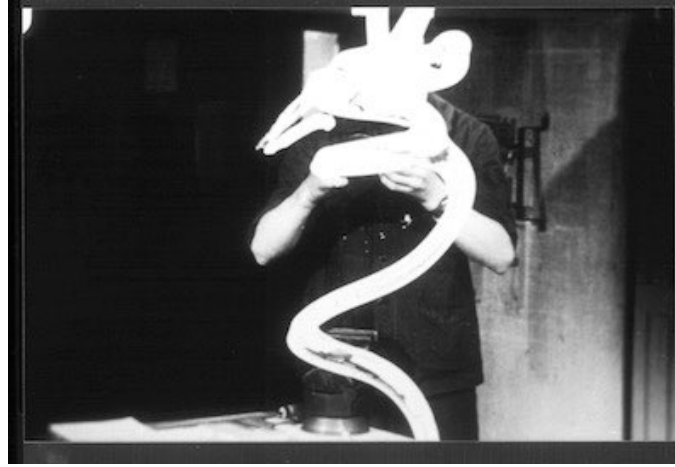
In the 1960s (during a period concurrent with the late activities of the Situationists), Pop Art —notably the use of repetition of silkscreens in the work of **Andy Warhol**— negated the artistic



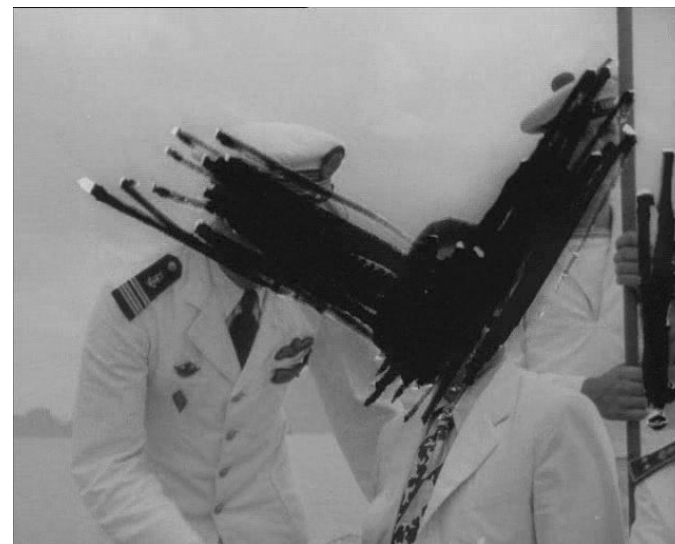
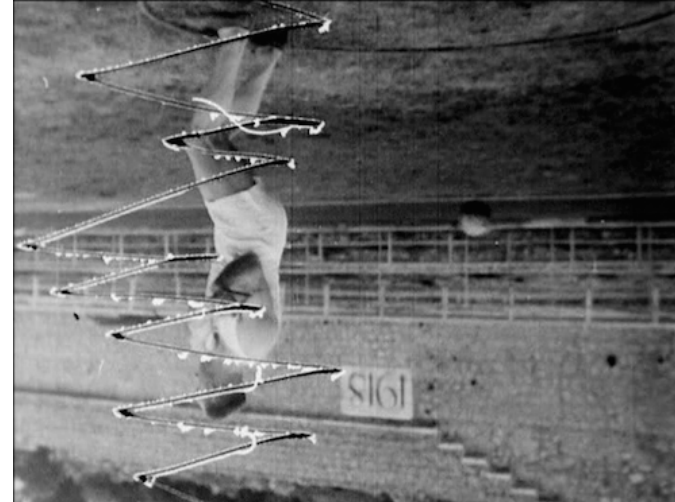




covenant of technique, but even more prominent is the use of repetition to negate the concept of preciousness. Spoiling that which is precious lies at the core of *Defacement*.



**L u c a s A j e m i a n** subverts the concept of authorship and relative value in his ongoing body of work, *Laundered Paintings*. The artists acquires 'finished' paintings



(which are willingly donated, a contract between Ajemian and the painter remains silently collaborative), and proceeds to un-stretch, soak, wash and dry the canvas, effectively laundering the original article. Ajemian further intervenes by cutting, reframing, and re-stretching the newly-washed canvas to create a new artwork, a painting which supersedes the original authorship and becomes a work by Ajemian himself, consequently removing the name of the original painter, and highlighting the relations of value and transaction in art and collaboration.



Some  
of



Ajemian's collaborators include market-starlets like Dana Schutz, Nate Lowman, and Cheyney Thompson, among others. The laundering process effectively reduces the value of the work by two, even three digits, while still creating value for a lesser-known conceptual artist like Ajemian. In Michael Taussig's terming of defacement, this act --as well as in Andy Warhol's silkscreens-- "exerts its curious property of magnifying, not destroying, value."



Finally, there are two artists who deface creations of their own. Since the 1980s, the painter **Gerhard Richter** has been taaking





the standard format, commercially processed 4x6" photographs and obscuring the



image by using the palette knife to smearing leftover oil paint across the surface. This



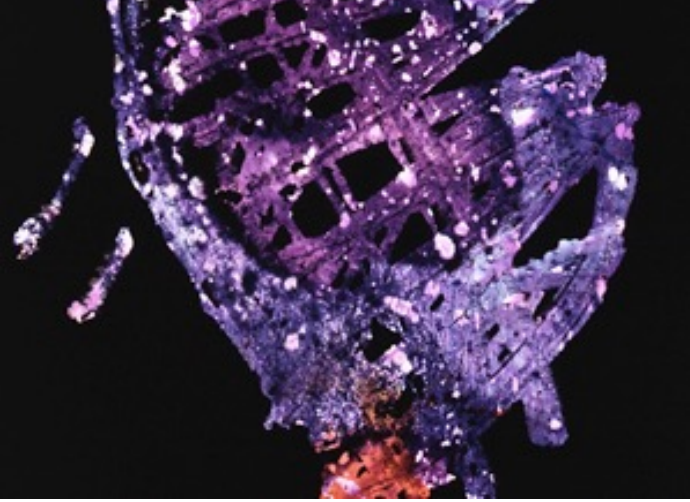
act of defacement is additive, as opposed to the scratched polaroid prints by **RH Quaytman**, which are reductive. Both however conjure the imagery of an incisive attack, using a device such as a knife to deface. Quaytman here is also the primary photographer, in these examples taking portraits of friends such as artist Matt Mullican and curator and critic Ed Halter.

Both artists are using consumer-use photography formats, images that are meant to end in family photo albums. These seemingly aggressive acts of defacement, though



paint smears and scratched emulsion, could perhaps be gestures that represent a certain sort of affectionate attention to the original subject of the photograph, through which only the artist is intimately connected. The viewer struggles to uncover meaning or a narrative from underlying photograph, bringing closer attention in fact to the seemingly banal moment which is captured on film: a bench by a window, a man checking his email, men and women walking down flights of stairs, visiting an exhibition, etc.





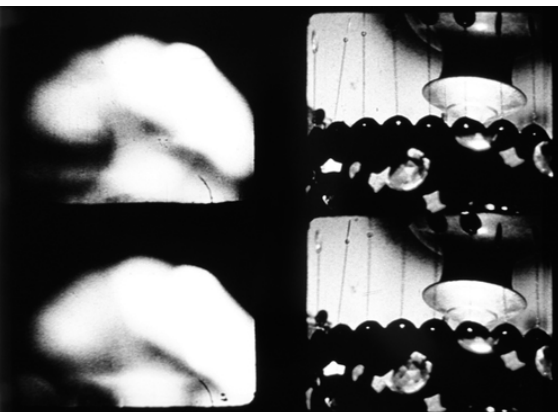
The act  
o f



defacement after all can be enlightening. To end with the words of Taussig, “It brings insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery...it may also animate the thing defaced, and the mystery revealed may become more



text by



Amanda  
Schmitt



mysterious.”<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup>Taussig, Michael. “Defacement”. Stanford University Press, 1999.



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