

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

Nonetheless, the odd letter combinations in Fnu Lnu, spelled as if it might be a name in a foreign language, has caused infamous mis-
_____ when investigators cannot

Deviled Court

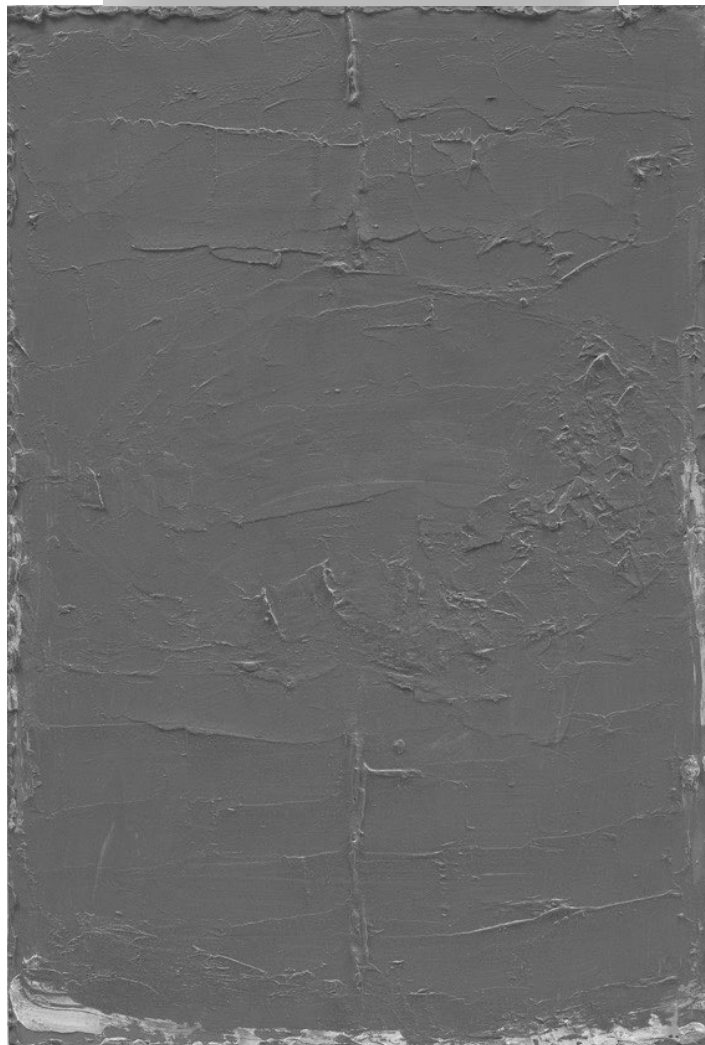
"Fnu Lnu is a stand-in; he's the missing man; he's the defendant you know exists but cannot name," said Steven M. Cohen, a former federal gangs prosecutor.

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
at intervals by special revelations

INTRODUCTION

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

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



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

"Détournement is a game made possible by the capacity of devaluation. Only he who is able to devalorize can create to us to devalorize or according to our ability to reinvest in

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

our own



culture.”² 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.

²Jorn, Asger. *Détourned Painting*, 1959.



UNIVERSAL 1966
100



SELF-RETRAIT 1966
100

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. Who better to illustrate the act of original collaboration of the SI and détournement herself. In her *Blues*, de Jong starts with a high-resolution 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 unrecognizable in the

Stan Brakhage, *Reflections on Black*, 1955

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

昭和 32 年 11 月 27 日
Date
送付通知書番号 第 43 号
Notice No.

早川昌孝様へ 殿
〒 (Address) 東京都渋谷区 虎ノ門1-14-1301 東京税関支 窓 買 掛 係
Director of the Tokyo Customs Branch Customs
税関支署長

貴様が輸入しようとした下記 1 及び 2 に掲げる物品は、下記の理由により、関税
定率法第 14 条第 4 項に該当すると思われまますので、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。

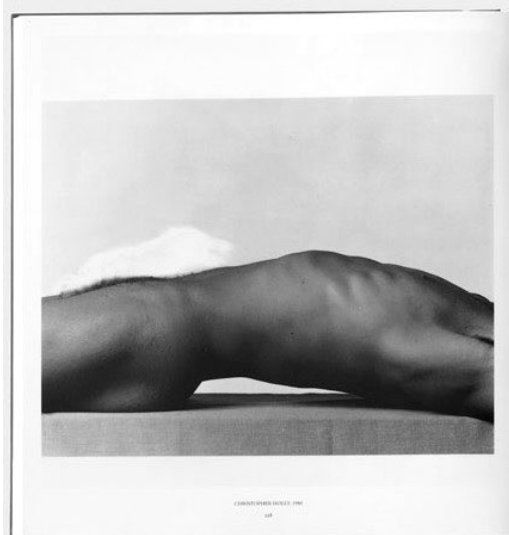
You are hereby notified under the provisions of Item 3, Article 14 of the
Customs Tariff Law that the importation of the article(s) given below (List 1,
shall not be permitted as it is (they are) listed, by the reasons shown below
3, to fall under the Provisions of Item 3-4 of the same article.

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.

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1 品 名 別 紙 2 枚入り
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3 理 由 異議を述べべき物品と認められる。

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(備 考) 本通知について、異議に異議がなく、当該物品を放棄される場合は、品付
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customs.

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税 関 支 署 長 東京税関支署長 渡邊 博 樹 門
Name and address of the Customs office. TOKYO ANK CARGO SUB-BRANCH, TOKYO CUSTOMS.



CHERRY ONES 1966
100



WELDON 1966
100

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? the timeline that the Vandalism focused on, the agriculture, is dated back (on the South American

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



Ironically, coinciding with Institute for Comparative cultivation of potatoes, as approximately 10,000 years continent).

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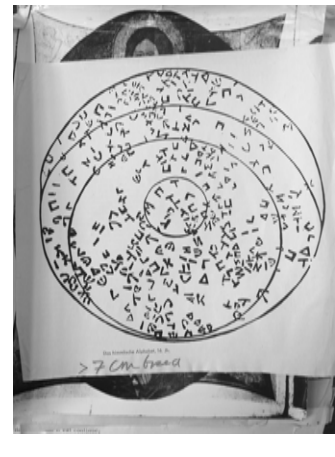
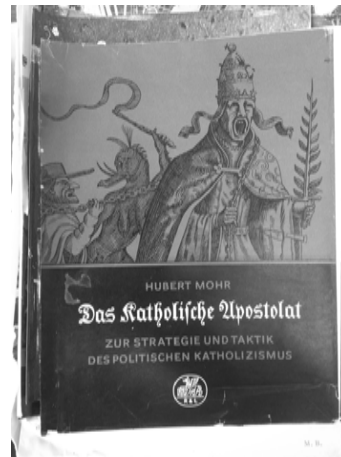
modern world.”³ Illustrated here, in the work of **Betty Tompkins** and **Leigh Ledare**, we are posed with examples in which the artist has defaced one of the most sacred of figures, the mother. In *Orion*, Ledare invited children (young enough to be supposedly

³Taussig, Michael. “Defacement”. Stanford University Press, 1999.

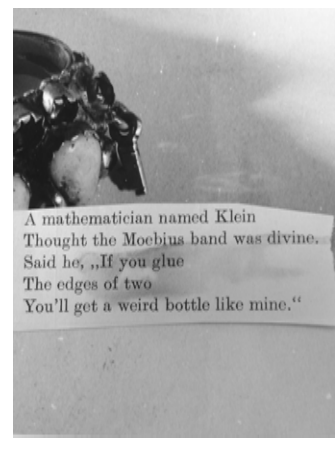


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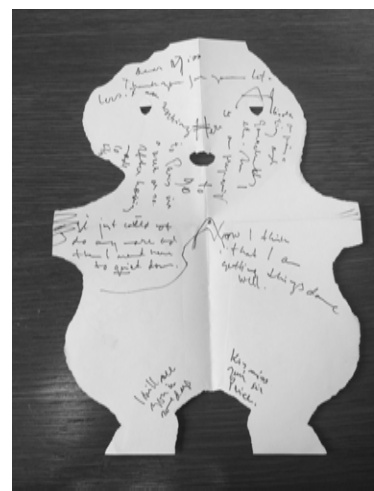
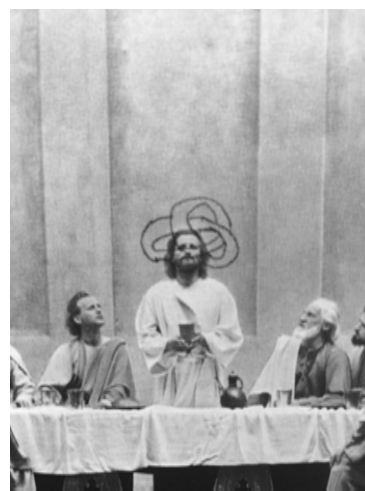
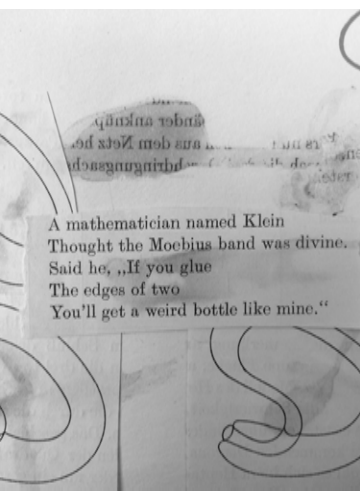
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licentious



presentation of the

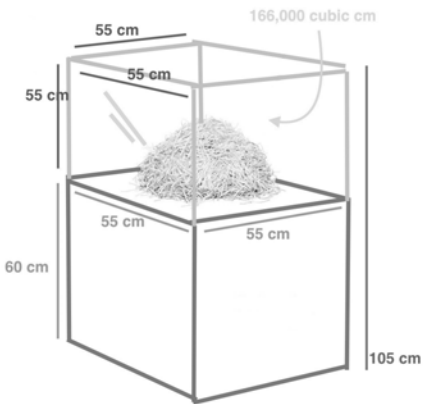




full-frontal female nude, thereby oblivious to the sexualize nature of the object) to scribble over a representation of the artist's own mother. **Tompkins** has torn a reproduction of Titian's Virgin Mary, the most famous of all mothers, from an art history book and has obscured the figure of the female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



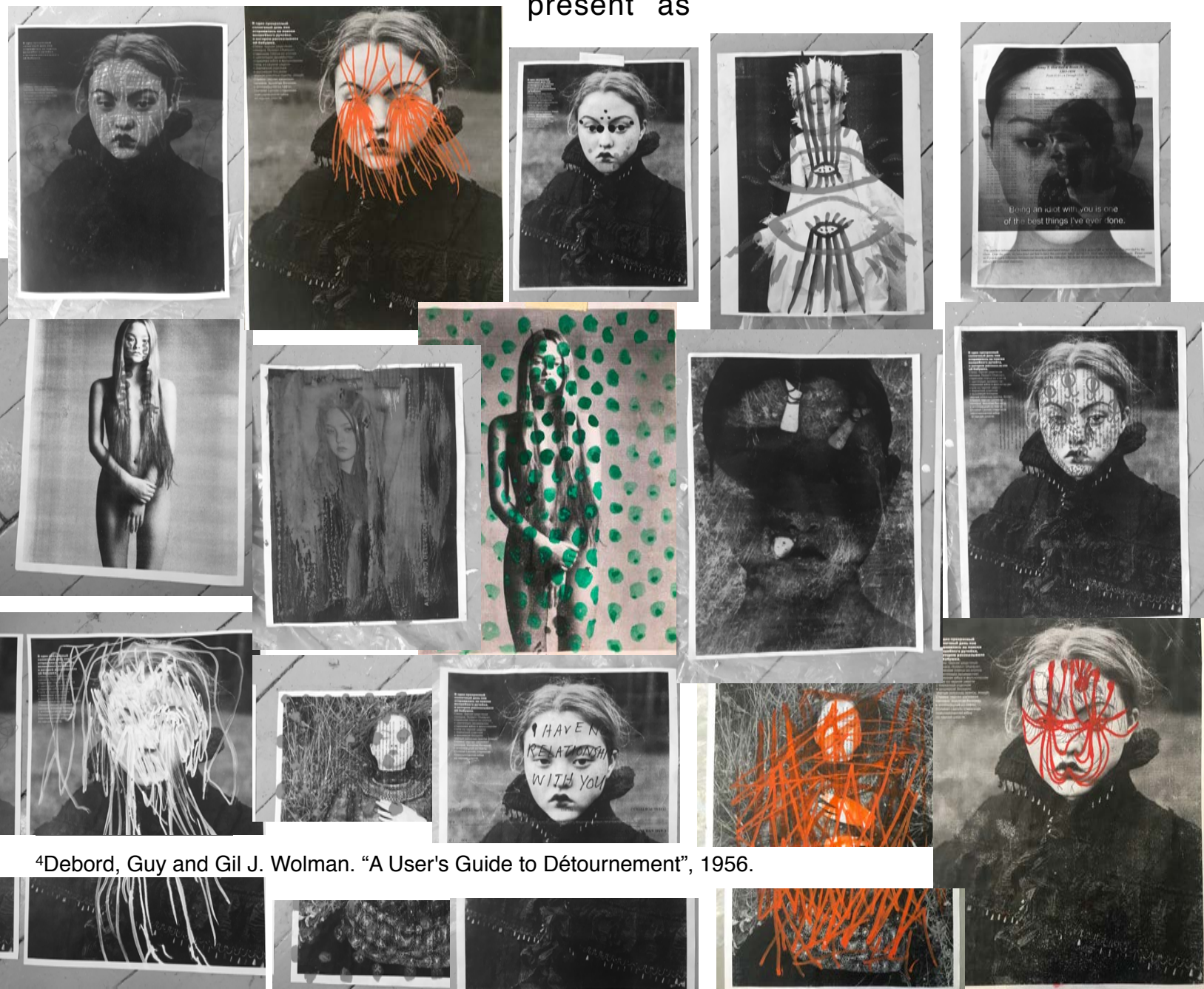
makes a painting and specifically what happens when the act of painting is turned on
 i t s head,



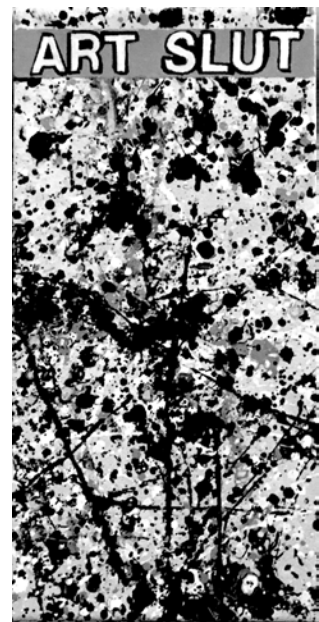
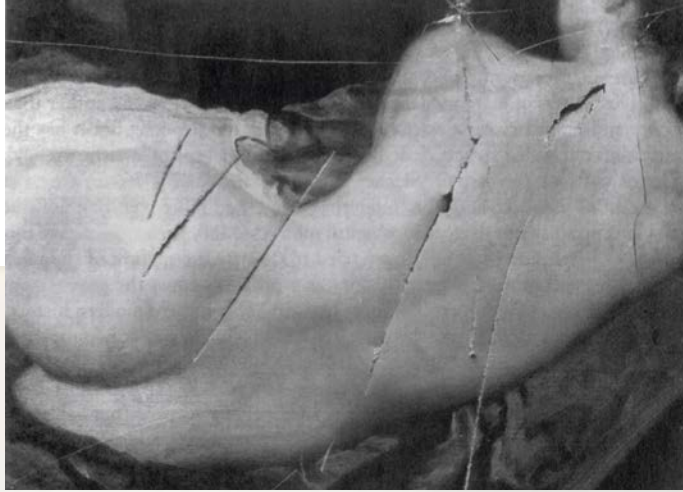
Storm de Hirsch, *Peyote Queen*, 1965

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*." ⁴This 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 vinyl record cover, composed in a manner that highlights the negative space between the two figures. Rather than representation through traditional portraiture, the composition highlights the intense physical, emotional, and intellectual intimacy that the Sharrocks embodied as both spouses and bandmates. This unseen, almost vibrational space between them, is as present as



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



the figures themselves.

In some cases, the defacement isn't intended by the artists 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 (such as genitalia) were defaced with to the raw whiteness of the paper. First books, the project is exhibition as

and the profane elements sandpaper, rubbed down exhibited in Japan as re-presented in this a photograph.

The poet



Susan alphabet

articles, poems, essays and captions, among other sources. Presented here is two pages from *Tom Tit Tot*. Within the diptych words *Fnu Lnu*, an obscure legal

Howe effectively defaces the English by slicing and splicing words from

the suite appears the term which stand-in for



acts as a plaintiff or unknown. An individual identifying as



defendant whose identity is

is effectively defaced, and the legal system is put to a challenge in

F n u

Lnu



acknowledging a public playing along in a system identity must be known, but easily be articulated. In the what not to know, which is

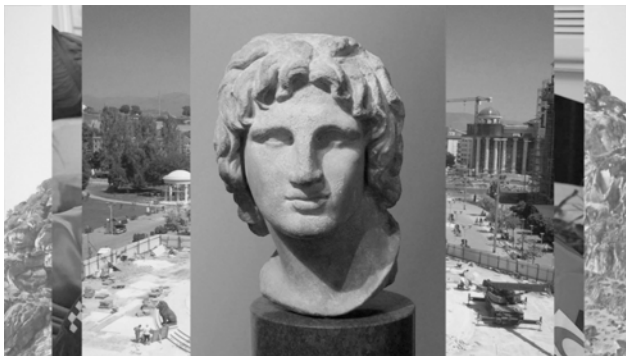


secret and where the

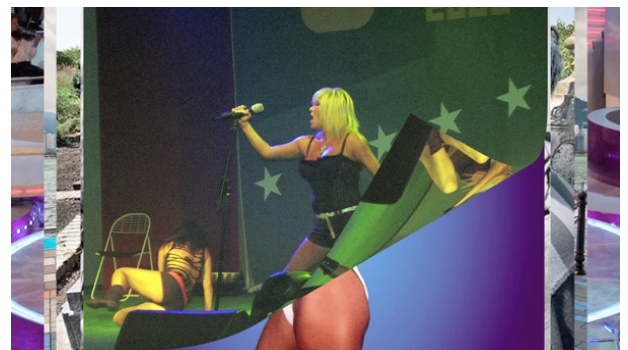
for one reason or another, cannot words of Taussig, they are knowing the most powerful form of knowledge.

Nicolás Guagnini collects 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 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*

faces who identities have succumbed



Aggregator, itself is defaced by the work of an emerging artist, **Brook Hsu**. Possessed



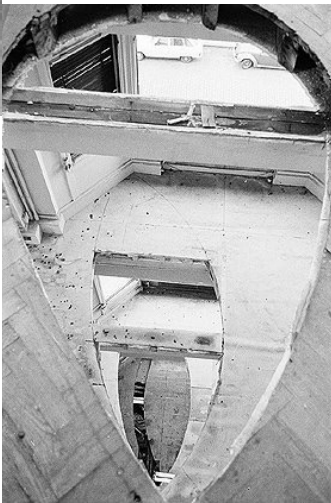
by the image of Japanese supermodel Devon Aoki, Hsu endlessly interprets new readings of the face. Hsu is of course not defacing Aoki in the public sense of shame, however using the model's face, which has freely been given to the camera's gaze, as a sort of template in which to imbue new meaning, almost as if Aoki is defaced simply

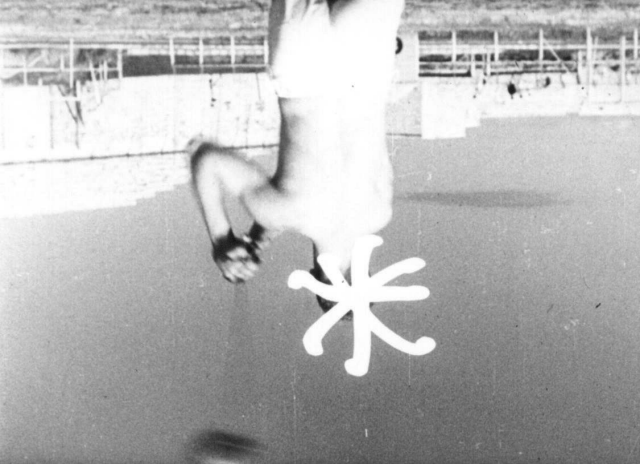


through repetition. This could be interpreted by way of the proverb, “Familiarity breeds contempt,” or rather we could focus on the additive, enhancing aspect of defacement.

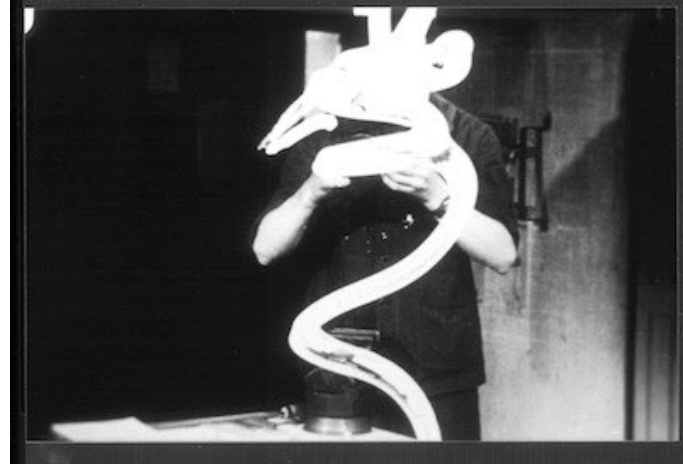


In the 1960s (during a period concurrent with the late activities of the Situationists), Pop Art — notably the use of repetition of silkscreens in the work of **Andy Warhol**— negated the artistic covenant of technique, but even more prominent is the use of repetition to negate the concept of preciousness. Spoiling that which is precious lies at the core of *Defacement*.

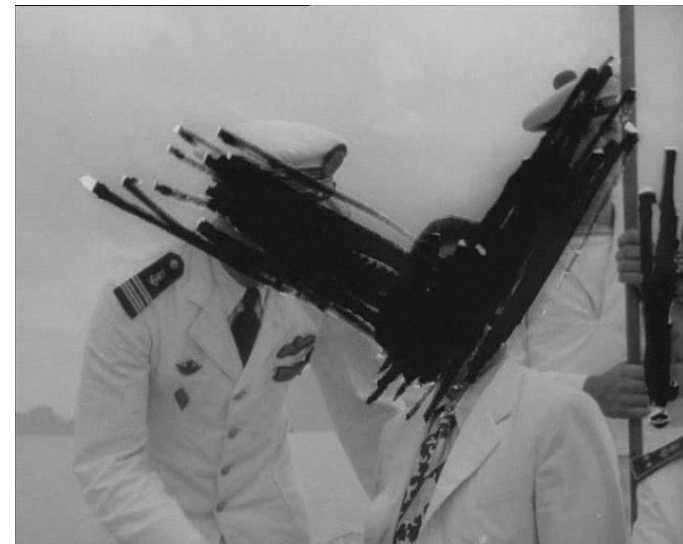
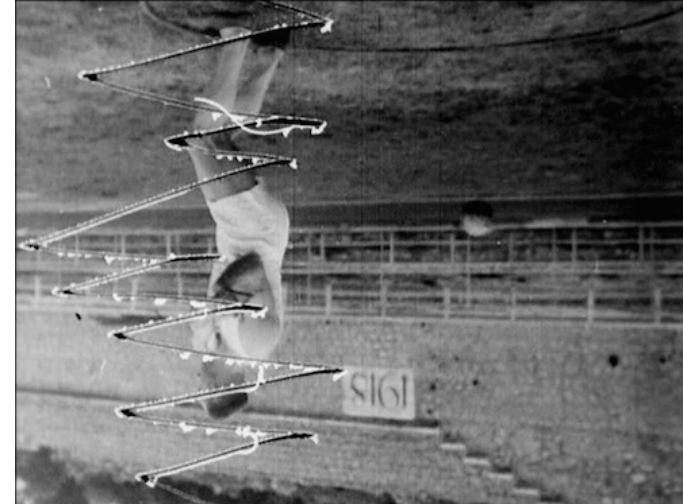




subverts the concept of authorship and relative value in his ongoing body of work, *Laundered Paintings*. The artist acquires 'finished' paintings (which are willingly donated, a contract between Ajemian and the painter remains silently collaborative), and proceeds to un-stretch, soak, wash and dry the canvas, effectively laundering the original



So our ideas can't be too different, despite what we say...



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 taking the standard format, commercially processed 4x6" photographs and obscuring the image by using the palette knife to smear 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.



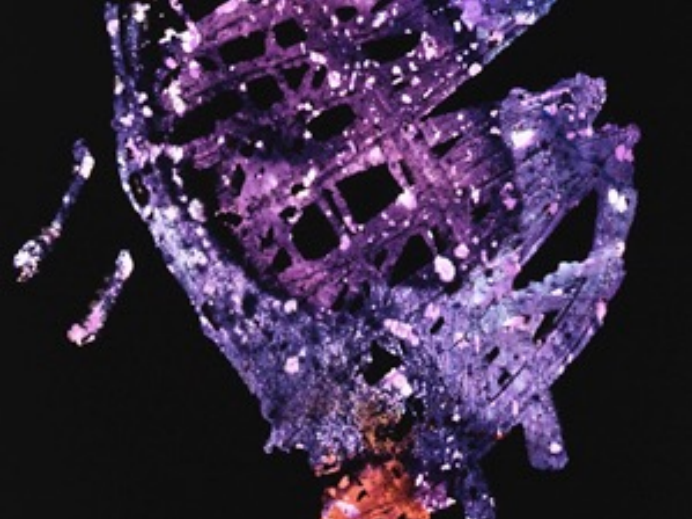
Quaytman here is also the primary photographer, in these examples taking portraits of friends such as artist Matt Mullican and curator and critic Ed Halter.

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

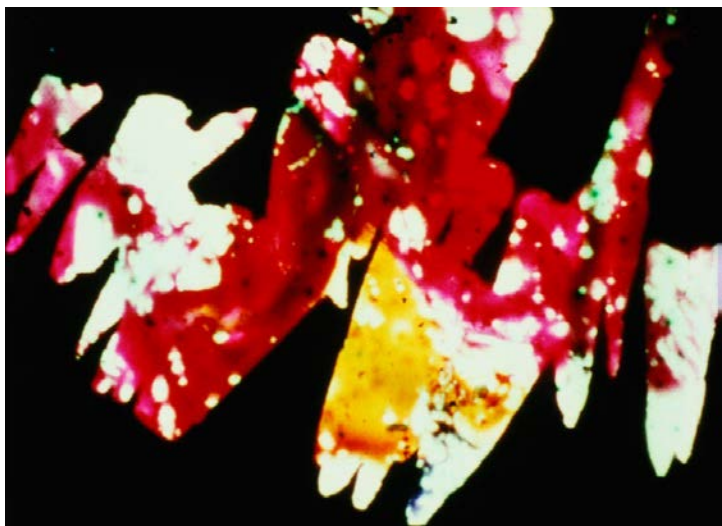


narrative from underlying photograph, bringing closer attention in fact to the seemingly banal moment which is captured on film: a bench by a window, a man checking his email, men and women walking down flights of stairs, visiting an exhibition, etc.

The act of 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

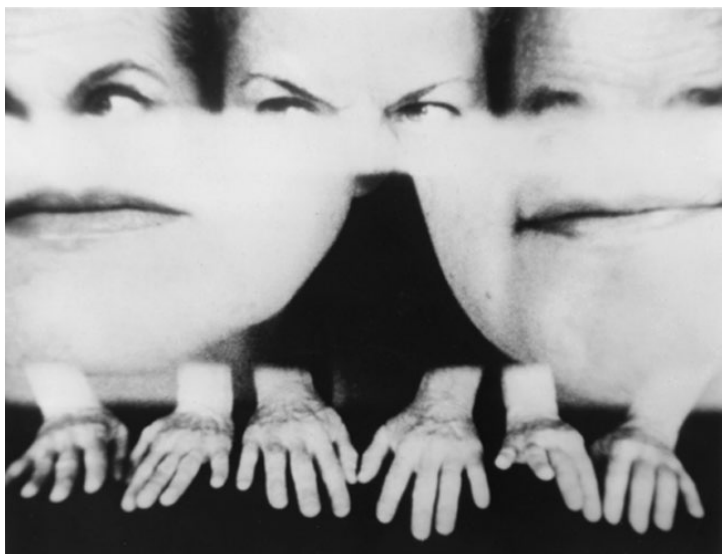
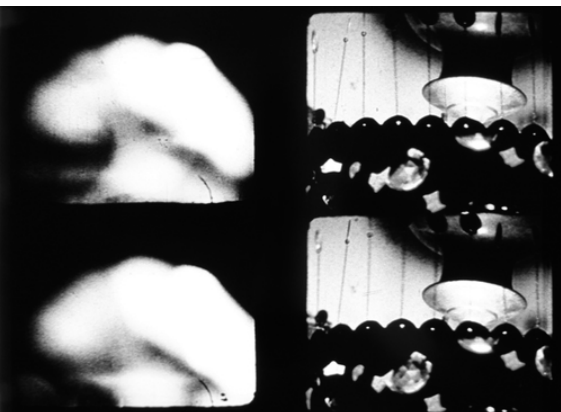


animate the thing defaced, and the mystery



revealed may become more mysterious.”⁵

text
by Amanda
Schmitt



⁵Taussig, Michael. “Defacement”. Stanford University Press, 1999.

this PDF can and should be printed and further defaced in whichever manner the recipient chooses. this version made Wednesday March 6, 2019 9:11PM by Brook Hsu.