Feels Real: The Rhetoric of the Image

Peter Barnett

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Approved by:
Jina Valentine
Elin Slavick
Pedro Lasch
Lien Truong
Peter Barnett  
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My work combines video, performance, photography, new media & installation to address consumerism, identity and experience in contemporary culture. A substantial part of my practice is concerned with investigating the power of images. I’m interested in what role imagery plays in the social construction of reality. Borrowing from the language of art history and advertising, my photographic and video works attempt to deconstruct various cultural tropes through strategies such as decontextualization, exaggeration and reification. I’m interested in exploring the language of commodity — how it looks and feels — and how our phenomenological experience with commerce and its attendant stimuli, i.e. advertising, affects our personal and collective psyche.

In the highly-constructed images I create, I attempt to parse out the various visual and emotional tactics employed by media, advertising and other systems of consumerism. I’m especially interested in how constructed imagery elicits desire in the viewer, adds value to objects and promotes improved lifestyle through consumption. My work also concerns the embodiment of commodification through the construction of persona. The presence of consumer objects, media and advertising in our personal histories and memories help forge our identities and influence our desires and emotions. I attempt to make clear the power and importance of consumerism in our culture and lives.

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1 In Marxism, reification (German: Verdinglichung, literally: "making into a thing" (cf. Latin res meaning "thing") or Versachlichung, literally "objectification"; regarding something impersonally) is the thingification of social relations or of those involved in them, to the extent that the nature of social relationships is expressed by the relationships between traded objects (see commodity fetishism and value-form).
Thomas Cole, \textit{The Oxbow}, 1836
\hfill
National Gallery
Oil on canvas, 51 1/2 x 76 in.

John Constable, \textit{The Haywain}, 1821
\hfill
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Oil on canvas, 130.2 x 185.4 cm
Peter Barnett, Wraith, 2012, Digital Video
Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*, 1836

Oil on canvas; 51 1/2 x 76 in.

Metropolitan Museum of Art


Digital Video

Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View
Left: Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Installation View

Right: Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video Still
Left: Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video Still
Right: Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Installation View
Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video Stills
Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video
Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video Still
Peter Barnett, *Dream Body Gym*, 2013, Installation View
Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video Stills
Peter Barnett, Dream Body Gym, 2013, Digital Video Stills
Peter Barnett, Castle, 2013, Installation View
Peter Barnett, Castle, 2013, Installation View
Left: Elad Lassry, Nailpolish, 2009, Chromogenic print
14 1/2 x 11 in.

Below: Elad Lassry, Persian Cucumbers, Shuk Hakarmel, 2008, C-type print, 9 1/2 x 11 in.
Peter Barnett, Virtual Life of Flowers, 2014, Digital Photography
Peter Barnett, Bouquets, 2015, Digital Video
Peter Barnett, Frontman, 2015, Digital Video Stills
Peter Barnett, Frontman, 2015, Installation View
Peter Barnett, Frontman, 2015, Digital Video Stills
Left: Catherine Opie, *Jo*, 1993, Chromogenic Print, 20 x 16 in., Los Angeles

Peter Barnett, Frontman, 2015
Peter Barnett, Frontman, 2015, Installation View
Peter Barnet, *Frontman*, 2015, Digital Video Stills
Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015

Digital Photography
Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015
Digital Photography

Peter Barnett, Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle, 2015
From Barthe’s Rhetoric of the Image
Peter Barnett, *Feels Real: The Rhetorics of Lifestyle*, 2015

Digital Photography