

## Seth Price

*Reena Spaulings Fine Art  
371 Grand Street, SoHo  
Through Dec. 7*

For a video shown at the 2002 Whitney Biennial, Seth Price combined images of old master paintings pulled from the Internet with a spoken fairy tale-style narrative. At first, the story seemed to give the random sequence of paintings a logic, to reveal a history in apparent chaos. Before long it did the opposite, pointing up the chaos hidden in history, an effect also made by Mr. Price's stimulating multimedia solo show at Spaulings.

At first glance, the art itself is hard to pick out from the distressed "found" decor of the storefront space. Four photographs of what look like moonscapes lean against the wall, propped on little black "feet" resembling roach traps. Sheets of plastic with cast reliefs of fists and breasts hang above eye level. A grainy home video of three men embroiled in a sometimes hostile conversation plays on a monitor stuck face-up in a packing crate.

Beneath the formal casualness, narratives, light and heavy, fictional or otherwise, are in progress. The embossed fists and breasts hint at acts of sex and violence behind the sheets of plastic. The "moonscapes" turn out to be closeups of sliced bread, though the black "feet" hold far more sinister secrets. They are actually stacks of compact disks. Each carries a copy of what was, statistically, one of the year's most frequent internet downloads, a video of the beheading of an American hostage by Islamic militants, an act at once horrifically real and carefully staged.

Finally, there's the home video, filmed in 1970 by Joan Jonas, but seen for the first time here. The three men are the artists Robert Smithson and Richard Serra and the dealer Joseph Helman. The discussion — coolly phrased by Smithson, snappishly by Mr. Serra — is about who's making money from art and why. To this bit of unreal realness, Mr. Price makes his own shrewd addition: a digital spill of black liquid, which appears to ooze, rather like one of Mr. Serra's early process pieces, over the screen, sometimes ornamenting a slice of art history, but eventually obliterating it.

HOLLAND COTTER

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Reena Spaulings Fine Art, through Dec 7 (see Lower East Side).

In 1913, Marcel Duchamp famously asked: Is it possible to make works that are not works of art? Some 60 years later, Belgian poet-cum-artist Marcel Broodthaers attempted to answer this question at Documenta V with

his *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*, which displayed 266 artworks and kitsch objects, all depicting eagles and each accompanied by a plastic sign saying THIS IS NOT A WORK OF ART. Broodthaer's fictitious museum highlighted the system of exhibitions, institutions and magazines through which works are displayed as art.

In his first solo exhibition in New York, Seth Price follows this line of inquiry to create works in which the means of distribution and reproduction constitute the message. For example, in *Untitled Document* (2004), the

artist has downloaded a controversial video showing an American journalist beheaded by Pakistani fundamentalists; the video is available for \$10 at the gallery on a black, caseless DVD. The piece gives sculptural weight to information that the FBI attempted to prevent from being disseminated. Alternatively, *Fuck You, You Fucking Fuck* is nothing but a cracked sheet of safety glass. The title implies the violence inherent in the material's commercial applications—from a shattered door to a smashed car windshield.

Elsewhere, three slabs of what appears to be marble lean against the wall; they're actually Plexiglas-mounted digital prints created by scanning slices of moldy bread. In this work, Price mocks the objectivity associated with photographic reproduction and, like Broodthaer's museum, complicates our attempts to separate a medium, such as photography or sculpture, from its framework of circulation and reception.

—Benjamin Carlson



Seth Price, *Fuck You, You Fucking Fuck*, 2004.

# Flash Art

January-February 2005

Reena Spaulings Fine Art

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Price's work deconstructs the processes that turn documentation into art while expanding the limits of what makes these terms acceptable or disturbing, such as in *Untitled Document* (2004), an inverted copy of the Internet file of Nicolas Berg's beheading in Iraq. The different forms of replication, transcription or distribution form a field of activity embodied in the very presentation of the works, from the CDs stacked on the table at the back of the gallery to the more sculptural video installed at the front.

*Demonstration, Digital Video Effect: Spills* originated as a home video by Joan Jonas of a discussion between Robert Smithson and Richard Serra in 1970. Price added digital effects to the 'surface' of the video, presented on an upturned television still contained in its original packaging.

In these works, as in those of *Continuous Project* (with Bettina Funcke and Wade Guyton), Price furthers experimentation with modes of distribution and documentation started in the late '60s by utilizing strategies of appropriation and possibilities of transference within digital technology. In *NTSC* (a slab of safety glass — also used for *Untitled, A,B, C,D* — smashed over a metal rack), or *Different Kinds of Art* (all 2004), Price ambivalently maintains some of these tactics while conserving a space for jubilatory experimentation.

—Sarina Basta

SETH PRICE, *Demonstration, Digital Video Effect: Spills*.

