

# CUETO PROJECT



## **A Lucid Camera**

by Emily Nathan

### **Revision 1: All Quiet on the Western Front**

Cueto Project

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Revision 1: All Quiet on the Western Front, a New York iteration of Egan Frantz's first solo exhibition, All Quiet on the Western Front, delivers a sophisticated examination of precisely what it promises: transparency—a peek into the productive process. Taking its title from a 1929 novel by German author and World War I veteran, Erich Maria Remarque (and associatively from the work's 1930 translation into film), Revision engages with the scope of cultural production in its variety of manifestations—visual, literary, performative et al.—and declares itself an exhibition that exists, like a draft of a manuscript, as but one step along the trajectory of its own creation.

In the front room of the gallery, Frantz presents us with an array of works that serve elegantly and effectively to map the “epic” scope of his consideration—an apt description in light of the aforementioned film's designation as such by the American Film Institute. Walls to the left and right of the entrance boast two distinct yet related series entitled, respectively, Sidesteps (source: chaos\_and\_creation.jpg) and Sidesteps (source: i\_c\_8.jpg); each series is the borne of an image which Frantz has appropriated and recomposed by dragging “a darkroom squeegee across [the] wet, freshly printed [original] and onto a blank page.” Sidesteps' source contents, or original images, whose component parts we see dispersed as ink across Frantz's page, are accessible to us, but only as a reconfiguration of themselves. As writers construct their worlds by drawing from a shared pool of basic elements—words—and as artists create art from similarly universal, atomic components—color, form, texture—Frantz has “re-dispersed” his “source structure” to create something fresh, something of his own. Creative production, it is implied, is perhaps as simple as the enactment of this very process: the personal utilization of universal, raw material in order to achieve a desired, subjective end. Sidesteps thus functions as an introduction to Revision, an aesthetic reflection of Frantz's conceptual formulation, and establishes his commitment to provide access to the process of creation, to lay its foundations bare.

This interest in the dialogue between material and content is developed intelligently throughout the rest of the show: for Untitled, Frantz has screwed a clear plastic poly(methyl methacrylate) frame to the wall. Exhibited as are works of art, displayed as a canvas would be and hanging in a gallery, the frame in fact contains nothing, its translucence giving only unto the white plaster of the room. Its title is “Untitled,” its medium is nothing more than that which is generally used to display other media; it is a veritable tabula rasa, a blank, onto and into which anyone might project his or her impressions. Art, it suggests, might be anything and nothing. And authorship? In Klein, Yves, Jean Yves Mock, and Veronique

Legrand, Yves Klein: 3 Mars-23 Mai 1983, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National D'art Moderne, Classiques du XXe siècle/Musée National D'art Modern, Paris: Le Musée, 1083. 374-5, Frantz has printed an image from an Yves Klein catalogue with, it appears, an excess of ink, such that the pigment has spilled forth from its frame and runneth over, a dainty tear of black tip-toeing down the white border of the page. Frantz's selection of this "flawed" print, most likely one of many that depict the same thing, is, of course, intentional, and therefore noteworthy. His drip, though perhaps initially an accident, both forces a viewer to acknowledge the fact that this framed artwork exhibited regally on the wall is the product of a physical artistic process, an often imperfect one at that, and aggressively asserts its own materiality.

Frantz's interest in "spring[ing] a leak in the subject," in bursting open the sealed door which leads unto the artist's studio or to the writer's office, and thereby exposing Art, is by no means an original pursuit. Take, for example, Russian constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko's 1921 proclamation that he had reduced painting to its "logical conclusion"—its most basic elements, the primary colors—thus heralding the end of the medium. Certain of Frantz's works even echo this precedent aesthetically: MK, PK, LK, LLK, C, M, LC, LM, Y consists of nine rectangular maple sheets in frames which hang side by side on the wall, each one a solid color, and cumulatively they represent the printer's palette as deconstructed and parsed into its pure values. Petroleum Pictures is a veritable do-it-yourself arrangement of interchangeable plastic pieces; they attach to the wall in a steady line that stretches around the room, each small square stands in physically for one functional unit of the artist's most elemental tool, color. In re-organizing them, the viewer participates in a "re-dispersion" of that source material, enacting himself the process of artistic creation at its most basic level.

Frantz's engagement with these oft-explored issues feels far from stale; his adaptation of age-old problems into a contemporary system is compelling and fresh. In Revision, he makes good on his promise to "spring a leak" not only in his "subject," but in the established history of relevant discourse, "dispersing" its substance and configuring it anew. After all—isn't that what Art today really is: a re-distribution of an inkjet printer's constituent colors?

--Emily Nathan,

(Images: Installation view; Detail from Klein, Yves, Jean Yves Mock, and Veronique Legrand, Yves Klein: 3 Mars-23 Mai 1983, Centre Georges

Pompidou, Musee National D'art Moderne, Classiques du XXe siecle / Musee National D'art Moderne, Paris: Le Musee, 1983. 374-5 (2009), Epson Ultrachrome K3 Pigment Print, Epson Exhibition Fiber: 22 x 17 inches, White Washed Maple with PMMA. Courtesy of the artist; Sidesteps (2009), Epson Ultrachrome K3 Pigment, Epson Exhibition Fiber, Lacquered Maple. Courtesy of the artist and Cueto Project, NY)

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