



Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson

Kenneth Shorr *Action through Redaction*

Action through Redaction is a retrospective exhibition in the sense that it presents the work of Kenneth Shorr dating from the mid-1970s to the present, but it is far from a chronological examination. Instead, it examines imagery, themes, and techniques that recur throughout Shorr's career: the culmination of ideas he has explored for decades. The exhibition is a view into the artist's mind, in his own words, "An obsessive, pathological dialog with myself." Shorr employs a biting wit to examine diverse subject matter. Nothing is immune to the scrutiny of his arched brow: the influences and abuses of the mass media; familiar cultural images not excluding arcane yet disconcerting racist cartoons; clichés of government bureaucratic culture; the dark psyche of corporate idealism; or what he refers to as "the idiotic tautology of the politician's stump speech."

Shorr does not view his work as a part of the canon of Western art and literature nor as an attempt to be clever or arcane, but as personal amusement and entertainment. He says, "it has to be funny. If I don't find a work amusing, I don't consider it a success." Humor is evident everywhere, but it is an uneasy and absurd comicality, laughably simple, onanistic, and tinged with schadenfreude.

The artist utilizes a spectrum of media simultaneously, including photography, image appropriation, collage, performance, video, and altered books and record album covers. His willful refusal to properly learn the techniques he employs affords his work an accidental quality. In fact, accidents are not only desirable, but absolutely essential to his process. He contrives ways to damage objects, and allows them to break or decay to suit his aesthetic. The work often implies danger, menace or toxicity, and thereby references large-scale disasters such as Chernobyl and the ensuing attempt to conceal and contain that which can neither be concealed nor contained. A few favorite sources of inspiration are nudist magazines, mannequins (the ways he could experience nudity as a child,) instructional manuals, deer hunting, and nymphomania.

Shorr has altered books since his youth. For this exhibition, these livres d'artist fall into two categories: those which can be held, displayed on a table with total access to the viewer, and those to behold, with objects—tools, rulers, dynamite—crudely and barely concealed inside, like a saw baked into a cake, which provoke the question, "how would no one have noticed?" Similarly, he has for decades altered and amended LP covers

from the 1950s and 1960s with stamps, drawings, splatters of ink or paint, and other embellishments, all encased in acrylic.

Photography has been Shorr's primary chosen media. His photographic work defines an era when artists began to use mass media technologies in artistic practices; practices that critiqued the use of those same technologies in the world at large. He works with the photograph in two ways, creating set-pieces to be photographed and destroyed, or appropriating images from popular or vulgar sources, which are altered and obscured with layered imagery. Both challenge our adamant belief that the photo does not lie, and the manner in which photographs inform our world view.

In this exhibition, Shorr introduces the many faces of DIM. DIM is an alter-ego, a political action group, a corporate entity, a historical manufacturer seeking to edify its image through the museum setting. DIM is the heroic figure of totalitarian despotism: a dictator, his monumentality makes the people servile. DIM is as ambiguous as the mercenary army.

Kenneth Shorr, an Associate Professor of Art at the University of Arizona, has exhibited at the New Museum in New York, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Whitney Museum of American Art, P.S. 1 in New York. The Jewish Museum in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Center for Creative Photography are among the institutions that have acquired his work. His video performance work has been shown in La MaMa in San Francisco, and the California Institute for the Arts, Valencia. Three of his plays have been presented at theaters in Chicago. Shorr has received three NEA Photography Fellowships.

Kenneth Shorr: *Action through Redaction*
Exhibition List

Video Room

Screenings of videos

DVDs

2000 - 2013

Altered LP covers

Mixed media

1994 - 2013

Corridor & Central Gallery

Livres d'artist objects

Mixed media

1973 - 2013

Southwest Gallery

Large format photographs

Digital prints

Drawing Room

Photographs

Analog prints

1980 -1999

Northeast Gallery

Transparencies

Mixed media

2010-2013

X-ray Viewer

2013

Northwest Gallery

Large format photographs

Digital prints

2013