

Images Propelled Beyond Pictures

Among the works by eight artists in “New Photography 2013” at the Museum of Modern Art is a series of prints by Josephine Pryde showing

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ART REVIEW

guinea pigs bustling about in what appears to be studio detritus. Viewers who know that Ms. Pryde uses photography to explore ideas about social issues will surely assume that these are not just affectionate pictures of her cute little pets. A wall label explains that the guinea pig, native to South America, was so named when it was brought to Europe on slave ships known as “Guineamen.”

Elsewhere in the exhibition is a large picture of intricately worked lace, a photogram by Lisa Oppenheim called “Leisure Work III.” This image is not addressed by a wall label, but Ms. Oppenheim’s Web site explains that her images of lace have a feminist import. The series, she says, “derives its title from the classification of lace making in an early-20th-century Belgian census. Since lace making was predominately considered to be the domestic labor of women, it was not considered labor worth recording. Except maybe now recorded as an art project and brought into another economy.”

Eileen Quinlan also makes

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photographs whose meanings are obliquely related to what you see, which is something resembling Cubist abstraction. A wall label notes that her work is “grounded in feminist history and material culture.” Several of her pictures are based on shots of yoga mats — “an emblem of social well-being and contemporary life style” — folded and draped to create compositions of roughly triangular forms. One, called “Sophia,” takes its title from one of the 39

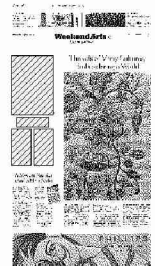
women memorialized by Judy Chicago’s feminist extravaganza “The Dinner Party.”

These artists and four of the five others in the exhibition — organized by Roxana Marcoci, a curator of photography at MoMA — share a certain iconoclastic attitude about photographic images. In traditional photography, your experience of the image is the main thing. But these artists are not primarily interested in images. Following in the footsteps of photo-conceptualists like Sherrie Levine and James Welling, they want to free the viewer’s mind from the seductive, too often mind-numbing tyranny of images in an image-saturated world. They hope to bring up ideas that are not easily visualized and may resist the imperatives of capitalist hegemony.

Annette Kelm, for example, creates technically refined portraits and still lifes that subtly parody certain kinds of commercial photography. Her pictures are vivid but in a banal way. Like the photo-conceptualists Christopher Williams and Roe Ethridge, she aims to alert viewers to the ways that glossy magazine-type photography constructs impossibly ideal worlds, distracting us from complicated and messy realities. But if what Ms. Kelm reveals is news to you, then you haven’t been paying attention to the criticism of photography for the past 40 or so years. Meditations on the medium by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag should be on your reading list.

The ideas proffered here have long been standardized by the academic establishment. While it’s interesting to learn how the guinea pig got its name, Ms. Pryde’s exposé of Western civilization’s depravity is hardly revelatory. What’s more remarkable is how strenuously clever these artists try to be in representing their essentially orthodox thoughts. A striking example is by the team of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, who have produced a book called “War Primer 2.” It’s based on a book created by Bertolt Brecht called “War Primer,” which consists of war images clipped from newspapers and supplemented by poetic epigrams. Mr.

Broomberg and Mr. Chanarin appropriated copies of a 1998 English-language edition of Brecht’s book and silk-



screened over the original newspaper pictures of World War II with images from the Internet relating to today's war on terror. Their update is more impressive for its graphic stylishness than for its or moral urgency.

Anna Ostoya is an exception. Her mostly small, black-and-white collages and montages address certain social and political concerns with a directness that is refreshing amid so much obliquity. One of a pair of montages picturing a multitude of female artists is called "The Tradition of Elasticity and Endurance." A companion piece portraying dozens of men is called "The Tradition of Intensity and Force." The deadpan wit in that and in other works by Ms. Ostoya highlights by contrast the humorless solemnity of the rest of the show.

The exhibition's most overtly iconoclastic artist is Brendan Fowler. Several of his works consist of enlarged, diaristic snapshots in frames behind glass, assembled into irregular stacks. In each

case, another piece appears to have impaled the stack, breaking through the glass and prints. It looks as if a natural disaster had sent it crashing into the other piled up pictures. Photography here is nearly completely obliterated by punkish gesturalism. (The twisted, broken canvases of Steven Parinno come to mind.) Mr. Fowler's works are too contrived to be genuinely anarchic, but you get the idea. And you may find yourself hungering for the opposite of this show's iconoclasm: a display of unabashed and unbridled visual imagination.

"New Photography 2013" runs through Jan. 6 at the Museum of Modern Art; (212) 708-9400, moma.org.

Eight iconoclasts reassess both seeing and believing.



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND UNTITLED, NEW YORK

New Photography 2013 *Brendan Fowler's "Winter 2011 — Fall 2012" (2013), in this show of eight artists at the Museum of Modern Art.*



MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Anna Ostoya's "Mixed Pseudomorphism of a True/False Cry" (2010). Her deadpan wit contrasts with the solemnity of most of this MoMA show.