

DECEMBER, 2004

Trong Nguyen, Elana Rubinfeld  
Roger Smith Hotel

By Mary Hrbacek



A mysterious aura pervades this collection of work, presented in the penthouse of the Roger Smith Hotel in New York. In the playful spirit of Marcel Duchamp, Private View: The Collection of Rick Haatj pretends to be a collection of high-class stolen originals; by artists such as Edvard Munch, Marcel Duchamp, Picasso and others. These works are actually meticulous copies made by Trong Nguyen, a co-founder with Elana Rubinfeld of Art Hijack, a combination of art collective and promotion firm. Intended to confound viewers in order to stimulate public dialogue on themes of attribution, originality, art preservation and ethics, the exhibit raises questions on the very nature of collecting; what determines the perimeters of a coherent collection and why are these limitations so often narrowly defined. The clever bluff teases viewers and tests

their sense of the absurd. Two original pieces by Trong, both silhouette portraits etched on vintage mirrors, obliquely explore self-identity and the artist's perception of the other.

The iconoclastic spirit behind the "Haatj Collection" (an anagram for Art Hijack), raises ethical issues probing the regulations that apply to an installation of works so perfectly recreated. Copies are frequently to be found in the art marketplace. The potentially thorny process of determining attribution was explored some years ago in the Rembrandt: Not Rembrandt show at the Metropolitan Museum. Signatures protect artists from unlawful duplication, with the result that unsigned works, perhaps unfairly, command lower prices. In the juncture where art and commerce converge, art may be a commodity, but it is not unprotected. Artists' rights groups have fought for laws making the deliberate alteration or destruction of an artwork illegal.

The expectation that serious art should be viewed exclusively in galleries and museums has been supplanted by the proliferation of independent art fairs in recent years. In this context, Art Hijack, with its novel exhibition concept, provides artists with yet one more creative alternative to get their artwork shown before a critical, engaging audience.

Ed Note:

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