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Theatrical Openings

By Catherine Krudy



Edvard Munch's *The Scream* has seemingly resurfaced from its daring midday theft from the Munch Museum in Oslo last August. It reappeared in the penthouse of the Roger Smith Hotel during a private viewing of the art collection of Rick Haatj. Other works in Mr. Haatj's collection included Pablo Picasso's *Head of a Woman (Dora Maar)*, Georgia O'Keefe's *Special #21 (Palo Duro Canyon)*, and Edouard Manet's *Chez Tortoni*. No authorities were involved, as the mysterious Rick Haatj was revealed to be the brainchild of a newly formed collective named Art Hijack. The fictive collector's name exists as an anagram of the group's title.

Created by two artist curators, Trong G. Nguyen and Elana Rubinfeld, Art Hijack simultaneously functions as a project-based art collective and a communications firm for cultural organizations. Nguyen and Rubinfeld's deft promotional skills were demonstrated by the enigmatic and witty invitations to the event. In the visual language of a pulpy horror movie, the invitations intrigued guests by exclaiming the theft of Maurizio Catellan's Whitney Biennial piece—an event which individuals conscious of the art world know as a sustained joke. The viewing project consisted of eight carefully recreated masterpieces: seven paintings and one sculpture (Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*). Two 'original' works, a pair of vintage hand mirrors etched with Nguyen and Rubinfeld's silhouettes were also displayed. The silhouetted self-portraits framed the artists' profiles in the negative reflective surface and served to reference the complex identity of the evening's organizers.

Art Hijack represents an unabashed honesty about the many, interlacing forces at work in the art world. Nguyen notes that their collective employs a "strategy that uses any reasonable means necessary to consistently put the artists and their works first." By taking control of the tools used by galleries and art organizations for promotion, Art Hijack seeks to maintain a unified independence from outside authoritative decisions. Artists have often made use of personas, like Duchamp's alter ego Rose Selavy, as a means for expanding their public presence. Art Hijack's Rick Haatj represents the evolution of the artistic persona in the present marketplace.