

# Reality Effects

MATTHEW BIRO ON THE ART OF ROBERT HEINECKEN

IN 1968, ROBERT HEINECKEN released one of the signal works of his career: *Are You Rea*, a portfolio of twenty-five grainy, ghostly, tonally reversed photograms taken from the pages of popular magazines. His introductory text leaves no doubt as to why he is today considered one of the most prescient forerunners of appropriation. Disclosing his debt to Surrealist theory, he professes his interest in “the multiplicity of meanings inherent in aleatory ideas and images” and declares that “these pictures do not represent first hand experiences, but are related to the perhaps more socially important manufactured experiences which are being created daily by the mass media.” He then quotes André Breton at length (“Everything, in effect *is an image* . . .”). One could hardly ask for a more concise articulation of the genealogy linking Dada and Surrealism, the assemblage and montage practices of West Coast artists such as Wallace Berman, Edward Kienholz, and John Baldessari, and the strategies of postmodern photography associated with Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, et al. Indeed, Heinecken’s work seems a more direct ancestor to the Pictures generation than that of his contemporaries.

Yet rather than viewing the art Heinecken (1931–2006) created between the 1960s and ’90s exclusively through the lens of postmodernism, it is perhaps best to understand the artist first and foremost in his own paradoxical terms—namely, as a “documentarian” of “manufactured experience.” His is an eye that reveals, that describes experience not as given or spontaneous but as preconditioned and fabricated, and that sees contemporary existence as a process of consumption. At the same time, Heinecken also recognized that it was impossible to criticize consumer ideology from without. Acknowledging his own implication within the systems that sustain and are sustained by this ideology, he frequently incorporated his own particular obsessions and biography into his art. In this respect, he finds common ground with the documentary photographers of the 1960s (e.g., Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand) in that his work, like theirs, constitutes an individualistic selection of motifs and details, a social statement from an unabashedly subjective point of view. But he took the implications of subjectivity considerably farther than they did, laying bare his own tastes and affinities in an often shocking and always unflinching way.

Heinecken’s practice ranged from (photo-based) painting and sculpture to collage, installation, and time-based work with TVs and slide projectors. Though his formal training was in printmaking, he began to explore photography in the early ’60s, when he was hired to teach it at his alma mater, UCLA. His earliest photographs, shot with a 35-mm camera, are his “straightest” or least manipulated, but he was already flouting the modernist photographic tradition most powerfully embodied on the West Coast by Ansel Adams and Group f/64, with its emphasis on medium specificity, objective depiction, structure, and sharp focus. Many of his works from this period employ techniques of “bad photography,” such as shooting against the light, motion blur, and underexposure. Or they bring together opposites that the West Coast modernists preferred to keep separate, as in one image in which the cropped silhouette of an airplane reveals a vaguely nipplelike contour, melding the organic and the technological. By the mid-’60s, Heinecken was committing even greater affronts against photographic purity, producing photo-sculpture hybrids—black-and-white prints of female nudes, segmented and reassembled like puzzle pieces or laminated onto the sides of wooden cubes. His *Fractured Figure Sections* of 1967, for example, is essentially a three-dimensional exquisite corpse, a tower of stacked sections that can be rotated to produce impossible composites of the human form.

Heinecken’s “Are You Rea” series (from which the portfolio, a distinct work, emerged), 1964–68, was roughly contemporaneous with the sculptures, and in some ways complements



Opposite page: Robert Heinecken, *Untitled Newswomen* (Connie Chung), 1985, color photograph, 11 x 14".

Above: Robert Heinecken, *Time* (1st Group), 1969, offset lithography on found magazine, 11 x 8" closed.

Below: Robert Heinecken, *Are You Rea* (detail), 1966–68, black-and-white photograms, twenty-five parts, each 11 x 8½".





them. Inspired by Surrealism's use of the photogram, or cameraless photograph, as a technique of chance and automatism, the artist proofed some two thousand pages over the course of four years, removing leaves from *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Woman's Day*, the *New York Times*, and other publications and contact-printing them. The photogram process captured both the front and the back of each magazine page, superimposing one image on the other. In the resulting X-ray-like prints, spectral figures interact not only with one another but also with text and commodities. A woman wearing a bra and skirt hovers against a case of No-Cal Orange bottles that seem to both surround and suffuse her; the slogan NEW POWERNET WITH LYCRA SPANDEX shares a page with a cowboy about to lasso a steer. Playing between readability and nonsense, the images point to the media's tactical use of constant repetition, to the power of its labels and definitions, and to the fact that we respond to its cues in a disjointed, distracted, and visceral way.

Over the four years he worked on the project, Heinecken created approximately thirty-five different gelatin silver photograms, which he printed in varying edition sizes. Then, in 1968, he produced the portfolio, consisting of twenty-five lithographs made from the original photograms, sequenced and collated into an evocative quasi narrative. When read in its original order the portfolio interpolates its viewers, addressing them as consumers: In the title image, a line of women appears to move toward the viewer, the foremost figure opening her blouse. The truncated question above her—ARE YOU REA—evokes a materialistic culture in which readers "find" their real selves in idealized images and ad copy. While the first twenty images are largely pitched at a female consumer, appealing to her presumed interest in appearance, child care, and men, the last five pages focus on social issues, alluding to religion, civil rights, student protests, police violence, and the Kennedy assassination. A saintlike woman—actually a bride—looms above chanting protesters; a policeman, a gun behind his back, surveils three shadowy male figures, one of whom holds a sign that reads THE COP IS OUR FRIEND. HA, HA, HA. In this final sequence, men predominate, and the texts imply a more gender-neutral, or "universal," reader. By moving from montages of ideal female identities to powerful and violent male identities, Heinecken documents variants of the male gaze, from the eroticizing to the macho to the aggressive and even sadistic. (If Man Ray, one of the great Surrealist practitioners of the photogram technique, is evoked at the outset, James Earl Ray is suggested by the conclusion.) The strategies of appropriation and montage are here combined to criticize ideology, to make implicit values explicit, and to encourage their reevaluation by juxtaposing them in new and provocative ways.

Of course, the same might be said of any number of artists using photomontage, from John Heartfield to Barbara Kruger. But in Heinecken's case, political conviction is replaced by radical uncertainty. As the title puts it, "Are you real?" In other words, rather than presupposing that there is a stable "real" or truth to be disclosed behind the ideology, these works question the stability or indeed the very existence of reality as a whole. In contrast to the early photo-sculptures, which dismember the nude body, cutting it into separate pieces, the photograms evacuate or disembodify the human form. It's as if Heinecken grasped that in the 1960s, even as magazines and televisions were funneling images of horror into every home, much of the violence of contemporary culture had grown too subtle to be captured in the idea of a cut-up body. Instead, he gives us the body as X-ray, a mere floating trace of radiation. We are not blown up or torn apart by our interpolation by the culture industry, but rather emptied from within.

**HEINECKEN CONTINUED TO EXPLORE** this tension in his altered magazines—a sprawling group of works he produced between 1969 and 1974. In *Mansmag*, 1969, he employed lithography again, to print photograms of soft-core porn on top of one another in vivid color. Text, cartoons, and "real" bodies interact, their almost flickering forms approaching one another from various angles. Quickly, however, Heinecken turned to collaging magazine pages themselves. *Time* (First Group), 1969, for example, consisted of pages cut from the famous newsmagazine, overlaid with lithographs of cheesecake shots and reassembled in an aleatory order. Then, in *Periodical #1*, 1969, he simply cut up and reconfigured a group of twenty-nine magazines ranging from *Glamour* and *Good Housekeeping* to *Playboy* and *Guns and Ammo*, without adding overlays. The end product was a set of nineteen twenty-nine-page volumes, or "variants" (the artist's preferred term), each containing a single leaf from each magazine. When we flip through these reconstituted magazines, we experience a cacophony: not only forms of advertising address

Quotidian experience manifests itself in much conceptual photography, but Heinecken went right to experiences that surpass the everyday.



Right: Robert Heinecken, *Fractured Figure Sections*, 1967, black-and-white photograms on wood, 8¼ x 3 x 3".

Below: Robert Heinecken, *Mansmag*, 1969, offset lithography on paper, artist's book, 8½ x 6½".







Robert Heinecken, *Periodical #5*, 1971, offset lithography on found magazine, side-stapled and taped in, with repurposed magazine cover, 12 1/4 x 9" closed.

geared toward different education levels and tastes but a mélange of subjects and voices, some first-person confessionals, some omniscient and ostensibly ungendered news stories.

Heinecken went on to create nine more issues in the "Periodical" series, using the appropriate and documentary strategies that were becoming his stock-in-trade. Fashion imagery and graphic '70s-style pornography appear in combination again and again: Cosmetics ads and nude photos are juxtaposed to suggest the interpenetration of products and flesh; fashion models and centerfolds meet in faux-lesbian encounters that embody but also exceed a male gaze. Marlboros and Virginia Slims, whiskey and TV dinners (a subject he committed to canvas in a suite of mixed-media works, *TV Dinner/Shrimp*, in 1971) jostle one another in high-key color.

The typological impulse that connects Heinecken's work to that of Dan Graham and Ed Ruscha, among others (including artists outside LA such as Bernd and Hilla Becher), is much in evidence here, but again with some significant differences. His cohorts saw potential in the tropes of banality—gas stations, prefab homes—but Heinecken did not. Where taste figured into the equation, he was interested in the lowbrow more than the middlebrow; where sex was concerned, the graphic trumped the suggestive. Quotidian experience manifests itself in much conceptual photography, but Heinecken went right to experiences that surpass the everyday, and not just in the realm of sexuality. Imagery of extreme grotesque violence shadows the series. In *Periodical #5*, 1971, a smiling and androgynous soldier—presumably Vietnamese, though whether North or South isn't clear—carrying two severed heads is repeatedly superimposed across the pages of a compendium of fashion ads. Heinecken also deployed this image for one of his most extraordinary works, using it for a guerrilla action he performed a few times in 1972, when he returned altered magazines to newsstands or doctor's or dentist's offices for an unsuspecting public to discover.<sup>1</sup>

While Heinecken continued to use lithographic overprinting and full-page reassembly in the "Periodical" series, with *Periodical #9*, 1972, he added a third technique, a form of photomontage. For him, though, photomontage was a process of subtraction rather than superimposition: the excising of shapes or elements on bound pages to let the adjacent pages bleed through. Carefully cutting out bras, panties, toiletries, and other products, he revealed partial images, barely recognizable glimpses of people or objects, beneath. Heinecken's cuts also created a puzzling shape on the excised leaf's other side. Once again, the overall effect was

## SIMONE FORTI

I have experienced a broad realm of discourse in Los Angeles, which I liken to the mushroom plant, with a wide-ranging underground mycelium from which the individual fruiting bodies, or mushrooms, emerge.

I spent 1970–72 in the vortex of CalArts, where I lived in the orange groves with old New York friends who had come there to teach. CalArts let me take advantage of what it had to offer, without asking me to have any official status. I did a bit of substitute teaching for Allan Kaprow, studied tai chi with Marshall Ho'o, and ran Open Gardenia, a Friday-night music and dance jam. But mainly I worked with musician Charlemagne Palestine; we'd meet in a beautiful hall with a Bösendorfer grand piano, a perfect wooden floor, and magnificent acoustics.

I returned to LA fourteen years ago and was welcomed by a number of institutions (including UCLA), through which I've developed a diverse network of colleagues. In turn, this has brought to light various aspects of my artmaking that had previously remained more private. Fred Dewey, a former director of Beyond Baroque Literary/Arts Center in Venice, CA, published my book *Oh, Tongue*. Mara McCarthy, of the Box gallery, has been presenting my performances as well as exhibiting my works in other media, including drawings, holographic work, and a musical-score construction. For the past six years I've been working with a small group of performers, including artists from dance, improvisational theater, and new music. We participate in one another's scores, and it's up to me to forge a whole from the mosaic of our various interests. As each of us also works with other groups of artists, influences pass back and forth through a broad Los Angeles network. And we are all somehow influenced by colleagues twice removed or more—kindred spirits we may not be specifically aware of but with whom we are nevertheless in discourse. □



Simone Forti (at right) and Charlemagne Palestine dancing and singing, CalArts, Valencia, CA, 1972.





Heinecken's transparencies are a lurid admixture of document, art, and titillation—one that, the artist suggests, is reiterated in every film we watch, and perhaps in every moment of our lives.

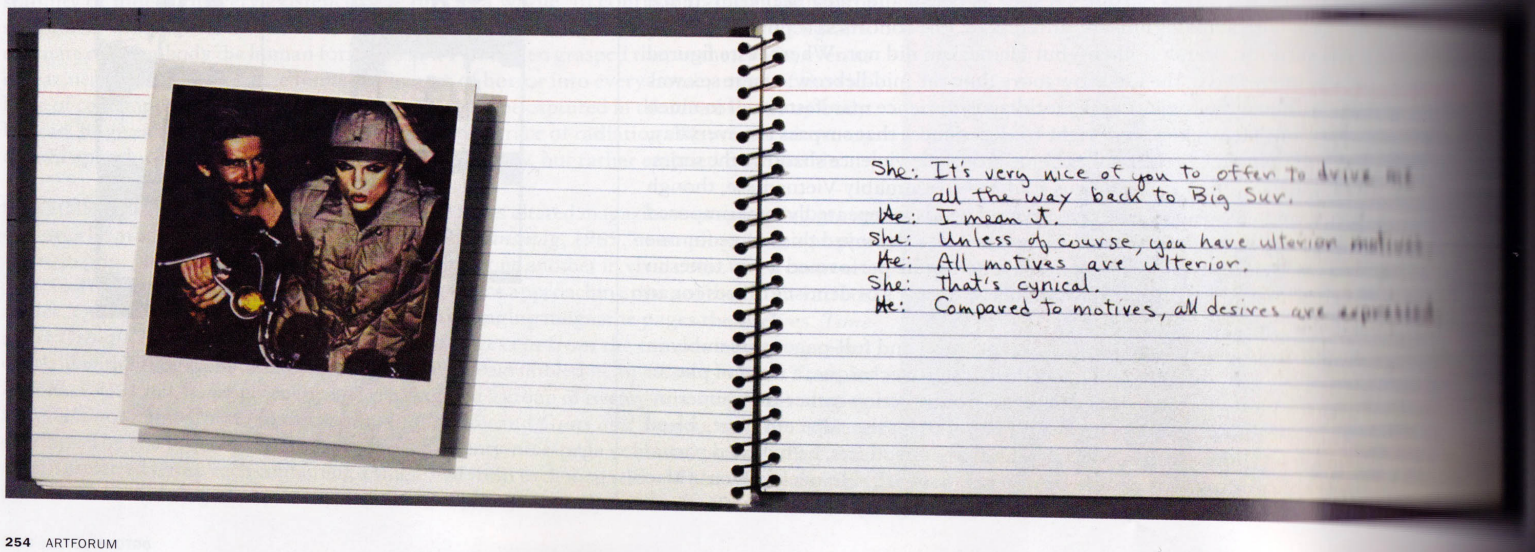
Robert Heinecken, *TV Dinner/Shrimp* (detail), 1971, chalk, resin, and photographic emulsion on canvas, six parts, each 13 x 15 x 1".

to create a document as iconographic and textual babble, messages stepping on one another in their attempts to get to the consumer.

In the early 1970s, as the sexual revolution was fully absorbed and transformed into a full-fledged porn industry, sexual imagery became both increasingly hard-core and increasingly mainstream. Heinecken responded by magnifying the scale of his appropriations.<sup>2</sup> The latent cinematic aspect of his work (with its frequent use of sequential imagery) is unmistakable in his large-scale transparencies from this period, which resemble enlarged film frames. *Film Strip #2*, 1972, is a six-frame strip, reproduced, sprocket holes and all, at fifty-four by seventeen inches; it consists of composite images wherein a nude body commingles with tree branches. *Porno Film Strip #2*, 1972, is a six-frame strip of composited but still discernibly explicit pornographic film. Like his magazines, Heinecken's transparencies, with their deployment of such strategies as scale shift, tonal reversal, and overlays, stand outside traditional photographic and artistic media. Transformed records of a rapidly burgeoning industry, they evince a self-reflexive attention to medium, but this is no modernist gesture.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is a lurid admixture of document, art, and titillation—one that, Heinecken suggests, is reiterated in every film we watch, and perhaps in every moment of our lives. Experience is invaded at the smallest order of magnitude, in units so infinitesimal we cannot even perceive them as distinct, just as persistence of vision turns distinct frames into seamless footage.

Right: Robert Heinecken, *Film Strip #2*, 1972, strip of enlarged black-and-white film in 35 mm, 54 x 17 1/4".

Below: Robert Heinecken, *He/She*, 1980, offset lithography on spiral-bound book, 5 1/4 x 8" closed.





**NO SURPRISE**, then, that the Polaroid SX-70 camera—the “bedroom camera,” Heinecken called it—would prove a generative technology for him. The Polaroid instant process became commercially available in 1972, and the artist quickly saw its possibilities. The SX-70 was cheap and simple to manipulate, and the direct-positive snapshot it produced was almost a throwaway technology—it had none of the seriousness of the new social-documentary photography or even photojournalism. It was strongly associated with everyday life, and with its uniqueness, its images swimming into existence before one’s eyes, and its notorious propensity to pick up fingerprints, it was also emphatically indexical. Viewers tended to read such photographs as transcriptions of real events. At once personal and private (the consumer did not have to send the photographs out to be processed) and the quintessential branded object (*Polaroid* was a noun, and what it designated was both unique and ubiquitous), the SX-70 snapshot embodied the colonization of social life by the commodity. For Heinecken, it became a way to investigate how this colonization operates, how life becomes lifestyle, how documentary becomes fiction and bodies become clichés.<sup>4</sup>

Heinecken conducted this investigation in a massive body of work titled “He:/She:,” 1977–80, primarily comprising montages of Polaroids and handwritten texts. The photos include self-portraits, portraits, and snapshots of the artist with various women and close-ups of objects and body parts (e.g., a bright red high heel and a bright red telephone between the naked artist’s legs), as well as shots of drinks and other images that suggest intimacy and sexuality. The handwritten snippets of dialogue that accompany the images—which tend to be arranged in short rows, like comic-strip panels—are amusing and aphoristic. Sex is their primary topic, but they also touch quite frequently on other subjects, such as art, life, the body, food, drink, traveling, relationships, sleeping, teaching, vision, names, and popular culture. They are pervaded by a sense that male-female relationships are inextricably connected with consumption. And while the man’s desires are sometimes frustrated, there is an unequal power relationship in most of the scenes that works to “his” advantage. For example: *She: What makes you happy? He: Not being asked about it.*

The early “He:/She:” works seem to confirm their texts, thus proving their truth—a conversation about spike heels, for example, accompanies the spike-heel images. Likewise, Heinecken’s presence within some of the Polaroids seems to authenticate the stories and confirm their autobiographical nature. But the artificial quality of the conversations—the repartee is just too snappy and hard-boiled, too contrived and elliptical—suggests that they might be fictional after all. And in many of the “He:/She:” works, snapshots of everyday life get mixed in with staged still lifes—symbolic arrangements of dolls, toys, and other objects. We are constantly aware that Heinecken is turning moments in his life into emblems, parables, or signs of something more general.

In 1980, Heinecken concluded “He:/She:” by publishing a sixty-six-page spiral-bound book consisting of photographs of couples juxtaposed with dialogues between a man, again presumably Heinecken, and a series of female conversational partners. To create each of the ten images that illustrate the book, he used the SX-70 camera to rephotograph staged, costumed, and artificially lit images of fashion models posing in clothing catalogues. By appropriating staged images of ideal couples, Heinecken blended fantasy and real life, associating the indexical qualities of the Polaroid with the airbrushed clichés of ’70s-swinger style. Despite the ostensible immediacy of the Polaroid format, the obviously posed and commercial nature of the images calls the truth of both “his” and “her” statements into question. Heinecken was influenced by Alain Robbe-Grillet, and as we read through Heinecken’s text, with its noirish ambience and free-floating identities, we hear echoes of the Nouveau Roman and its eschewal of literary realism’s “three-dimensional” characters.<sup>5</sup> As is the case with all the “He:/She:” works, the book calls for reflection on the ways in which the photograph allows us not only to objectify but also to script ourselves.

This kind of scripting of experience was being carried out on a much larger scale in the world of television, where the consumer fantasies of corporate broadcasting were irrevocably inserted into the intimate domestic settings of the home. By the time Heinecken concluded “He:/She:,” he had already made highly innovative work related to this state of affairs. During an exhibition of his 1970 installation *TV/Time Environment* at the Pasadena Art Museum, he photographed a television set with a 35-mm camera—one of the first times an artist had done

## KAARI UPSON

You drive past five scorched lots that can’t withstand rebuilding. The luxury two-story burned down three times and blew down once, which is too hard to explain. A crystal-meth explosion started an internal fire, and police spent months searching for a dead woman’s body, digging hole after hole after hole. My grandmother shot her own oleander bush because one of the guys there threw a brick through her window. The San Andreas Fault apparently runs through the backyard, so the house will become beach-front property when the big one comes, which sounds like a punch line but no one says it that way.

Every time I have to drive on the 10-E, the list repeats itself, information shifting a little bit each time. Why did he return? Did he throw a wrench, or something similar and heavy?

Here is a place of contradiction, overgrowth, and release. It folds in on itself, and I fold in on it. The swimming pool burns. There is smoldering and looting and starting over again. Holes don’t ever get filled, but they aren’t empty, either.

A few years ago, a stranger appeared on a lot, asking about a two-story house that wasn’t there anymore. The stranger then asked my brother whether he recognized him, thinking he was someone else. When the mis-recognized answered no, the stranger went on to apologize for the incident, but reassured him that he had seen the light and was now free. □



Kaari Upson's *Mirrored Staircase Inversion* (San Bernardino) being fabricated on a residential lot in San Bernardino, CA, 2011. Photo: Chadwick Rantanen.



**It is not “natural” light that forms Heinecken’s photosensitive image—it is the cathode-ray screen, the ultimate spectacular and ephemeral vision.**

this. The installation, somewhat reminiscent of William Leavitt’s contemporaneous environments, parodied an average middle-class living room with a constantly running television, in front of which was hung a positive transparency with an image of a nude torso. Visitors could sit in an armchair and watch, but only through an overlay that emphasized the erotics of television spectatorship and consumption. Heinecken took pictures of the screen through the transparency, and a few years later printed some of the images as 3M prints (“Daytime Color TV Fantasy,” 1974–75) and four-color lithographs (“Daytime TV Fantasy,” 1976).

He only turned to an intensive consideration of television, however, around 1980, with a massive outpouring of TV-screen appropriations in a variety of media. His incredible 1981 “videograms” of Ronald Reagan’s inaugural speech were among the first of these. He produced them by pausing a VHS video on the frame he wanted to capture, turning the TV off, pressing Cibachrome paper against the screen, and then turning the TV quickly on and off again to expose the emulsion. Yet another transformation of the photogram technique, the videograms morph the president into an electronic ghost. Blurry and effulgent, the images remind viewers of the constructedness of Reagan’s vaunted persona—the famous pompadour and the mid-western bonhomie just so many dissolving pixel fragments. Heinecken’s technique foregrounds the former GE spokesman as actor-president, who sold “morning in America” in just the same way that sexy women sell products and that Reagan himself had sold TVs.

Heinecken’s gesture marked a qualitative shift. Though Kennedy may have been the first telegenic president, it was with the Reagan presidency that politicians were first fully submitted to the gaze of objectifying desire. From this point on, the pretense of a difference between the logic of advertising, marketing, and consumption and the logic of electoral politics was unsustainable. In some of the videograms, Nancy Reagan is clearly recognizable, even though she is reduced to nothing more than a blur of her trademark color, red. An entire section of the electromagnetic spectrum becomes a logo; a first lady becomes a brand. Fittingly, even the light that renders her visible is artificial. It is not “natural” light that forms the photosensitive image—it is the cathode-ray screen, the ultimate spectacular and ephemeral vision. The collapse of distance and the intimacy promised by TV prove illusory. Nothing is transmitted but these electronic wraiths.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it was newscasters, the most notoriously “plastic” of public figures, to whom Heinecken next turned his attention. “Untitled (Newswomen),” 1983–87, is a series of twenty-by-twenty-four-inch Polaroid head shots taken off of a TV screen and displayed in grids. Here again, we see signs not of physical presence but of an electronic medium: In a photo of Diane Sawyer, the famous anchorwoman becomes a configuration of fluorescing optical patterns; in a related ink-jet print, Connie Chung is bleached and blurred nearly to the point of abstraction. The grids, some of which also contain composites of different visages, suggest strange museum displays, collections of hairstyles, clothing, backdrops, and gestures. In his book *1984: A Case Study in Finding an Appropriate TV Newswoman* (A CBS Docudrama in Words and Pictures), 1985, Heinecken more directly connected American broadcast TV to certain of its forebears: nineteenth-century photography and the pseudosciences, such as phrenology and physiognomy, to which it was sometimes yoked. Comprising eighteen pages with approximately ninety-four color plates depicting male and female anchors, the volume uses an absurdist text to present the images as part of a scientific visual analysis designed to help television executives pick the best female cohost for a morning news program. We are informed, for example, that against the foil of a wave-patterned dress a cohost’s face appears to be “an island in the world storm.” A page may present multiple columns of three images each; the top portrait is a woman, the bottom a man, and the one in the middle a ludicrous androgyne created

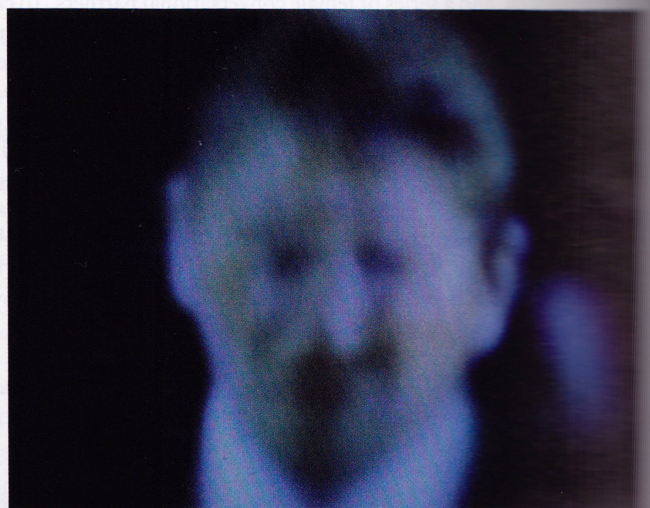


From top: Robert Heinecken, *TV/Time Environment*, 1970, mixed media. Installation view, Pasadena Art Museum, CA, 1972.

Robert Heinecken, *Daytime Color TV Fantasy* (18B), 1974, color photograph, 8½ x 11".

Robert Heinecken, *Inaugural Excerpt Videogram/Ronald Reagan (... not the other way ...)*, 1981, color photogram from television screen, 11 x 14".

Opposite page: Robert Heinecken, *A Case Study in Finding an Appropriate TV Newswoman* (A CBS Docudrama in Words and Pictures), Phyllis Georgopoulos/Kurtis, 1984, color photograph, text, overall 48 x 42".





by layering one atop the other to form a composite. Through this strategy, marketing science is parodied and fixed categories of gender and race are pointedly undermined. Oblique references to the history of photography and, in particular, to the use of composite images in the 1880s remind us that our understanding of how human vision functions continually lags behind the technologies of vision we invent. By the nineteenth century, English eugenicist Francis Galton had combined portraits of soldiers, prisoners, and other human groups in the mistaken belief that he could reveal physiognomic types that defined fundamental structures of race, class, health and sickness, family, etc. The composites in 1984, however, with their crossing of ages, races, and genders, give the lie to the idea of ideal types. They seem no truer than Galton's images—nor false. These newswomen are not ideal, but neither are they real. They are nothing but Q ratings, immaterial projections of focus-group consensus.

**YET IF THE TENSION** between dismemberment and disembodiment can be understood as a thread running through Heinecken's work, it was the latter that took precedence in the late 1980s. Between 1987 and 1991, the artist created approximately 125 Cibachrome photograms, which he produced in editions of one to fifty, using *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and other magazines. He issued these under a number of series titles, including "Possible Prints" (P.P.), "Recto/Verso," "Whisky and Cigarettes," and "Move to Malibu." Unlike the "Are You Rea" photograms, the color photograms are positive images, and thus, although similarly morphed, they are much more legible. They are also more disturbing. The Cibachrome process blended the two sides of the magazine leaf with greater variation of tone and color, and as a result, human bodies merge convincingly with one another as well as with processed foods and other consumer products, producing exuberantly grotesque chimeras. The images not only bespeak the tastes and excesses of the period but also evoke the financial crisis following the '87 crash and the AIDS crisis—as well as a sense that all aspects of humanity can be bought and sold.<sup>6</sup>

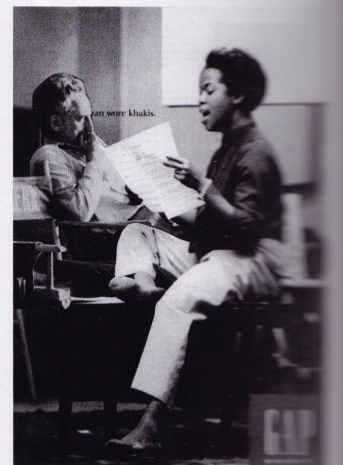
Perhaps because of its three-dimensional, corporeal qualities, excision still held attractions for Heinecken. He returned to this technique in a series of "revised" or "compromised" magazines made between 1989 and 1994. Most notable in this group is *150 Years of Photojournalism*, 1989, a carefully altered copy of a *Time* "Special Collector's Edition" that presented a time line of famous events and photographers. Through Heinecken's incisions, well-known photographs pile up and interact in new ways, and text used on one page is allowed to bleed through to another. The nurse in Alfred Eisenstaedt's V-J Day photo clutches the *Hindenburg*, which explodes on the leaf preceding it; and the mouth of the Vietcong prisoner in Eddie Adams's famous shot of a summary execution has been cut away, while an



Above: Robert Heinecken, *P.P. Overlapped Faces*, 1991, color photogram, 11 x 14".

Left: Robert Heinecken, *150 Years of Photojournalism* (detail), 1989, magazine with altered cutouts, eight parts, 10 3/4 x 8 1/2" closed.

Right: Robert Heinecken, *Gap #4* (detail), 1999, reconstructed magazine with altered cutouts, 10 1/2 x 7 1/2" closed.





**In 150 Years of Photojournalism,**  
the artist reveals what seem to be  
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ness and disorder.

incision on his killer's back reveals the words LOOK. AND SEE. By jumbling both time and logic, the cuts make the idea of any single history of photojournalism seem ridiculous, and they also imply that photography can just as easily falsify a historical event as document it. However, this is more than a simple elucidation of the profound unreliability of photography as historical document. The magazine here is proposed as a most paradoxical, indeed impossible object, a three-dimensional stack of two-dimensional images. Cutting into this stack, the artist reveals what seem to be bottomless strata of iconography, almost universally recognizable and yet shot through with randomness and disorder. As with the radical proposition of "Are You Real"—the magazine photogram as an assertion of the instability of reality—in these photomontages the suggestion is that we will never get to bedrock. There is no fundamental reality on which an orderly historical structure can be built.

As the magazine work progressed in the 1990s, Heinecken developed his photomontage technique, creating overcrowded tableaux of people and objects coiled in tight interactions. The cuts between elements collapse spatiality and create discrepancies of scale and perspective, but they also connect opposites: nudity versus dress, male versus female, and celebrities versus the average Joe. In many ways, the magazines are a reaction to the contemporaneous Photoshopping of the world, a kind of return to the physical cut at a time when editing was becoming digital and, hence, virtual. In his revised Gap ads created between 1994 and 1999 (and also in his book . . . *Wore Khakis*, 1999), the artist homed in on the famous campaign featuring a succession of iconic personalities, all garbed in khakis. Suturing celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Muhammad Ali, and Marcel Duchamp, he allowed their individual looks and messages to intrude on one another, disrupting advertising's ostensibly personal address to the viewer. With its 1984-ish promise that wearing what everyone else is wearing will release your individuality, the Gap's " . . . wore khakis" campaign pioneered the marketing of the no-collar lifestyle. (You're not just another struggling member of the precariat; you're a maverick, like Steve McQueen.) And like that no-collar worker, Heinecken played many roles, acting simultaneously as artist, editor, graphic designer, and critic—but he never wore khakis.

This mutability seems apt, since, after all, Heinecken's art thrived on contradiction, confrontation, and strategic shifts in medium and subject position. But those very qualities raise the question: How are we to assess Heinecken's work, with its complexity and its incredible profusion of operations (superimposition, compositing, decontextualizing, transposition, inversion, displacement, and random permutation)? Part of the answer may lie in what for many is the most confounding aspect of his art, its near-obsessive return to sex. It is libidinousness, perhaps, that characterizes not only Heinecken's iconography but also his intense engagement with his mediums, the promiscuity of his practice and its messiness. His documents of manufactured experience, however acerbic and ironic, stand in vivid contrast to the archival or ethnographic turn encompassing not only conceptual photography and the work of the Pictures generation but much of postwar and contemporary art. Against the "cultural studies" of Dan Graham, for example—against the *dryness* of Graham's tactics, their near-clinical activation of spectatorship—in Heinecken's work we confront sex, violence, and the body and its fragmentation and estrangements from itself. His career spans a period when the brutality of physical control was increasingly giving way to stealthier and more seductive technologies of power, and when lived experience was undergoing its uncanny transformation into electronic signals and, later, digital code. To trace his work across the decades is to understand why he seems to have felt that any art apprehending these developments must be an art of extremes. □

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For notes, see page 340.

## JIM SHAW

When I got out of CalArts in 1978, no one was trolling the LA schools for new art stars, the rents were cheap, you could find work in the film biz, and nobody cared too much about what you did. It was a great time and place to make art if you didn't need to make a living off of it or have a gallery, as there were very few. You could take your time, make mistakes, and argue with your friends. I developed slowly by today's standards, occasionally exhibiting in group shows at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions or the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, absorbing influences, seeing shows (work by artists like Judy Pfaff, Laurie Anderson, and Jonathan Borofsky comes to mind), and doing special-effects jobs that funded my art production until they started to get in the way (this list includes *Moonwalker*, *The Abyss*, the first *Tron*, *Earth Girls Are Easy*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4*, and lots of TV commercials). Thirty-plus years have gone by since I graduated, and today there are galleries, collectors, and an audience paying attention to what you do the minute you put up your thesis show. Rents are expensive, tuitions are criminally high (though the schools are still a major magnet for newcomers, as they were for me when I came here from Michigan during the financial downturn of the early 1970s). There's no time left to be a slacker anymore, and it helps to be born rich. However, it's still warm in the winter, music is easy to come by, you can still find work in the film biz, and the gene pool is now a lot less incestuous. □



Jim Shaw, *Untitled*, 1979, still from an unfinished color video.



