

REVIEWS DEC. 31, 1969



In the fall of 1977, images became "pictures." Prompted by Douglas Crimp's exhibition by that name at Artists Space, the shift heralded the institutionalization of what would be dubbed "postmodernism" in the arts. The show's title came to signify an emerging cadre of artists who presented images not as indexes of the real but as strings of readymade representations.

"Frozen Lakes," curated by Richard Birkett and Stefan Kalmár and featuring eight artists and two collectives, revisited the zeitgeist—capturing art that first gave the venue historical heft. The artists, all young enough to have encountered "Pictures" transgressions only after they became conventions, reconsider "quotation," "excerptation," "framing" and "staging"—the quartet of "Pictures" strategies outlined by Crimp—for the digital era. If the emblems of their predecessors today seem stale, it's because we've been told so many times what they're meant to convey. Thinking through what images mean in an age when Google and computer codes translate the visual into bands of words and numbers, "Frozen Lakes" offered new stakes for a conversation that has long felt tired.

The show included a mix of artists, with relative unknowns, like Charlotte Prodder and Banu Cennetoglu, appearing alongside more familiar names, such as Ken Okiishi and Ed Atkins. The works recall



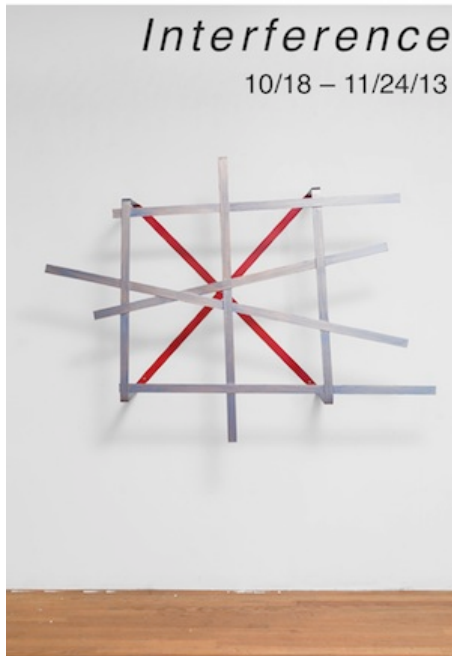


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the discursive over-flow that marked the reception of Cindy Sherman and her peers, whose art was often eclipsed by the theoretical frames it marshaled. Here, too, images fail to stand on their own: each is supplemented by objects, audio or disjunctive texts, yielding works that demand to be read and heard as much as seen. Digital technologies dominate, making the strange immateriality of images, cogently thematized in the original "Pictures" show, all the more overt. In "Frozen Lakes," images not only existed as so many copies without an original, but flattened into an abstract informational flow.

In Tobias Kaspar's *Bodies in the Backdrop* (2012), 18 framed color photographs shot inside the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice lean against the wall on a long red carpet, each accompanied by a typed line from the collector's autobiography. The compositions, all abruptly cropped, feature seminal modernist works—a Picasso, a Brancusi and a Man Ray, among others—hanging in the Guggenheim's galleries. Standing near them are museum visitors who always seem to be looking elsewhere, out of windows or across the room. A boy and girl beside Jackson Pollock's *Alchemy* (1947) appear in several frames, their heads and torsos variously truncated. Kaspar's installation also includes a floor-bound monitor, which plays the prints on loop. The world outside the image falls away; in its place, the artist offers fragments, depthless and hermetic.

Elsewhere, Ed Atkins probed digital's eerie weightlessness in two HD videos, *Death Mask II: The Scent* (2010) and *Death Mask III* (2011). The figure of the cadaver—an object, like the death mask, whose presence marks an absence—unites them. If the "body" of film has fallen away with the decline of celluloid, Atkins replaces it with images of flesh, as if attempting to return viscosity to a medium whose hyperreal renderings seem designed to anesthetize and lull. References to structuralist films, from Hollis Frampton's *Lemon* (1969) to Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967), recur, as Atkins explores how digital video might reflect on its essential properties. In *Death Mask III*, shots of nature come in and out of focus, then cut to monochrome spreads of color that frustrate HD's illusion of spatial depth. For Atkins, images, far from being fixed, are endlessly mutable, and he alters them continually, tweaking their colors or multiplying them. His videos anchored a show of works at once haunted and seduced by the possibilities of new media.

PHOTO: View of the exhibition "Frozen Lakes," showing Tobias

Kaspar's Bodies in the Backdrop, 2012; at Artists Space.

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