

Claire Fontaine's "Working Together"

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Claire Fontaine's migration from Reena Spaulings to Metro Pictures for "Working Together," her first show in Chelsea, pressurizes her concept of the ready-made artist. If this idea was once experimental, now it is deployed in the field at large. Fontaine has described the ready-made artist as referring, "to the reproducibility of artists during... an era that has been qualified as post-Fordist, one in which on-demand has replaced stock. The only goods still produced on an assembly line—that of the education system—without knowing for whom, nor why, are workers, including artists." [1] Fontaine's own name is taken from a popular brand of French notebooks and stationary, and those responsible for assembling the work that appears with her signature refer to themselves as her assistants.

It is in this sense that *The Assistants* (2011) one of two videos on display in "Working Together"—in which a poet reads a Giorgio Agamben text of the same name—can be called a self-portrait. The other, *Situations* (2011), an unsettling presentation of street-fighting pedagogy, is more in-keeping with the found quality of the rest of the work and is emblematic of the show's success. In other words, having declared the artist a ready-made, Fontaine could have preceded apace by having the ready-made artist display only ready-made works, or worse. Instead, the question of the found object is multiplied and refracted. What is the object found in *Situations*? The technical know-how? The strange character doing the teaching? The video itself?

The series "Joke Paintings (Richard and Marc)" (2011) turn an interview between Marc Jacobs and Richard Prince (concerning the latter's design of a Louis Vuitton handbag) into paintings. Wrapping around the space and under a scaffold set against the back wall of the gallery, they vibrate across the same sort of line Fontaine crossed on her way uptown (or at least to Chelsea), maybe. The scaffold belongs outside, which places the paintings beneath, in the space of outdoor advertisements—not insider objects at all. On the one hand, the objects for sale inside are much pricier than a luxury handbag—but, on the other hand, not just anybody knows where to find them or what it is that they mean. The hanging trash bags filled with returnable cans, by contrast, are not only clearly legible as properly found objects; they are equally clear as holders of value—or they ought to be. And the difference between their (literal) exchange-value as cans and their (real) price tags as objects of art nicely demarcates the distinct, functional role of the ready-made artist.

Untitled (2011), a Newton's Cradle produced by Lehman Brothers as an executive toy and emblazoned with the word "networking," is both more pleasing and less conceptually successful. Modified by Fontaine to remain in perpetual motion, it's a silly little gag referencing the continued circulation of Lehman's human resources in international finance, as well as the role of the artist in providing a repository for accumulated capital—a "cultural fix"—at those moments, like now, when a decent return on investment elsewhere cannot be guaranteed.

Other works—a neon sign reading "PAST PRESENT FUTURE," two strangely menacing pie graphs, and a diagram of lupine aggressiveness—clutter the space. Though not unappealing, which is both the point and the problem, they feel extraneous. In the corner lurks some kind of automated washing device, and, as I tried to decipher it, someone walked up and held a ring to its large black bristles, which began to spin. I have no idea if this was its intended purpose, but it was certainly a perfect bit of comic overkill to wash jewelry with something so large, and, in any case, utility often makes for strange marriages. Not so for Fontaine, though, who seems perfectly at ease in her new home. Her assistants have made damn sure of that.

[1] See www.clairefontaine.ws/pdf/readymade_eng.pdf, p 4.

Stephen Squibb lives in Brooklyn and Cambridge. He writes for n+1, artforum.com, and was formerly editor at Idiom. He is Artistic Co-Director at Woodshed Collective, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Critical Theory at Harvard University.

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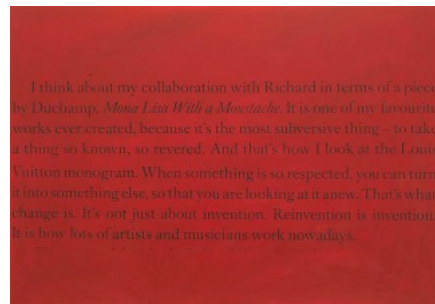
1 Claire Fontaine, *The Assistants*, 2011.



2 View of Claire Fontaine's "Working Together" Metro Pictures, 2011.



3 Claire Fontaine, *Situations*, 2011.



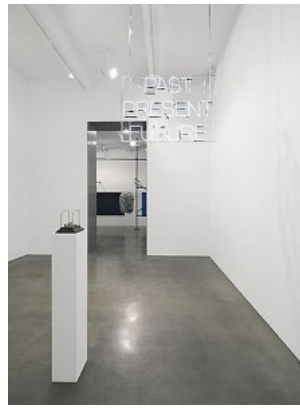
4 Claire Fontaine, *The most subversive thing*, 2011.



5 View of Claire Fontaine's "Working Together" Metro Pictures, 2011.

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6 View of Claire Fontaine's "Working Together" Metro Pictures, 2011.

- 1 Claire Fontaine, *The Assistants*, 2011. Two channel video, color, sound. 38 minutes. All images courtesy of Metro Pictures, New York.
- 2 View of Claire Fontaine's "Working Together" Metro Pictures, 2011.
- 3 Claire Fontaine, *Situations*, 2011. Single channel video, color, sound. 35 minutes.
- 4 Claire Fontaine, *The most subversive thing*, 2011. Silkscreen and acrylic on canvas. 56 inches x 79 inches. From the series "Joke Paintings (Richard and Marc)," 2011.
- 5 View of Claire Fontaine's "Working Together" Metro Pictures, 2011.
- 6 View of Claire Fontaine's "Working Together" Metro Pictures, 2011.

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