

Claire Fontaine's "Working Together": Cheek vs. Chic

A mini-collective sets up shop at Metro Pictures

By James Hannaham

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Details:

Claire Fontaine: â€œWorking Togetherâ€™

Metro Pictures

519 West 24th Street

212-206-7100,

metropicturesgallery.com

Through December 10

There is no Claire Fontaine—rather, she’s a collective named for a French notebook company and composed of two Paris-based artists, Fulvia Carnevale of Italy and Englishman James Thornhill. But it’s clear from “Claire’s” first show with Metro Pictures that their audacity demands a bit of anonymity; the semi-conceptual exhibition “Working Together” simultaneously tickles your funny bone and pokes you in the eye.

You might call the contents minimalist in light of the low-budget simplicity of these works; most pieces would get

hauled away by sanitation workers if you moved them into the street. Some of it actually is trash: Fontaine has filled eight clear plastic bags with empty soda cans and suspended them from the ceiling. There’s also a hand mirror on a spinning wire and a scaffolding partially wrapped in Christmas lights. In another room, there’s a deliberately static, barely audible video of poet Douglas Park reading a dense text about assistants. And as people do with assistants, no one spends more than a few minutes paying attention to it. A series of monochrome paintings with text silk-screened onto them might seem like art, but they soon prove more *artful* than *artistic*.

Insouciance is one part of Fontaine’s modus operandi; the other part is pure cheek. The text on the paintings consists of an interview from the British edition of *Harper’s Bazaar* between Marc Jacobs and Richard Prince discussing a work-for-hire the latter did for Louis Vuitton, in which the pretentious languages of artspeak and fashion-hype slam together hilariously: “RP: . . . I studied the history of Louis Vuitton. It was all about changing and working with the monogram.” Another painting finds Jacobs glibly comparing the Vuitton logo to Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.* Fontaine calls these Joke Paintings, and while the joke is mostly on Jacobs and Prince, it’s also on you—specifically the way you conflate art, fashion, and commerce, and how you’re a sucker for letting artists be “free.” Fontaine’s sauciest move along these lines consists of framing a blank check (kept behind the front desk) made out to the collective and signed by Metro Pictures co-founder Helene Winer. It’s entitled *Trust*.