

GUYTON \ WALKER

GREENE NAFTALI

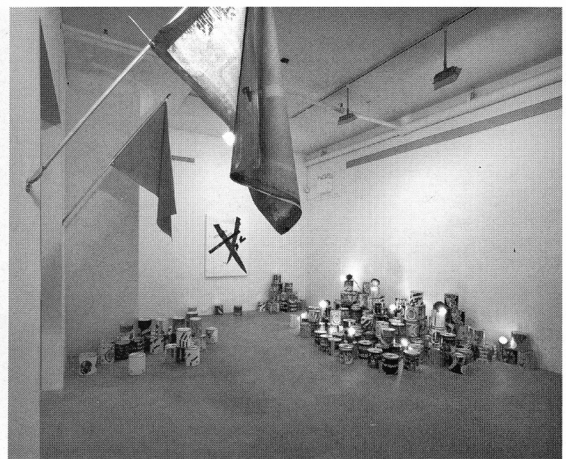
Dear Ketel One Drinker: Here is the recipe for our signature art show. Take one part Wade Guyton and one part Kelley Walker, add nothing, and get a “third artist” with two last names and twice the power of either one. Guyton\Walker is like a corporate merger between two solo artists, whose qualities and ambitions are neither sacrificed nor confused but rather pooled and integrated to produce one super-double-artist. Guyton\Walker’s Chelsea debut, “The Failover of Judgement Part III,” was a sort of hypothetical pavilion, a convincing proposal for an installation just like this one designed and signed by two recently emerged, provisionally merged professionals known for their strategic appropriation of images, styles, and techniques from art history and advertising.

This show’s more-or-less explicit borrowings included not only Ketel One Vodka ads but also Warhol (his off-register silk-screen technique and images of knives), David Fischli and Peter Weiss (their “self-portrait” *Outlaws*, 1984–85, a photograph of two chairs performing a balancing act, reproduced here as a digital print on canvas), Dan Graham (a two-way-mirror wall), Jorge Pardo (designer lamps made of coconuts), and even new work by artists showing in nearby galleries, such as that other constructed überartist Reena Spaulings (her wall-mounted flags, concurrently on view around the corner at Haswellediger).

Much of the work exploits Walker’s signature experimentation with the flatbed digital scanner, which he wields as both camera and palette, loading its glass face with sliced fruit, halved coconuts, chicken bones, and steak knives. Guyton weighs in with his knack for remixing and recontextualizing modernist signifiers (Constructivist graphics, cut ‘n’ paste collage, fragmented and rescaled text). “Painting Installation,” 2004–2005, a series of twenty-six canvases hung edge to edge in the style of Warhol’s *Shadow* paintings, features imagery poached from an old Swiss design annual, which the artists attack with multiple layers of ink-jet printing and silk-screened enamel paint. These different strains of flatness encrust the picture plane until it cracks and drips. The scanned images of knives, which also point to the aesthetic violence of collage and appropriation, cohabit the posterlike paintings with the relentlessly repeated, hacked, and hacked-up vodka ad. It is a tight, bright roomful, a panorama of eye-catching moments suspended in blankness. A fortresslike stack of digitally decorated paint cans stands nearby, as excessive and banal as a window display at Janovic/Plaza.

When did the brutality of rupture, the scandal of *détournement*, and the dysfunctionality of the glitch become productive design motifs? If design constructs a coherent, consumable present by absorbing difference and resolving antagonisms at the level of the surface, we might say that Guyton\Walker’s project affirms not only the collapse of aesthetic judgment but capitalism’s cool indifference to the meanings and values it circulates—as long as these obey the law of exchange and produce a surplus. Guyton\Walker produce surplus with the surplus they appropriate, as if to say that everything—including history, art, the very idea of the subject—is surplus today, constantly recycled for profit or pleasure. And as Guyton signatures and Walker gestures, too, are repeated under Guyton\Walker, the artists put themselves back into circulation as their own content, working overtime now to design something like an aesthetic autoimmune system. Will rupture return somewhere between the scanner and the printer? Or will design win the day? The answer is ambiguous. Dear Ketel One Drinker, here is another recipe: Make yourself as immediate as a magazine page, as thin and bright as a label, as democratic as a scanner, as accidental as a printing error, and repeat until you taste difference.

—John Kelsey



View of “Guyton \ Walker,” Greene Naftali, New York, 2005.