# A PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE ENGAGING STRATEGIES OF APPROPRIATION

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> The desire of representation exists only insofar as it can never be fulfilled, insofar as the original always is deferred.
> —Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," in *On the Museum's Ruins.* Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993, p. 119.

Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's work, like the work of many of his contemporaries,[1]* takes on diverse forms, supports, and materials, undermining, in the process, the foundations of virtuosity and style as artistic criteria. Resisting a single, immediately identifiable style, his approach as a whole nonetheless is conceptually structured on the paradigm of photography. The historical topic of the relationship between an image, or more generally a sign, and its referent, a topic renewed with the advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, is central to his work.[2] More fundamentally, focusing on this topic, he scrutinizes the status of art and its capacity for producing meaning.

* The note numbers in color correspond to endnotes by Yann Sérandour, p. 40.

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From 1993 to today, many works by Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié employ the photographic medium. At no time, however, is the term "photography" sufficient for describing the processes set in motion in the making of a piece. At the very most, it is inscribed in a series of operations, whose sequence is often complex to unravel.

Even when a work appears to comprise a straightforward series of pictures, as in *Untitled* (1993), eighty slides of screws projected life-size, the number of screws increasing by increments of one with each new slide, from one to forty, then decreasing through the same process, photography is just part of the apparatus of installation.

Dating from 1993, this piece is one of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's first works and, in a way, serves as a statement. First and foremost, it recalls the following idea of Philippe Dubois's:

> [A photograph] presents itself to us as a "volume" in and through an "apparatus" (as neutral and discreet as it may be) that influences our perception. . . . We do not grant (much) importance to this aspect of the *exhibition* of a photograph, to everything that is physical about it, to everything that surrounds it, to everything through which it comes to us, in short, to everything that constitutes its *concrete enunciation* when contemplating it. Most often, we tend to reject completely the *pragmatics of the reception* of photographs. And yet, it seems important and significant to me that, for the past fifteen years, more and more photographers and artists have systematically engaged in works specifically focused on this pragmatic and "objectual" aspect of the *mise en scène* of photographs.[1]

Inscribing these pictures into a real environment and employing a 1:1 scale also raises the problem of mimetic reproduction. Pushing the analogy to its threshold, it runs the absurd risk of making the sign merge with its referent. The tale of cartographers drawing up a full-scale map of their empire, told and attributed by Borges to a fictive seventeenth-century author as a literary device, exemplifies this:

> "In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears

1. Philippe Dubois, "L'art est-il (devenu) photographique?" (1986), in *L'Acte photographique et autres essais* (Paris: Nathan, 1990), p. 251. [All citations from this book translated here by Jian-Xing Too.]


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had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography."—J. A. Suárez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658.[2]

Conceived the same year, a piece entitled *Paris le 2 juin…* (1993) also hints at what was to come: on the occasion of a group show in the 20th arrondissement of Paris, a series of photographs[3] of building facades in the vicinity of the exhibition space[3] were presented in three different forms: a color slide projection in the exhibition space, a black-and-white poster posted in the street just outside the exhibition space, and a book made from the poster folded, bound, and cut. Here the status of photography relative to the subject represented is investigated by the multiplication of a single photographic subject through different modes of presentation: if a single subject can lead to a multiplicity of representations, then the relation that ties the subject to its referent, far from limiting itself to a simple equation, proves to be complex. The predominant idea, at the time of photography's emergence, of a mimetic or analogical equivalence between the subject represented and its photographic image is straightaway challenged.

In his subsequent work, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié raises even more acutely the issue of reproduction bordering on replication or duplication by choosing subjects that have been submitted to photographic reproduction: 1. photographs of photographs; 2. photographs of reproductions of works of art; 3. reproductions of works of art in art books (catalogs to collections or exhibitions). When the subject represented is not mediated through the intermediary of photography, it is mediated by means of: 4. graphics; and 5. schemas, maps, and plans.

## 1. PHOTOGRAPHS OF PHOTOGRAPHS

An experience of the real as if it were a photograph is described by Robert Smithson in his text, "The Monuments of Passaic," in which the artist narrates the events of a day-long photographic excursion to the New Jersey suburbs. Of photographing an ordinary wood-and-steel bridge, Smithson remarks: "Noonday sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed *picture.* Photographing

**2.** Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science" (1946), in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), p. 325.
**3.** The photographs in this piece were taken by Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié and Stéphan Lucas.

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> it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph. . . .” If reality itself appears to be already constituted as image, then the hierarchy of object and representation—the first being the source of the authority and prestige of the second—is collapsed.[4]

Exhibited in a gallery in Los Angeles, *Loot* (1998) pushes the notion of confusion between reality and the photographic image to an extreme by showing only pictures of pictures and by instigating a *mise en abyme* of the practice of (re)photography. This project consists of two series: in the gallery’s storeroom, photographs of photographs of the gallery’s emptied exhibition space are presented in flat Kodak boxes; in the exhibition space, photographs of the aforementioned photographs when they were hung in the same exhibition space. The subject—in this case, the exhibition and the exhibition space[4]—can be seen exclusively through photographs. This suggests that reality does not exist outside of the way we picture it, in other words, outside of systems of representation. Moreover, as suggested by Philippe Dubois, photography inherently lends itself to confusion: “Positive prints are in fact no more than photographs of photographs, “metaphotographs,” or secondary pictures, which simply attest that photography concerns not so much reproduction, as re-production.”[5] More generally, the 1970s saw the development of a critique of representation, in particular, of its claim to reality. American critics associated with the journal *October* were ardent spokespersons for this critique. In an article entitled “Representation, Appropriation, and Power,” Craig Owens noted:

> In the visual arts, the postmodernist critique of representation proceeds by a similar attempt to undermine the referential status of visual imagery and, with it, its claim to represent reality as it really is, whether this be the surface appearance of things (realism) or some ideal order lying behind or beyond appearance (abstraction). Postmodernist artists demonstrate that this “reality,” whether concrete or abstract, is a fiction, produced and sustained only by its cultural representation.[6]

Photography soon emerged as a favorable terrain for experimenting with the status of representation. Its mechanical mode of operation effectively, immediately sanctioned the multiple

**4.** Craig Owens, “Photography *en abyme*” (1978), in *Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power, and Culture*, eds. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 27.
**5.** Dubois, “L’Acte photographique” (1983), in *L’Acte photographique*, p. 70.
**6.** Owens, “Representation, Appropriation, and Power” (1982), in *Beyond Recognition*, p. 111.


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edition to the antipodes of the model of the unique work of art and, in the process, undermined the notion of the original, whose distinction from the copy was becoming increasingly problematic.

## 2. PHOTOGRAPHS OF REPRODUCTIONS OF WORKS OF ART

Right from its appearance in the nineteenth century, photography was used as a tool for the fine arts. It established itself as an intermediary link between the artists and their models, who were liberated by photography from having to hold sometimes unbearably long poses. Focused on the theme of the nude, a 1997 exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris presented this sort of photograph, thus constituting a survey of genre scenes: beside academic nudes (wrestlers, discus throwers) and erotic nudes, were numerous religious subjects (crucifixions, descents from the cross, Mary Magdalene).[7] More generally, photography, then widely considered a tool of strict reproduction of the real due to its mechanical mode of operation, also emerged as a mediating agent between artists and reality. In the name of defending art from industry, attacks on photography grew numerous. Baudelaire categorically denied that photography could entail any artistic competence whatsoever:

> During this lamentable period, a new industry arose which contributed not a little to confirm stupidity in its faith and to ruin whatever might remain of the divine in the French mind. The idolatrous mob demanded an ideal worthy of itself and appropriate to its nature—that is perfectly understood. In matters of painting and sculpture, the present-day *Credo* of the sophisticated, above all in France (and I do not think that anyone at all would dare to state the contrary), is this: 'I believe in Nature, and I believe only in Nature (there are good reasons for that). I believe that Art is, and cannot be other than, the exact reproduction of Nature (a timid and dissident sect would wish to exclude the more repellent objects of nature, such as skeletons or chamber-pots). Thus an industry that could give us a result identical to Nature would be the absolute of art.' A revengeful God has given ear to the prayers of this multitude. Daguerre was his Messiah. And now the faithful says to himself: 'Since Photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire (they really believe that, the mad fools!), then Photography and Art are the same thing.'[8]

Starting in the late nineteenth century, with the pictorialist movement, photography in effect aspired to attain the status of an artistic practice.

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**7.** *L'art du nu au XIX^e siècle. Le photographe et son modèle*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, October 14, 1997–January 18, 1998.

**8.** Charles Baudelaire, "Salon of 1859," in *Art in Paris 1845–1862*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965), p. 152.

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This ambition was reinforced by the early twentieth-century avant-garde: constructivism and Bauhaus considered it as a powerful artistic tool at the service of society, all the while engaging it in a completely experimental direction with the photogram and photomontage. It was not until the 1970s, however, that photography's presence in the visual arts became standard in museums. As Douglas Crimp put it in a nutshell, "Photography may have been *invented* in 1839, but it was only *discovered* in the 1970s."[9]

Photography and the fine arts thus sustained a complex, even contentious relationship, throughout the twentieth century. The reaffirmation of its artistic status in the 1980s in France with the term *photographie plasticienne* [which roughly translates as "art photography"] instituted the slim distinction between "photography by artists" and "photography by photographers." In the 1970s, in the field of the visual arts (particularly in land art and performance), photography sometimes still played a seemingly secondary or adjunct role, inherited directly from a naturalist stance that assigns it a strictly documentary function. With time, this second-fiddle role was reevaluated and the constitutive role of photography in the very conception of these works became patently apparent, whether it concerned freezing ephemeral, immediate actions or capturing monumental interventions on the landscape by aerial view, etc. On this specific point, the role and the lot of video resemble that of photography. An exhibition recently paid homage to Gerry Schum (1938–1973), author of many videos done in close collaboration with artists tied to land art, conceptual art, and Fluxus.[10]

> Photographing a painting is one means of reproduction; photographing a fictive event in a studio is another. In the first case, the thing reproduced is a work of art, whereas its reproduction is not. This is because the act of the photographer adjusting the lens does not create a work of art any more than does a conductor directing a symphony. At the very most, these acts constitute artistic performances.[11]

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**9.** Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting" (1981), in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993) p. 93.

**10.** *Ready to Shoot, Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum Videogalerie*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, December 14, 2003–March 14, 2004; Casino Luxembourg, March 27–June 6, 2004; Museu de Art Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, July 23–October 10, 2004; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC, Paris, October 23–November 28, 2004.

**11.** Walter Benjamin, "L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée" (1936), in *Écrits français*, ed. J.M. Monnoyer (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) p. 153 [trans. Jian-Xing Too].


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By introducing a clear distinction between photography and photographic reproduction, Walter Benjamin explicitly reduces the most basic condition of photography (its supposed neutrality or objectivity) to the copy—serving purposes of documentation and dissemination. In the 1970s again, as artists were tackling the status and the definition of art head-on in their work—particularly the notions of originality and autonomy—photography was giving rise to a number of radical experiments that put the original-copy tandem to a severe test. Emerging in the United States at the time and entirely focused on this problematic, appropriation art inaugurated the practice of "rephotography": the photographic copy of already existing photographs (usually those by famous photographers, which makes the copy more immediately identifiable as such), with the copy attaining the status of a work of art in its own right.

> A group of young artists working with photography have addressed photography's claim to originality, showing those claims for the fiction they are, showing photography to be always a *re*presentation, always-already-seen. Their images are purloined, confiscated, appropriated, *stolen*. In their work, the original cannot be located, is always deferred; even the self that might have generated an original is shown to be itself a copy.[12]

Sherrie Levine did a series unreservedly based on the work of Walker Evans. Rephotography is probably the most rigorous practice of appropriation art: the medium copied and the medium of the copy are one and the same. Moreover, this medium naturally lends itself to the production of multiples, in other words, to more copies. Appropriation is often hastily defined as a practice of identical replication. In fact, the interesting thing about appropriation is precisely the more or less obvious disparity[5] between the replica and the work replicated—recreated or reinterpreted would certainly be a more accurate term. Sherrie Levine does not copy, but rather she transposes certain oil paintings by Malevich in watercolor; Elaine Sturtevant does not copy, rather she reenacts certain performances by Joseph Beuys. Watercolor is not oil on canvas, Elaine Sturtevant is not Joseph Beuys and, in each scenario, the context in which a work is literally re-presented is never the same. This spatiotemporal gap, in itself, suffices to undermine any possibility of rigorously identical reiteration. Consequently, appropriation affirms, among other things, the primacy of context and disputes the

**12.** Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" (1980), in *Museum's Ruins,* pp. 117–118.

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validity of all claims to an absolutizing of art. Thus adapting rather poorly to the notion of autonomy due its history and various applications, photography became the favored medium for the critique of a then dominant conception of art founded precisely on the autonomy of art.
The copy or the reproduction allied with an interpretation or an all-out re-creation—an "artistic performance," to use Benjamin's term quoted previously—is the subject of Borges's short story "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote":

> This work, possibly the most significant of our time, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of the twenty-second chapter. . . . [Pierre Menard] did not want to compose another *Don Quixote*—which would be easy—but *the Don Quixote.* It is unnecessary to add that his aim was never to produce a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable ambition was to produce pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes. . . . To be, in some way, Cervantes and to arrive at *Don Quixote* seemed to him less arduous—and consequently less interesting—than to continue being Pierre Menard and to arrive at *Don Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard.[13]

**13.** Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" (1939), trans. Anthony Bonner, in *Ficciones*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1962), pp. 48–49.

The practice of rephotography and its application to art relates Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's approach to that of the appropriation artists, without assimilating it to their approach, nor reducing it to theirs. His work begins, so to say, where the work of the appropriation artists ends. The gap between the reproduction and the work reproduced constitutes not the culmination, but rather the departure point of his work. His first solo show at Galerie Claire Burrus, which he chose to entitle with the dates of the exhibition, *5 octobre - 16 novembre 1996*, is significant in this connection: sixty-four photographic prints present, in actual size, slide sheets from the gallery's artists' files. In a very explicit manner, the subject of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's photographs are not the works of various artists of the gallery (the works are barely visible), but rather the reproduction of their works in the form of slides as well as the technical information written on them (title, date, ownership, etc., all presented life-size). The matter is no longer about claiming an equal status between the copy and the original. The copy has ousted the original and the reproduction overtakes the work of art. Seven years later, *London Street Projects* (2003) somewhat corroborates and exemplifies this intent. Made for an exhibition in which the works were


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supposed to arrive by mail, this piece consists of a series of fourteen postcards made from other postcards reproducing works of art (most of which are famous and easily identifiable) cut out and reassembled to create a hybrid. The resulting pictures are impossible reproductions of chimera-like, inexistent works. *5 octobre - 16 novembre 1996* and *London Street Projects* each assert the primacy of the reproduction over the work, as well as its submission to a standardized norm (slides and postcards). At this stage, Craig Owens's previously cited statement that, for postmodern artists, "'reality'. . . is a fiction, produced and sustained only by its cultural representation," takes on its full meaning.

### 3. REPRODUCTIONS OF WORKS OF ART IN ART BOOKS (CATALOGS OF COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS)

Scores of works are known to the public exclusively through their reproduced image (in the form of postcards or in exhibition catalogs). As in Malraux's imaginary museum, which Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié refers to for his radical decontextualization of the work of art, privileging cognition over perception, a work exists as soon as it is disposed to being reproduced. Over the twentieth century, this assertion has been historically proven by works whose renown ceaselessly continued to grow despite the immediate and definitive disappearance of the original.
The most well-known case of fame acquired almost exclusively on the evidence of a reproduction is Duchamp's *Fountain*, presented under the pseudonym R. Mutt. Censured, the work was not even shown in 1917 at the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists. Nor was it reproduced in the catalog. At the end of the exhibition, it mysteriously disappeared. At the Society's salon,

> [R. Mutt] was in good company, no more and no less talented after all than many a naïve amateur whose display of clumsy craftsmanship embarrassed more than one critic. But Richard Mutt was soon to become famous, while all the others would revert to anonymity. And the paradox is that they had exhibited whereas Mr. Mutt's entry was censured, put behind a partition, surreptitiously stolen, rejected on a technicality by Rockwell Kent, broken by William Glackens or brought away by Walter Arensberg—we'll probably never know, among all the equally fantastic versions of the facts, which is the right one. In any case, *Fountain* was neither seen by the public nor listed in the catalogue. A press release was issued by the board of directors on the day following the opening, leaving no doubt as to the fate of the controversial object: "The *Fountain* may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition and it is, by no definition,

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> a work of art."[14] All that remains are the replicas made by Sidney Janis in 1950, by Ulf Linde in 1963, and by Arturo Schwarz in 1964, and also, of course, the photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz in 1917.[15]

One of the key works of the twentieth century disappeared without ever being exhibited and it is known through replicas and reproductions only. On this point, a disconcerting parallel can be made with another founding myth of the twentieth century, but this time in the field of psychoanalysis: it concerns the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage, which "was developed since 1936 on the basis of a lecture whose content disappeared, a paper to be found nowhere and pulled from the proceedings of an international conference held in Marienbad."[16]

> There is no original version of the paper presented on this theme at the IPA 14th Congress[17] held in Marienbad in 1936 (August 2–8). After speaking for about fifteen minutes, Lacan was interrupted by Ernest Jones who thought that this French lecturer, whom he had never heard of before, was not respecting the time limit accorded to each speaker. . . . Taking this interruption as a humiliation, Lacan left the conference and went to the Olympics in Berlin to see firsthand what turned out to be a sports event manipulated by Nazism. . . . He did not submit his paper for the publication of the conference proceedings.[18]

Starting in the late 1970s, ranging from Roland Barthes to Rosalind Krauss, one of the dominant critical discourses on photography was centered on the notion of index. Photography was theorized as a trace, an imprint of the real. It thus emerges as a ghostly power—the vestige of a past presence, in other words, an absence. If, following Élisabeth Roudinesco's mention of the mirror stage lecture, we postulate that "the power of the archive is all the stronger when the archive is absent"[19] and if we transpose this phrase to the field of art history: "the power of the work of art is all the stronger when the work is absent," photography, insofar as it pertains to both the archive and absence, seems to be a keystone medium in the history of twentieth-century art.

**14.** Thierry de Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case" (1987), in *Kant After Duchamp*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 98–99.
**15.** Ibid., pp. 95–96.
**16.** Élisabeth Roudinesco, *L'Analyse, l'archive* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2001), p. 9. [All citations from this book translated here by Jian-Xing Too.]
**17.** IPA: International Psychoanalytical Association, founded in 1910 by Sigmund Freud. In 1936 it was directed by Ernest Jones.
**18.** Roudinesco, pp. 26–27.
**19.** Ibid., p. 9.


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More than the reproduction of isolated works, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié is interested in the context of presentation and dissemination of knowledge of works. Often connected to a collection (public or private) or an exhibition, the postcards and catalogs that he reproduces refer to a context of publication, which in turn comes full circle and relates to the context of a collection or exhibition—in other words, a context of presentation of works. Most often, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié conceives his works on the basis of the context of the exhibition in which he is invited to participate. Introduced in the 1960s by minimalist and conceptual artists in the United States as site specificity and developed essentially by Daniel Buren in France as *in situ*, the idea of a form of contextual art founded on an intrinsic tie between the work and its exhibition context has all too often been misread as a strictly formal approach to space, to the detriment of its historical, political, and sociological considerations.
This influence is clear in the work of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié. However, he does not integrate the context into the perception of the work, nor does the context constitute the material of the work, as Hans Haacke asserts that it does in his work: "The symbolic circumstances of the context are in fact often my main materials. A piece made especially for a given site cannot be moved or shown elsewhere."[20] The context, in the work of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié, most often constitutes the subject of the work in its own right. *Film und Foto* (2001), conceived for an exhibition in Esslingen, near Stuttgart, is a good example of this. The six color prints, in the dimensions 100 x 80 cm (40″ x 30″), present reproductions of works that appeared in the seminal exhibition of the same title held in Stuttgart in 1929, which substantiated the historical role of photography and film in the work of the avant-garde. Like most exhibition catalogs of its time, the *Film und Foto* catalog was limited to a list of the works shown and it contained few reproductions. Hence the reproductions of works presented by Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié are from diverse exhibition catalogs published much later. His framing of these re-photographed works is such that it clearly displays the books in which they appear. The work does not exist independently of its context of dissemination (through exhibitions and books). Before *Film und Foto* (2001), *After Pierre Menard* (1997) also proposed an apparitional reconstitution in the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University

**20.** Hans Haacke and Pierre Bourdieu, *Libre échange* (Paris: Seuil/Presses du réel, 1994), p. 144 [trans. Jian-Xing Too].

in California. Making light work of the gallery's disparity from its homonym, the Guggenheim in New York, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié obtained two copies of *A Handbook to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Collection*, which was published in 1959 on the occasion of the inauguration of Frank Lloyd Wright's building. Having cut out all of the reproductions from the left-hand pages of one copy and all from the right-hand pages in the other copy, leaving intact the text and captions, he rearranged the removed reproductions on the gallery walls, hanging them in an ascending spiral winding around the exhibition space. The absence of the works reproduced was as unmistakable on the walls as it was in the two altered catalogs, which were also on view.

In a similar vein, the web project *Traverses* (1998), commissioned by the online journal of the same name published by the Centre Pompidou, offers a labyrinthine navigation through eighteen empty exhibition spaces. Installation views of exhibitions in eighteen museums and galleries, in various cities and from different periods of the twentieth century, were taken from one-person exhibition catalogs published by the Centre Pompidou. These installation views were then emptied of their content and reduced to schematic line drawings with the schematization leveling out the differences and conferring the various exhibition spaces with an analogical appearance. A link, however, discloses the photographic source and identifies the places and the works. Although absent from the final piece (or present only as an annex), photography is yet again the starting point and vehicle of forever absent works of art.

A solo show presented at the gallery Atelier Cardenas Bellanger in Paris, *Richard/dada* (2006) is an extrapolation of two givens of the exhibition's context: the opening on January 14, 2006, the week of the closing of the publicly acclaimed *Dada* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, which is just around the corner from the gallery; and the sponsorship of the opening by Ricard, the maker of the popular aniseed-flavored aperitif and, by the same token, the promoter of contemporary art (the group opened an exhibition space in the late 1990s in the 8th arrondissement of Paris).

Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié selected objects publicizing the *Dada* show at the Centre Pompidou (postcards, notebooks, key chains, etc.) that present variations of two works in the exhibition: *Kleine Dada Soirée* (1923), a leaflet by Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg, and Lajos Kassác's cover design for Tristan Tzara's book *Gáz szív* (1922). He made photographs of


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these objects and printed them at the actual size of the works, thereby inversing the leveling out of difference that is inherent to photographic reproduction, the process of homogenization at work in "the imaginary museum." Promotional products find themselves reframed and returned to the size of the works that they represent. The underside of a white porcelain plate, too, has been photographed. Printed with the letters "L.H.O.O.Q.," in centered black type, this plate takes Duchamp's 1919 inscription on a reproduction of the Mona Lisa, which he also decked out with a moustache and goatee. The tipping over of the plate alludes to the one Duchamp applied to a urinal before entitling it *Fountain* and getting Stieglietz to photograph it. The porcelain material of the subject and the photographic medium also make reference to this. It is important to note that the leaflet by Schwitters and van Doesburg, the cover design for Tzara's book, and the reproduction of the Mona Lisa are not one-of-a-kind works but rather were conceived as reproductions from the start. As for the Mona Lisa and *Fountain*, the former is barely visible behind its bulletproof protective case and it is one of the most profusely reproduced works of art in the world, yielding abundant variations adapted to commercial wares; the latter is, as mentioned earlier, a fundamental work of the twentieth century despite the fact that it is known exclusively through reproductions, since the original piece, itself, mysteriously disappeared after not even being exhibited in 1917.

In France, the Ricard logo from the 1960s and 1970s is probably as familiar and popular as is the Coca-Cola logo on a worldwide scale. Objects with its trademark (notably carafes and ashtrays) fill flea market and antique stands. In the mid 1970s, Richard Hamilton appropriated the brand's logo and made a series of three objects (a metal enameled sign, a carafe, and an ashtray),[21] in editions of thirty-six each, rigorously duplicating the design and technique of the Ricard objects, but trademarking them "Richard" (his first name and coincidentally, also that of R. Mutt) instead of "Ricard." Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié reconstituted a photograph of these three objects that was reproduced in a Richard Hamilton catalog,[22] only in Saint-Loubert Bié's photograph, the "Richard" objects have been replaced with the original (!) Ricard objects.[6] The merchandise holds the place of the original, while the art object comes in

**21.** *Sign* (1975), *Carafe* (1978), *Ashtray* (1979).
**22.** *Richard Hamilton,* ed. Richard Morphet (London: Tate Gallery, 1992) p. 121.

several variations in the form of multiples or reproductions. This homage to one of the founders of pop art, an artistic movement focused on the overlapping of art and mass consumerism, is the perfect foil to the work on the objects publicizing the *Dada* exhibition.

## 4. GRAPHICS

While it is a favored means of transmission, photography is not the only vehicle and surrogate for the work of art. In conjunction with a production of copies and replicas, graphics is another means for introducing a reference. *Guggenheim Global* (2003) was conceived for the exhibition *Grande Orlândia*, in Rio de Janeiro. At the time, negotiations between the City and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation were underway to implant a new museum in Rio's port area, the pharaonic architectural project going to Jean Nouvel. Responding to the Guggenheim's commercial policy, initiated by Thomas Krens in the early 1990s, of engaging the collection in a multinational-type strategy and opening franchised institutions in the four corners of the earth, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's project consists of a series of eight rubber stamps made in Rio de Janeiro, each replicating the logo of an exhibition produced by the Guggenheim. The stamps were applied within the space by the other artists in the exhibition. Concretely, the work is reduced to a graphic tool publicizing exhibitions.

In the same vein, *Command-N* (1999), a solo show in Tokyo, considers another graphic tool that promotes both works of art and exhibitions: catalogs. The exhibition was composed of three elements: outside the gallery was a schematic perspective wall drawing of the exhibition space within; inside the gallery was a series of twenty-five frontal photographs of catalogs printed life-size, showing the cover and giving an idea of thickness through the shadow cast by each book, all of which present group shows of Japanese art, photography, design, and architecture, organized outside Japan; and thirdly, a computer was at the disposition of visitors, so that they could access a comprehensive database on exhibitions of Japanese art abroad since 1945. Changing with the times, variations on graphic stereotypes—meant to conjure up Japan—were thus displayed in a patent manner. Foreign books on Japanese modern and contemporary art were nonexistent pre-World War II, whereas they underwent a staggering increase in the 1990s and at the turn of the century. Japanese culture is frequently alluded to by a red circle in the 1980s and by kitsch objects often having something to do with sex in the 1990s.


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With these two projects, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié dismantles the overbearing tendency of tools promoting works of art, particularly exhibitions and catalogs, to act as substitutes for those works of art.

## 5. SCHEMAS, MAPS, AND PLANS

Like graphic tools, schemas, maps, and plans raise the issue of representation in terms other than resemblance. The idea of a hierarchy of objects and their representations is null and void from the outset: both appear to be invested in the same degree of reality or, more precisely, the same degree of signification. To define this type of relationship to the subject, Craig Owens goes back to Foucault who, himself, had taken the concept of transparency from the corpus of the Port Royal Logic.

> To claim that representation is transparent to its objects is not to define it as mimetic or illusionistic —maps for example do not simulate visual experience. Rather, it means that every element of the work of art is *significant,* that is, it refers to something that exists independently of its representation. Thus, "transparency" designates a perfect equivalence between reality and its representation; signifier and signified mirror one another, the one is merely a reduplication of the other.[23]

**23.** Owens, "Representation, Appropriation, and Power," p. 98.

In fact Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié has done a number of pieces that explore the mode of referentiality at work in schemas, maps, and plans. Presented at the California Institute of the Arts, *Untitled* (1996) propels the entire area in which the gallery is located in a *mise en abyme*: a schematic perspective drawing is done directly on the wall opposite the gallery's entrance; silkscreened on single sheets, another drawing of the same space in the style of a diagram for assembly is available for viewers to take with them. This silkscreen print acts as an exhibition catalog in two ways: on one hand, it visually lists the parts shown in the exhibition; on the other hand, it serves as an edition accompanying the exhibition. Based on a cursory, one-minute-long oral description of an exhibition space that the artist has never seen, *Une minute* (1996) proposes a series of sixty-eight possible floor plans of the site. The concomitant existence of different but equally pertinent representations invalidates, in one fell swoop, the idea of the identical replica, of the perfect double as the only possible form of representation. According to a comparable principle, *Billy* (1995) indexes in the form of a softcover book 265 axonometric views of the Ikea Billy bookcase. The book form, as well as the number of copies printed, correspond exactly to the capacity of an

Ikea Billy bookcase. A paragon of standardization, Billy nonetheless lends itself to a multiplicity of representations. In continuation of the investigation of the Ikea catalog, *Maps* (2001) consists of a series of maps of freeway off-ramps to various Ikea stores in suburbs around the world, emptied of their informative content and stripped of an indication of scale and location. The result is a series of geometric forms each distinct from the other but completely enigmatic. Representation in the form of a schema, map, or plan allows for a multiplication of the space represented.

Heir to two fundamental achievements of postmodernism, the demolition of the notion of the original and the paradigmatic character of the photographic medium for which the notion of the original is inherently problematic, Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié has developed an approach that unsettles not only the issue of reproduction of the work of art but also the conventions surrounding it. Mining all too quickly forgotten parts of history, his work eradicates the reductive or even negativist interpretations of appropriation art (professing for the umpteenth time the end of art history). By the same token, it lays out the idea of the identical copy on the level of theoretical impossibility.

## ENDNOTES

Yann Sérandour

1. To be a contemporary of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié is to spring from an artistic and conceptual legacy in which the sidelines, the periphery, or what others may have metaphorically named the "thresholds" or "hors d'œuvres" [outworks] paradoxically seem to occupy a central position, to the point of making the presence of the unique and original work of art completely "detestable."
Deliberately relegating myself to the endnotes and thus sharing this rather "eccentric" fascination for surrounds, my contribution to this catalog is not only secondary but also parasitical, insofar as it can only be developed around the presence of another text, in which it interferes. Subverted from its traditional scholarly function—"the text persuades, the notes prove," writes Anthony Grafton—here, the note primarily exemplifies a function of reference, which in return, is certain to refer the reader back to the main body of text, the instant it ends.

2. Putting the referent (the work of art) at a distance by substituting the photographic document, which "on the evidence of the image"


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proves the existence of a reality that no longer exists (its exhibition), also constitutes deferring access to the original in favor of showing its indexing: a name, a title, a date, a place, which roughly compose its *caption*. Putting the relationship between the sign (the documentation) and its referent (the work of art) at the center of his work, while the originals are represented only in a lesser form, also entails declining to reconstitute an original truth and concentrating on the use and the manipulation of signs, in other words, on the fabrication of new meanings.

**3.** From its early to its most recent developments, the work of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié represents what immediately surrounds, adjoins, frames, and extends the exhibition of works of art by referring the viewer to the spatial and temporal context in which it takes place. *Paris, le 2 juin…* (1993) shows the surrounds of the exhibition space within the exhibition space itself but also just outside of it. *Untitled* (1996) represents the architectural structure of the building in which the gallery is located, while the "catalog" presents itself as a manual for assembling the place from which it is distributed. *Une minute* (1996) presents a series of schematic interpretations of the exhibition space based on a brief description left on an answering machine. *Loot* (1998) shows a hanging of photographs presenting the space in which they are hung. The work of art—or at least what substitutes for it in the form of a document, a reproduction, or a piece of information—is never more than a sign that refers to the context in which it is included. If Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's work refers so often to the space in which it is shown, it is because his main subject of investigation is none other than the exhibition itself: what announces it, documents it, transmits it, and consequently makes it possible to reenact it, elsewhere and otherwise; not in the form of a "historical reconstitution," but rather, depending on the projects, in the form of a photographic, bibliographic, computer graphic, or typographic recomposition.

**4.** Repainting the store front of the gallery in the same color as the exhibition's announcement card (*F.L.I.C.K.,* 2004), recalls the act of repainting a painting the same color as the wall on which it was hung (Claude Rutault, *Définition/méthode n°1*, 1973). Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's act, however, does not aim so much to continually enlarge the field of painting,

but rather to designate what frames and announces the exhibition as a (temporary) place of visibility for art, through means borrowed from a certain manifestation of modernity in painting—the sample of pure color. Elaborating on the modes of representation of art in their documentary form (its archive) or in the form of publicity (its promotional material) in order to resituate them through a game of reproduction and of turning inside out the artistic framework of the exhibition, his work blurs the boundaries between the work of art and what documents it or promotes it. Putting itself at the periphery of the work of art, it situates itself at the border between the inside and the outside, investing adjoining sites at its edges (from the gallery's storeroom to its front window, from the art history library to its catalog) while the "works" themselves often index the spatial and cultural context in which they are presented. When Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's projects cross the threshold of the exhibition space, as in the case of the altered postcards recombining pairs of "icons" of twentieth-century art (*Mail-In Show*, 2003), their entrance, as discreet as it is reversible, through the letter slot in the gallery's front door re-demonstrate, in their way, that "it's difficult to put a painting in a mailbox."

**5.** If the disparities produced by Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié's reproductions are multiple in nature (transfers from one medium to another, spatiotemporal displacements), they do not play any less on a line of division separating the autonomous work of art from its dissemination in the art world. Silkscreening the information on the announcement card of a group show five times bigger on aluminum panels to show them among other artists' works (*Please Please Your Self*, 2004), exhibiting photographs of artists' files (*5 octobre – 16 novembre 1996*, 1996), redistributing within an exhibition space reproductions cut out from the catalogue of a well-known collection (*After Pierre Menard,* 1997), making rubber stamps of the "logotypes" of exhibitions produced by the multinational Guggenheim Global are many ways of signaling the destiny of works of art—the majority of which we only experience through products and information derived from them and which, as such, would constitute "the best way to do art" according to John Baldessari's parable re-copied here:

> A young artist in art school used to worship the paintings of Cézanne. He looked at and studied all the books he could find on Cézanne and copied all of the reproductions of Cézanne's work he found in these books. He visited a museum and for the first time saw


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a real Cézanne painting. He hated it. It was nothing like the Cézanne he had studied in the books. From that time on, he made all of his paintings the sizes of paintings reproduced in books and he painted them in black and white. He also printed captions and explanations on the paintings as in books. Often he just used words. And one day he realized that very few people went to art galleries and museums but many people looked at books and magazines as he did and they got them through the mail as he did. Moral: It's difficult to put a painting in a mailbox.
—John Baldessari, *Ingres and Other Parables.* London: Studio International Publications Ltd., 1972.

An exhibition announcement, a catalog, a postcard, a map, a newspaper clipping, a press release—as long as they are the subject of a reflexive disparity—are no less carriers of an artistic intention whose discreet and annex-like character flirts with a certain invisibility. Although this catalog documenting the work of Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié is not cataloged within itself, it nonetheless fits easily in a mailbox, at a time when the radio waves are re-broadcasting the tune "Cézanne peint" [Cézanne Paints] in which France Gall sings to us: "Il éclaire le monde pour nos yeux qui n'voient rien" [He lights the world for our eyes that don't see a thing].

## 6. A visual note:


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