

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

"SOUL OF A NATION"

ART AND VIRTUAL REALITY

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problem of slavery and white supremacy. Scattered throughout the exhibition, these works form a throughline amid the patchwork of themes and grievances. Faith Ringgold's *Hate Is a Sin Flag*, 2007, is a redesigned Confederate flag with white letters spelling out the work's title replacing the stars, and with a handwritten text snaking around the border. These words matter-of-factly recount the first time the artist was called the N-word—at the Whitney, in 1968. The profound pain in Ringgold's drawing reemerges in a second modified flag; Dread Scott's *A Man Was Lynched by Police Yesterday*, 2015, which updates an NAACP banner that was flown from the organization's New York headquarters in the 1920s and '30s the day after a lynching occurred. Carl Pope's overwhelming installation of engraved plaques and trophies, *Some of the Greatest Hits of the New York City Police Department: A Celebration of Meritorious Achievement in Community Service*, 1994, names black men who were killed or brutalized by police over a period of forty-five years along with the officers involved.

It was while reading Pope's engravings that I first heard *An Ecstatic Experience*. And it was while leaving his piece to approach the music that I first saw the crowd that had gathered—a group that watched it together, with most visitors staying for the work's full six minutes. Unlike the isolated experience provided by our private screens, this work offers a communal experience that implicates us as viewers in the conditions it describes and refuses to reconcile pain and beauty so that we can more comfortably digest them. An incomplete response, no doubt, but a prodding, compelling one.

—Rachel Churner

Cheyney Thompson

ANDREW KREPS GALLERY

In the unforgiving hands of Cheyney Thompson, painting is subject to a deconstruction so thoroughgoing and severe that it might better be termed a disemboweling. Having broken the medium down into its constituent parts, Thompson doesn't so much reassemble it as transport it into other realms entirely, to fields governed by systems and routines more often associated with such divergent realms as mathematics, economics, and manual labor. "Somewhere Some Pictures Sometimes," the deliberately nebulous title of the artist's seventh solo exhibition at this gallery, was consistent with the teasingly evasive cast of his enterprise as a whole. There were "some pictures" (of a sort) here, but far from operating as autonomous images or objects, they made sense only as parts of a larger, tougher, and more rigorously conceptual undertaking.

Though composed almost entirely of variously sized, austere monochrome paintings, the key to the show was not a canvas at all but rather a small machine that occupied an unobtrusive spot on a narrow wall by the office door. This compact, "biometrically secure" punch clock required gallery staff to clock in each morning, and their mundane interaction determined the configuration of the show's installation for that day. Some sixty-four paintings were held away from visitors' prying eyes in custom-built storage racks, allowing for an unfathomable 152,587,890,625 potential combinations. Since, of course, only a tiny percentage of this vast range was ever realized, "Somewhere Some Pictures Sometimes" became more about the invisible than the visible, about function, value, repetition, and hierarchy, and the limits of meaning itself. Like On Kawara's "Today" series, 1966–2013, it distilled some surprisingly complex ideas from quasi-mechanical patterns of making and display.

In addition to their arrangement and rearrangement having been directed by Thompson's semiautomatic system, the paintings' production

and appearance were also the results of a predetermined logic. The continuation of a sequence of "quantity paintings," they, too, are the fruits of a statistical process. The artist employed an algorithm (that ever less exotic tool) to arrive at the distribution of a fixed amount of pigment over the surface of each panel, also allowing that formula to determine how much is applied in each brushstroke. Additionally, the formats of the paintings followed Thompson's exhibition at the same gallery two years earlier, reproducing its contents in five monochromatic black, white, and primary-colored variations. "Somewhere Some Pictures Sometimes" thus folded well-nigh-endless variation into absolute rigidity, finding a curious freedom in the abdication of control.

There is, then, a kind of bleak, Beckettian comedy to Thompson's approach, an acknowledgment that even the existence of free will and endless choice allow us no escape from a gradual but inescapable strangulation by diminishing return. The exhibition should be regarded above all as a temporal work, one where the installation's restless state became a kind of slow-burning performance, a chess game in which the pieces moved around but the stalemate remained. The show's punch-clock anchor recalled Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance 1980–1981 (Time Clock Piece)*, during which the artist clocked in every hour on the hour for the titular duration (also taking a photo of himself each time). Thompson's focus was more explicitly art-about-art than was the senior artist's, but both projects intersect with a pretty fatalistic vision of labor. The essence of work, they suggest, is endless repetition. A certain kind of meaning may be attainable, but only through relentless accumulation and strict limitation.

—Michael Wilson



Cheyney Thompson, *Biometrically Secure Punch Clock*, 2017, custom electronics, ABS plastic, 6 1/2 x 10 x 3 1/4".

Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Chelsea E. Manning

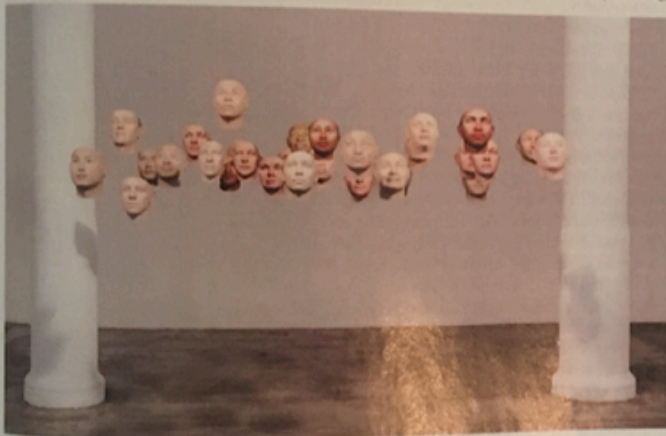
FRIDMAN GALLERY

It's difficult to gauge the merits of "A Becoming Resemblance" with anything resembling critical objectivity. The incendiary politics surrounding Dewey-Hagborg's collaborator and muse, the US military intelligence officer turned hacktivist Chelsea E. Manning, and the controversial nature of the show's subject matter (the diagnostically and morally murky territory of DNA-based profiling) overshadowed one's reading of the project from the outset. This was not a conventional collaboration—not least because half of the partnership remained incarcerated, periodically in solitary confinement and with highly monitored communication, for the majority of the project's duration.

The unlikely collaboration between Manning and artist Heather Dewey-Hagborg was set in motion by *Paper* magazine in 2015, while Manning was serving time at a military correctional facility in Fort

Leavenworth, Kansas. On the strength of Dewey-Hagborg's previous project, *Stranger Visions*, 2012–13, for which the artist attempted to create three-dimensional portraits using clues from DNA extracted from found biological traces, the magazine invited her to create a portrait of Manning using samples from cheek swabs and hair trimmings. No updated photographs of the infamous whistle-blower had been released since Manning's arrest in 2010; in the successive years, the ex-soldier had transitioned from male to female while detained. Dewey-Hagborg's renderings would, Manning hoped, restore some of the visibility she had lost during the lonely half decade.

For this occasion, Fridman exhibited Dewey-Hagborg's set of two three-dimensional prints (made from the 2015 data set) and twenty-eight newer prints produced after Manning's sentence was commuted this past January. The thirty masklike molds that jointly comprised *Probably Chelsea*, 2017, were suspended from the gallery ceiling,



Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Chelsea E. Manning, *Probably Chelsea*, 2017. Thirty 3-D printed masks, dimensions variable. Photo: Paola Abreu Pita.

where they faced the viewer like disembodied soldiers standing mutely at attention. The portraits feature a range of skin tones, eye-color shades, and facial attributes associated with the various racial and gender-specific strains present in Manning's DNA (Dewey-Hagborg has taken pains to underscore that neither biological gender nor its outward expression can be assured via DNA mapping), revealing the intricate constellation of traits that invisibly shape the appearance of this enigmatic public figure. In demonstrating the range of equally probable faces a single DNA set can generate, the prints also gave physical form to the artist's own increasing ambivalence toward a biotechnology now routinely used by police. Dewey-Hagborg readily admits that her renderings are rough approximations at best and likens her work to that of a sketch artist, albeit one who chooses from a near-infinite range of possible profiles those she finds aesthetically compelling rather than those she assumes to characterize her subject (height, eye color, build, etc.). She thus openly critiques the biases and assumptions that inevitably taint the operations of this supposedly neutral forensic tool. On Manning's part, the prints' significance derived not from their accuracy but from their shared resistance to the censorship that prevented her face from being seen and, implicitly, from the presumed truths and social norms that dictated her acknowledged gender identity for much of her life.

While the prints were its focal point, the show also included a handful of earlier works that trace the genesis of *Probably Chelsea*. On a nearby wall was *Suppressed Images: Frame #10*, 2017, a poster taken from one panel of a graphic novel that Manning and Dewey-Hagborg

made with illustrator Shoili Kanungo in 2016, the publication of which, remarkably, coincided with Obama's commutation of Manning's sentence. It depicts Manning with a loudspeaker; her voice bubble contains a line excerpted from a piece of mail correspondence with Dewey-Hagborg: *WHEN THEY CHILL YOUR SPEECH THEN THEY'VE WON—SO NEVER SHUT UP*. This excerpt provides a glimpse into Manning's role in the collaboration that was otherwise obscured.

At times, the show was hindered by its attempts to conform to the gallery context. The framed poster made one want to read more of Manning's correspondence sans graphic depiction, and the final work—a section of her mitochondrial DNA sequence scrawled in pencil on the gallery wall—felt a bit like a space filler. One wondered whether this research would have been better suited to a more discursive setting that might demonstrate Dewey-Hagborg's impressively innovative and scrupulous research, as well as give Manning herself more airtime. The latter sticking point at least seems poised for resolution with a documentary (produced by Laura Poitras) planned for release this fall that should finally give Manning a means to articulate the inner details of her experience.

—Cat Kron

Julie Speidel

WINSTON WÄCHTER FINE ART

Seen out of context—within the gallery's whitewashed walls rather than on the lush green grounds of Vashon Island, Washington, where they were made—Julie Speidel's twelve sculptures became exquisitely intricate abstractions and, with that, lost something of their larger meaning and purpose, if not their aesthetic magic. They were meant to be seats or resting places, according to the local Chamber of Commerce website, on "the little piece of paradise"—a sort of *hortus conclusus*—that is Vashon Island. The three boulder-like geometric objects in *Otemma Glacier*, 2016, were the exception that proved the rule. *Amukta*, *Orenas*, and *Porirua*, all 2017, were benches; the rest looked like stools (including *Sanibel Bench*, 2009, its name notwithstanding.) A particularly notable piece that showcased the sculptures' double meaning as autonomous, abstract objects and familiar functional furniture was *Bimifat*, 2017, which has two vertical ends, one of them pregnant with a large curvilinear form. We were not invited to sit on this strangely self-contained work, but it seemed to have its own intimate character. The sculpture is made entirely of white marble speckled with brown, as

Julie Speidel, *Otemma Glacier*, 2016. Stainless steel, overall 3' 8" x 10' 3 1/2" x 4' 1".

