

CASEY KAPLAN

121 WEST 27TH STREET

NEW YORK NY 10001

TEL +1 212 645 7335

WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

This Isn't Who It Would Be, If It Wasn't Who It Is

Organized by Alex Glauber

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Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce *This Isn't Who It Would Be, If It Wasn't Who It Is*¹, a group exhibition organized by Alex Glauber that spans nearly five hundred years and illustrates the breadth of inspiration, from misattribution to homage. For centuries, artists have explored implications of authorship, creative precedent, and tenuous attribution. Through pseudonym, quotation, collaboration, and conceptual obfuscation, artists embrace and anticipate nebulous interpretations. The artists included lay their influences bare or invite an epistemic “misreading” of their work, reminding us that art is rarely created in a vacuum and is instead both beholden to and framed by the past. The self-awareness of context is borne out in strategies that make conversations between influences central and complicate historiography for future audiences.

Following the premature death of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, his son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger, established an ambitious workshop committed to replicating his father's most celebrated and sought-after images including *The Outdoor Wedding Dance* (c. 1615), a subject of great popularity throughout 17th century Flemish painting. To our knowledge, over one hundred versions of the scene were produced by the Younger's workshop with only one-third being attributed to the master's hand. Suspect ascription follows the bend of time and strikes at the porous foundation on which opinion finds its footing. An artwork can be set off on a journey, where it becomes untethered from the artist's hand, drifting from their workshop and further still, to their circle.

Before Andy Warhol had his factory, artists like the Brueg(h)els and Lucas Cranach employed vast workshops to execute their most popular compositions to satisfy contemporary audiences. Later, with the advent of infrared analysis, modern-day scholars resolved outstanding questions of attribution and the division of labor between principal and workshop. Such is the case with *The Judgment of Paris* (c. 1520), a popular subject in Lucas Cranach the Elder's studio. Many of the strategies relating to compositional refinement, material preparation, and execution employed in workshops are attended to directly by Ella Walker. *Fugue* (2023) carries forth the visual language of the past by grafting contemporary references onto the architecture of old masters. It is through a commitment to the techniques and strategies of the past that Walker finds new territory.

This Isn't Who It Would Be, If It Wasn't Who It Is charts the myriad ways artists have deployed strategies that confuse taxonomy in the past century. Artists like Vern Blosom, Bruce Conner, and Michael (Corinne) West work under pseudonyms that complicate reception. Others embed collaborative concepts into the structure of their work as seen in the Surrealist drawing game “Cadavre Exquis” whereby artists compose a passage within a drawing or collage before folding it and passing it onto the next contributor. A similar logic unfolds across Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #869, Copied Lines* (1998) where, like a game of telephone, people participate in copying a single line across a wall to create a visual tautology. The use of instructions to obscure authorship and thwart attribution is equally foundational to Rudolf Stingel's seminal 1989 work, *Instructions*, which illustrates the procedures associated with making his paintings.

In the words of Sherrie Levine, “I don't think it's useful to see culture as rigid and unchanging. I'd rather see it as having many voices, some conscious and some unconscious, which may be at odds with one another. If we are attentive to these voices, we can collaborate with them to create something almost new.”² It is this ethos that informs her series “After” (1981-), for which Levine photographed reproductions of Walker Evans' portraits of depression-era sharecroppers. The conceptual thread extends to the practices of Sturtevant and Mike Bidlo whose repetitions mirror famous artists and peers. While Darren Bader reconstitutes the identity of extant works under his own name, Simon Starling recontextualizes old narratives through the framework of mid-century design. Homage factors centrally

¹ (Anastasio/Marshall/Gordon/McConnell/Fishman) © Who Is She? Music, Inc. (BMI)

² Sherrie Levine (1997) in Johanna Burton and Elisabeth Sussman, et. al. *Sherrie Levine: Mayhem* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2012) 3.

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in Ull Hohn's bucolic landscapes which follow the technical playbook of Bob Ross. More recently, David Thorpe's watercolors take the Arts and Crafts Movement as their starting point, referencing the bookends and wallpapers of William Morris. Collectively, these artists embrace Levine's awareness that the present is shaped by the past and untethered to the future.

Anonymouse
Darren Bader
Mike Bidlo
Vern Blosum
Andre Breton, Jaqueline Lamba, Yves Tanguy
Pieter Brueghel the Younger
Claude Cahun
Bruce Conner
Lucas Cranach the Elder and Workshop
Cerith Wyn Evans
Walker Evans
Emily Feather
Ull Hohn
Sherrie Levine
Hannah Levy
Sol LeWitt
Mateo López
Jonathan Monk
William Morris
Richard Prince
Paul Sietsema
Simon Starling
Rudolf Stingel
Sturtevant
David Thorpe
Ella Walker
Andy Warhol
Michael (Corinne) West