

PRESS COVERAGE



Manufactured Self

January 11- March 3, 2005

1. Chicago Reader, 2. 25. 2005
2. Chicago RedStreak, 1. 27. 2005
3. Chicago Sun Times, 1. 7. 2005

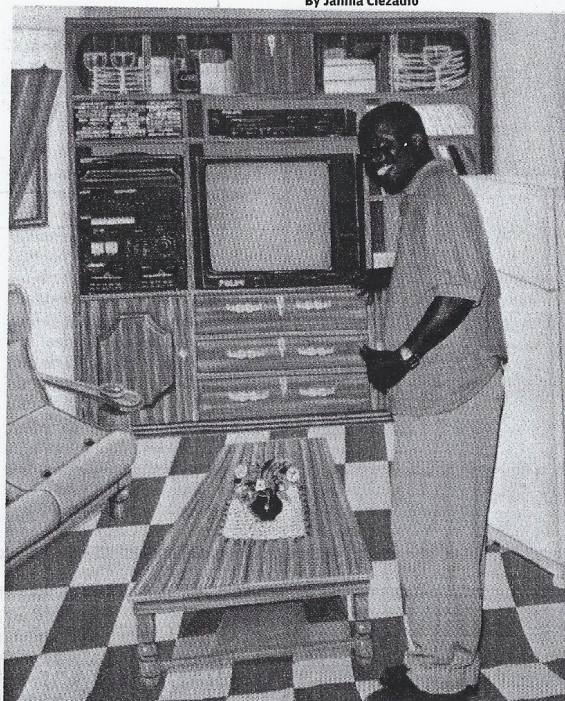
Art

MANUFACTURED SELF AT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY
UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE: ART, LIFE, AND THE TOURIST'S EYE AT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

We Are What We Own

Exhibits at the MCA and the Museum of Contemporary Photography examine how what we amass affects who we become and what we see.

By Janina Ciezadlo



TESTY OF JACK SHANMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK; COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION; COURTESY OF COURTNEY GALLERY, BEIJING

Each of the 13 artists in "Manufactured Self" at the Museum of Contemporary Photography offers a different perspective on the relationship between who we are and what we have. But while the nature of the self invites complex philosophical inquiries, photography is best at posing questions about appearances. As a result much of the work here is at once too serious and somewhat simplistic, opposing without exploring consumerism. In the 70s British critic John Berger identified a "gap between the real conditions of society and its daydreams of consumption." But Berger tied the problem not to consumer items themselves but to labor practices predicated on alienation and boredom. Many of the images here simply evoke an unfocused anxiety about the material world or sadness for the people who've fallen for the empty promises of consumerism.

Maybe because humor undercuts rational assumptions, the photographs that work best have a sense of levity. The Ghanaian subjects of Philip Kwame Apagya's studio portrait photos pose with various possessions: an airplane, an entertainment center, a giant boom box. All are elements of obviously fake but appealingly naive and exuberant painted backdrops, and the people posing are unself-consciously delighted

with their artificial signs of affluence and modernity. The photographer's approach echoes 19th-century American studio portraits in which serious-looking working-class people pose against the backdrop of a middle-class parlor or lean on a Victorian prop like a broken Greek column—but the Ghanaians are laughing.

Britton Walead Beshty also takes a humorous approach in "The Phenomenology of Shopping," depicting himself with his head stuck inside items on display in stores—a washing machine, a pile of stuffed animals. His pose suggests the fundamental gratification of shopping while his almost obscene flouting of the usual decorum in stores clarifies all the unwritten rules consumers must obey before satisfying themselves with their objects of desire.

Peter Menzel traveled the globe to depict families posed with all their belongings arrayed in front of their homes. His 14 high-quality 18-by-24-inch digital prints explore the relationships between possessions and people, between production and consumption, without oversimplifying our material lives or draining them of their rich variety and significance. Because his wide shots include both details and a broad overview, they show the connection between the environment, the household's family structure, and the material culture. A shot (taken

collaboratively with Peter Ginter) of the California Skeen family—mother, father, and two children—and their yard jammed with multicolored stuff shows the low, barren mountains bordering their subdivision.

Menzel captures the scope and similarity of the things people own: kitchen implements, musical instruments, books, televisions. Radios are among the most common of Western items. The range of people's homes is fascinating in itself: yurts, mud houses, a beautiful painted blue building in Turkey, a Samoan house that looks like a roofed porch surrounded by palm trees and mountains. The Icelanders are lit by a low winter sun while the Mongolians pose under a cloudless sky.

While "Manufactured Self" turns on questions about how our identities are formed by our stuff, "Universal Experience: Art, Life, and the Tourist's Eye" at the Museum of Contemporary Art asks how we understand the world and shape it as a result. It's a good question to address in any medium, and the exhibit's grand scope—there are 69 artists—presents myriad possibilities. Curators Francesco Bonami and Julie Rodriguez propose that tourism is a state of mind so deeply ingrained in the Western world that it forms frame how we see. Many works here tackle

tourism head-on while others drift, approaching the subject at a more conceptual level. An

Manufactured Self

WHEN Through 3/3: Mon-Fri 10 AM-5 PM, Thu till 8 PM; Sat noon-5 PM

WHERE Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan

INFO 312-663-5554, 312-344-7104

Universal Experience: Art, Life, and the Tourist's Eye

WHEN Through 6/5: Tue 10 AM-8 PM, Wed-Sun 10 AM-5 PM

WHERE Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago

PRICE \$10 suggested admission; \$6 students, seniors; Kids 12 & under free. Tue 5-8 PM free.

INFO 312-280-2660

by amassing photographs, even though our acquisitive nature leads us to collect them.

Another Swiss artist, Thomas Hirschhorn, also looks at the process of collecting and reassembling as a way of knowing. His

multiroom museumlike installation, *Chalet Lost History*, is made largely out of painted cardboard and filled with fake oriental booty—a reference to the looting of Iraqi sites after the 2003 bombings. One room holds six model pyramids made of boxes, concrete blocks, beer cans, and a jumble of other iconic stuff; another room features sarcophagi. Each room is festooned with streamers of packing tape to which counterfeit money from all over the world has been affixed; texts, including fragments of poems, are taped to everything. Wildly anarchic and almost childish, Hirschhorn's critique of technology, globalism, and representation is enlightening in its very messiness: the process of reproducing the actual world out of prosaic materials like cardboard and packing tape suggests both trashy tourist replicas and an appealing creative energy.

Chinese sculptor Zhan Wang travels the world with a collection of stainless steel pots, pans, chafing dishes, teapots, and other kitchen utensils and assembles them in a depiction of each city he visits. Wang's model of Chicago, displayed here, includes towers of pots, which allude to the Marina and Sears towers. Behind each "city" he places some stainless steel mountains—representations of the Beijing range—and the room is walled with mirrors. The result is a gleaming, mysterious assemblage.

Matthew Buckingham's film installation, *A Man of the Crowd* alludes to an Edgar Allan Poe story, Baudelaire's interpretations of Poe, and critic Walter Benjamin's comments on Baudelaire: Buckingham proposes that we know the world only through layers of reflections and projections. Buckingham foregrounds the projection process: before viewers enter the viewing chamber they encounter an industrial-model projector and a loop of film; inside they see a silvery black-and-white film of a young man following an older one through the labyrinthine passages of Vienna. Because the projection beam travels through a two-way mirror, there are identical projections on opposite walls; the viewers' shadows mingle with the film images.

The show's catalog is a collage of essays and brief quotations from the vast contemporary literature on leisure, authenticity, consumption, spectacle, universality, and many other subjects. Neither the show nor the catalog takes a rigorous approach, but their associative logic is wonderfully stimulating, like a tour of something rich and strange. **D**

Digging diversity

Chicago celebrates African-American history with unique events

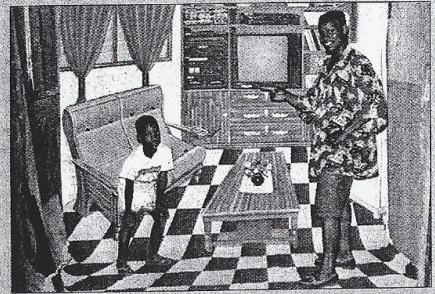
BY VENITA GRIFFIN
CENTERSTAGECHICAGO.COM

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHY
Columbia College Chicago
600 S. Michigan
(312) 344-7104
Mocp.org

While not devoted specifically to the work of a black artist, the Museum of Contemporary Photography's (MOC) "Manufactured Self" looks through the lenses of 13 international artists to examine how "the things we consume both reflect and construct our identities."

One of those 13 artists is the Ghanaian-born New Yorker Philip Kwame Apagya. Apagya's images feature his countrymen posed in front of a variety of painted backgrounds that reflect their fantasies: subjects are boarding a private plane, standing in front of a suburban dream house or pointing to a new television. This technique is rooted in a tradition of West African studio portraiture in which the subjects often ask to appear more affluent in the photograph than they are in reality.

Ron Humbertson, the Museum's marketing and development assistant, says the museum strives to showcase diverse photographers in its exhibitions. "A multicultural perspective is critical to our mission to uphold the most important artistic photography of our time." The exhibit runs through March 3.



Ina Barney's "The daughters," taken in France in 2002, is one of the photographs in the "Manufacturing Self" exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.



Diverse photographs build sense of 'Self'

BY MISHA DAVENPORT
Museum Pieces

The photographers featured in the exhibit opening Monday at the Museum of Contempo-

rary Photography may focus on different subject matter and come from different parts of the world, but their lenses all capture a profound look at our collective sense of individual identity.

"Manufacturing Self," in the lower gallery of the museum at 600 S. Michigan, features works from 13 photographers. The themes of identity, consumerism and social class resonate throughout the exhibit.

Of particular note is Peter Menzel's collection of photographs showcasing families in front of their homes with all of their possessions placed around them. Also of interest are Walead Beshty's colorfully curious "The Phenomenology of Shopping, 2001-2003," featuring a man seemingly disappearing into a rack of brightly colored leis and Brian Ulrich's print of the American Girl Store depicting an overwhelmed girl.

"Manufactured Self" at the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College, 600 S. Michigan. Hours are Monday-Wednesday and Fridays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Saturday noon to 5 p.m. through March 3. Free. Call (312) 663-5554; www.mocp.org.

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A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT: Ancient Mesopotamia, literally "the land between the rivers," is the subject of the documentary "Mesopotamia: I Have Conquered the River," showing Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago, 1155 E. 58th St. Shot on location in Iraq, the film examines the vital role the waterways played in the ancient city of Ur. Admission is free. Call (773) 702-9514. <http://oi.uchicago.edu>.

◆ ◆ ◆

ODE TO THE CORN COBS: The twin-pillar buildings of Marina City are one of the most famous

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