

Cover to Cover

Some people pore over novels, I tear through art magazines—reading them from cover to cover when time permits, but often simply skimming the text for names, dates, titles, and of course, looking at the pictures. Lately, these seemingly static objects turned out to be more than reference material; they became the raw material for new and unexpected transformations. Through an unconscious manipulation of magazines—rolling them into tubes in moments of boredom, nervousness, or for the practical purpose of carrying them—I noticed, and then became intrigued by the juxtaposition of shapes, the accidentally discovered spectrums of color. These austere linear abstractions are the unintended consequence of carefully designed documents, the byproduct of a painstakingly controlled internal organization.

Art magazines are carriers of information—an overwhelming mass of mediated messages that flow together and recede into space like the prints in this installation. Writers, critics and curators fill contemporary art periodicals with accounts that sanction artists and ideas they deem important and relevant. Galleries use them as forums to promote the artists they represent and upcoming exhibitions. Companies, institutions and individuals buy space between the covers to solicit and advertise products, services and events. Each print in this exhibition represents an entire magazine, every single page as viewed from the front or back. Each issue is presented in its entirety, and at the same time, completely fractured and totally partial.

The typological approach used to document these publications reveals the similarities between them, but also the variations—subtle differences, but significant nonetheless. Even though this project relies on a systematic and objective method to record these very fastidiously organized products, the element of chance plays a critical role. It was my decision to focus on the early-winter issues of art magazines, but the array of patterns that I discovered are the result of the artistic, editorial and commercial concerns that these publications must constantly balance, which to a large extent control, even if inadvertently, the final composition of the images.

Each barcode-like, minimal band of veiled information is removed from its original context; it is enlarged, magnifying the dot pattern from the printing press, microscopic details of contemporary art and advertising. They are appropriations of reproductions of reproductions. The digital mutation—dots of ink placed on magazine stock, scanned, manipulated and saved, then output with ink sprayed onto fine art paper—is as referential as it is abstract.

The motivation for artists to create work is frequently inspired by the work of other artists: while this occurs by encountering the artworks themselves, other times it happens through exposure to reproductions in books and magazines. This system of experiencing art, through its reproduction, allows for repeated and prolonged access to a work of art. Inspiration may come after years of contemplative viewing, as well as from a casual glance, an image barely seen out of the corner of the eye. Art does not have to reference other art directly, but to some degree, it is always an evolution of its historical predecessors.

This work calls attention to the packaging of a particular kind of information and its circulation in the world. Only a sliver of the content contained in these magazines is visible—a small cross-section of images among a plethora of other visual and textual data. Context is alluded to in the titles, but is not completely evident in the prints themselves. Ultimately these images are about the re-presentation of bound reproductions of contemporary art and culture. The fortuitous patterns in these prints are messages initially controlled by the medium; meanings further conflated and conflicted though my alteration, translation and presentation.

Dean Kessmann