

# AD | AGENCY



DIANA SHEARWOOD, *STEAK, SANTA FE SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA*, 2006, FROM THE SERIES "BEHIND THE MALL," PREFORATED VINYL INSTALLED IN THE PRC'S STOREFRONT WINDOWS, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

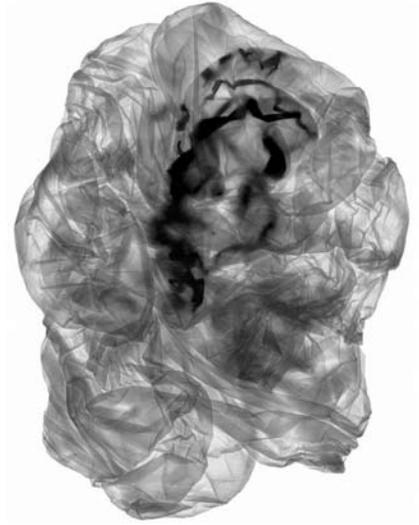
The PRC group exhibition AD | AGENCY brings together photo-based work that mimics or addresses the language of advertising and product photography as well as work that mines or alters catalogues, print ads, products, stores, or literally the consumer process itself. Addressing a spectrum of consumerism issues, the artwork also investigates the life of and power behind the objects, signs, and symbols that are marketed to us and the cycle of consumption—from branding to purchase and beyond. The artists of AD | AGENCY take an active role by borrowing the trappings of advertising and promotion—the look, language, method, and sometimes even manufacturing and marketing avenues—in an effort to initiate an aesthetic and intellectual dialogue about this system of which we are all a part. In order to comment upon such issues, the AD | AGENCY artists appropriately employ such conceptual and aesthetic strategies as appropriation, erasure, and mechanical means of production. Situated somewhere between Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, many of these artists also address issues of consumer culture aesthetically via pleasing compositions as well as emphasis on the “ready-made” object itself. The exhibition concentrates on artworks that feature products over people; just like in advertising, the consumer/viewer is implied.

A caveat: many AD | AGENCY artists—while duly asking us to consider our position as cogs in the global schema of consumption—are quick to remind us that they are not completely condemning of consumer culture. Although they do act as agents of political and social change, most assume agency by holding up a mirror to consumerism as well as their own habits and roles.

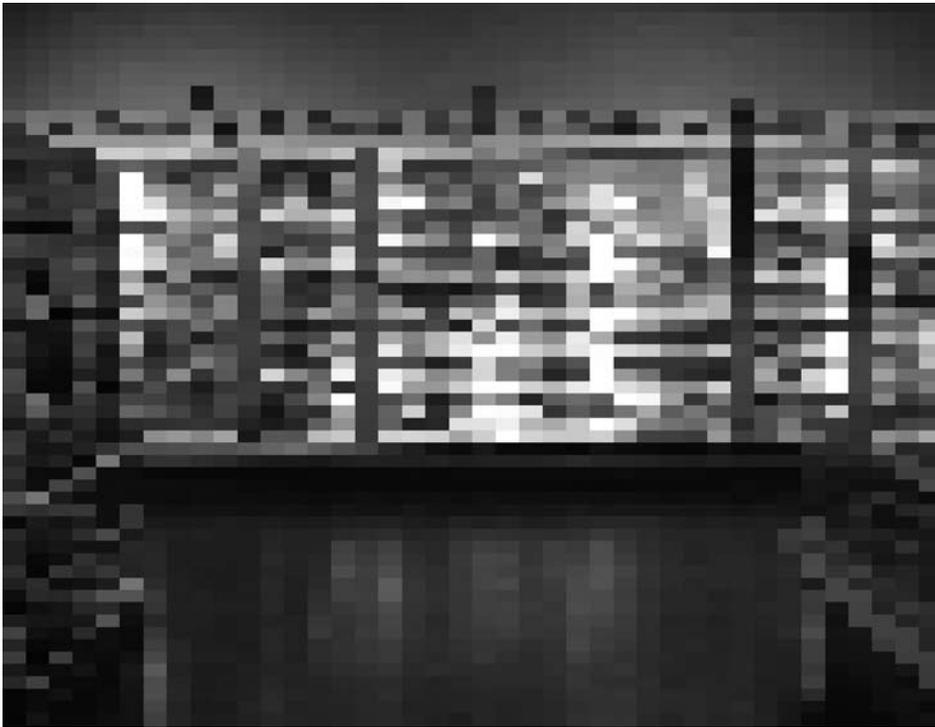
NOVEMBER 9, 2007  
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JANUARY 27, 2008

(Of course, it goes without saying that all of these artworks are for sale.) Quoting a few of the artists will serve to illustrate this fine line that they and this exhibition seeks to walk. In his series “Copia,” Brian Ulrich acknowledges his own role in work that “explores not only the everyday activities of shopping, but the economic, cultural, social, and political implications of commercialism and the roles we play in self-destruction, over-consumption, and as targets of marketing and advertising.” Finally, Kate Bingaman-Burt perhaps puts it best in describing her self-created brand: “Obsessive Consumption is repulsed and grossly fascinated by the branding of consumer culture...It wants to eat the entire bag of candy and enjoy the sickness that it feels an hour later. It doesn’t want to be an outside critical observer. It wants to be an active participant.” Correspondingly, AD | AGENCY seeks to do the same.

**LESLIE K. BROWN,**  
PRC Curator



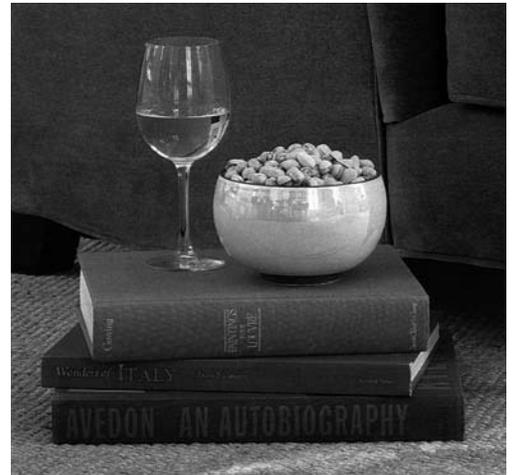
DEAN KESSMANN, *HAVE A NICE DAY*, FROM THE SERIES “PLASTIC ON PAPER,” 2005, DIGITAL PIGMENT PRINT, 34 X 24 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CONNER CONTEMPORARY ART, WASHINGTON, DC



LEFT: JONATHAN LEWIS, *MARKS AND SPENCER*, FROM THE SERIES “WALMART,” 2006, PIGMENTED INKJET ON SMOOTH WATERCOLOR PAPER, 23 X 28 INCHES, COURTESY OF BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY

TOP RIGHT: PENELOPE UMBRICO, *INSTANCES OF BOOKS AS PEDESTALS (SOME EXTREME), #11*, 2007, FROM THE SERIES “PRIVATE RESIDENCE (FROM HOME IMPROVEMENT CATALOGS),” ARCHIVAL DIGITAL PRINT, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND BERNARD TOALE GALLERY, BOSTON, MA

BOTTOM RIGHT: HANK WILLIS THOMAS, *SMOKIN’ JOE - “YOU THINK YOU CAN GET ME TO EAT MY FLAPJACKS WITHOUT MY BLUE BONNET®? TRY IT!”*, 2006/1979, FROM THE SERIES “UNBRANDED: REFLECTIONS IN BLACK BY CORPORATE AMERICA 1968-2008,” LAMBDA PHOTOGRAPH (DIGITAL C-PRINT), 28 X 35 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NY, NY





KATE BINGAMAN-BURT, DETAIL, *OBSESSIVE CONSUMPTION IS FIVE*, 2002-2007, DIGITAL PRINTS FACE MOUNTED TO PLEXI, EACH 5 X 7 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JEN BEKMAN, NEW YORK, NY



MICHAEL MITTELMAN, *SKYMALL: FIGURATIVE*, 2006, INKJET ON CANVAS, 24 X 20 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

## ABOUT THE ART AND ARTISTS

### Kate Bingaman-Burt (Starkville, MS)

After working as designer and art director for a gifts company, Kate Bingaman-Burt created “Obsessive Consumption”—“a brand, company, website, and artistic endeavor.” She hand draws her credit card statements (and will do so until they are paid off), draws an item she purchases everyday, and photographed her purchases for two years. On display in the PRC gallery is the latter Herculean effort, which includes some of her favorite purchase photos from 2002–2004 paired with a photograph of the same object in situ made in 2007. Bingaman-Burt holds an MFA from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln and teaches at Mississippi State University. Featured in diverse media outlets, publications, and venues, she was a 2006 **jen bekman** Hey Hot Shot! Winner/Ne Plus Ultra and had her solo debut at the gallery this past fall. [www.obsessiveconsumption.com](http://www.obsessiveconsumption.com)

### Dean Kessmann (Washington, D.C.)

Dean Kessmann is fascinated by mass-produced utilitarian objects. In his series “Cover to Cover,” he scanned the curled edges of contemporary art magazines. The resulting striped panoramic images emphasize what we assume to be full-bleed ads and recall bar codes, digital and printing syntax, and abstract paintings. In the series “Plastic on Paper,” he placed plastic bags—vehicles of marketing and temporary repositories of products bearing logos such as *Target*, *Safeway*, and *Have a Nice Day*—on a scanner. Floating on a white background, the luminous bags recall embryos and the white seamless of commercial photography. Products

of mechanical reproduction themselves, Kessmann’s prints are beautiful and haunting at the same time; the prints might last 100 years, while the bags will not decay, outlasting the products they held and even us. Represented by Conner Contemporary Art, D.C., Kessmann is an Assistant Professor and coordinator of the photography program at George Washington University. [www.dean-kessmann.com](http://www.dean-kessmann.com)

### Jonathan Lewis (London, UK)

Jonathan Lewis looks to the trimmings and wrappings of packaging and stores. Known for his abstract line prints derived from candy wrappers featured in *Blindspot*, Lewis turns to photographing the interiors of European “big box” stores with a low megapixel camera in his newest series “WalmArt.” After pulling the images into Photoshop, he further abstracts the composition by pixelating it; the result emphasizes a pattern of product placement and the overall look recalls Pop Art. Collected and shown internationally, Lewis marries an interest in simplifying and contemplating the essence of things, with a distinct dose of humor. A former artist in residence at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY, Lewis now resides in his native United Kingdom and is represented by the Bonni Benrubi Gallery in New York. [www.jgdlewis.com](http://www.jgdlewis.com)

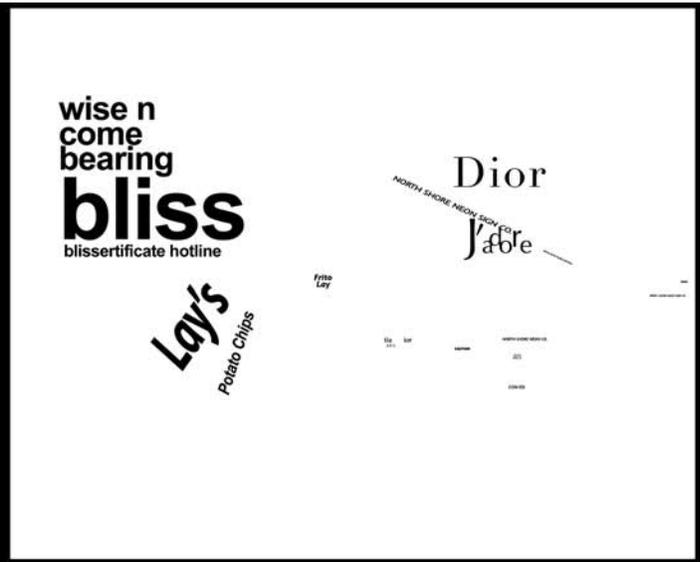
### Michael Mittelman (Boston, MA)

Holding an MFA from Massachusetts College of Art + Design’s Studio for Interrelated Media, Michael Mittelman is a practicing artist and Founder/Director of the new media magazine, ASPECT. In his “SkyMall” series, Mittelman returns to his photographic roots. Finding himself traveling a great deal, he bought

“objets d’art” from a SkyMall catalogue. He then took a photograph of the purchased item and had a company (also found in SkyMall) convert the image into a digital canvas—completing a consumer cycle within a closed and mostly mechanical system. Mittelman’s works reference Duchamp’s readymades and the Warholian “Factory,” weaving ideas and modes of mass and artistic production together with kitsch and humor. A member of the Collision Collective, Mittelman was featured most recently in the MIT List Visual Art Center’s exhibition *Son et Lumière*. [www.expandedfield.com](http://www.expandedfield.com)

### Diana Shearwood (Montreal, Canada)

Canadian photographer Diana Shearwood has been documenting our food landscape in her series “Behind the Mall.” Inspired in part by what she has called Martin Parr’s “humorous yet damning explorations of global culture,” Shearwood is drawn specifically to the practice of vehicle wrapping. This work is currently featured in a solo show at the Silver Eye Center for Photography and has recently been published in the *FOOD* book, co-published by Alphabet City, Toronto, and MIT Press (2007). Shearwood’s seductive images of advertising and industrial 18-wheeler trucks will be installed in the PRC’s storefront windows (on a major Boston artery itself) using the same perforated vinyl that wraps buses and cars. Her series questions ideas of advertising by relocating commercial photographs; it also begins a dialogue about mass production and “food miles,” the amount of miles that food travels from its origin to our plates. [www.dianashearwood.com](http://www.dianashearwood.com)



TOP: MATT SIBER, *UNTITLED, #13*, FROM THE SERIES "THE UNTITLED PROJECT," 2003, ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINTS, EACH 45 X 55 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

BOTTOM: DEAN KESSMANN, *ART FORUM, DECEMBER 2003 (FRONT)*, FROM THE SERIES "COVER TO COVER," 2004, DIGITAL PIGMENT PRINT, 22 7/8 X 72 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CONNER CONTEMPORARY ART, WASHINGTON, DC

**Matt Siber** (Chicago, IL)

An MFA graduate of Chicago's Columbia College, Matt Siber grew up in Brookline, MA and also holds a degree in History and Geography from the University of Vermont. In his series "The Untitled Project," Siber creates diptychs that remind us of the ad-laden environment in which we live. In one panel we are presented with a scene from which all logos and text have been digitally removed; in the adjoining panel, the logos and text are placed on a white background in the approximate area from whence they came. In the other series "Compare to..." he photographed images of "generic" products that mimic brand names in look—from fonts to phrasing, to even the shape of the bottle. These vibrant images, à la Warhol's soup cans, underscore the power of branding and play off of the palette as well as the look of product photography. Represented by galleries in Spain and Germany, Siber has been shown internationally and is a recipient of an Aaron Siskind Foundation grant. [www.siberart.com](http://www.siberart.com)

**Hank Willis Thomas** (New York, NY)

One of Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies *25 Under 25: New American Photographers*, Hank Willis Thomas holds an MFA in photography and an MA in Visual Criticism from California College of the Arts. In his series "Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America 1968–2008," Thomas appropriated and digitally manipulated "magazine advertisements that are marketed towards an African American audience or feature Black subjects." The resulting "unbranded" images, complete with a combination of his wording and the wording of the ads, Thomas hopes will expose generalizations within advertisements. The series will include two ads from every year from 1968 – 2008. A comparison of early ads with contemporary ads, Thomas believes, shows the evolution of Roland Barthes's phrase "what-goes-without-saying." Currently an artist in residence at California's Headlands Center for the Arts, Thomas is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. [www.hankwillisthomas.com](http://www.hankwillisthomas.com)

**Brian Ulrich** (Chicago, IL)

Holding an MFA from Columbia College, Brian Ulrich had his first monograph published in 2006 by Aperture as part of the *MP3: Midwest Photographers Project* and was named one of *Photo District News* magazine's "30 Emerging Photographers" in 2007. In his series "Copia," which is subdivided into *Retail*, *Thrift*, and *Backrooms*, Ulrich has been documenting the inside of stores, items of consumption, and consumers. Considering notions of "social class, excess, and corporate ideologies," Ulrich began this series after 9/11, when we were urged to spend patriotically to help the U.S. economy and combat terrorism. The works on display in the PRC showcase the spectrum of commercial outlets—from new American flag chairs in a carnivorous outdoor-themed store to a re-purposed store turned outlet dubbed "Blanket World." Actively exhibited and collected, Ulrich is represented by Julie Saul Gallery in New York. [www.notif-butwhen.com](http://www.notif-butwhen.com)

**Penelope Umbrico** (New York, NY)

An MFA graduate from the School of Visual Arts, Penelope Umbrico is the Chair of the MFA Photography program at Bard College. In her series "Mirrors (from Catalogs)," images of mirrors from home improvement catalogues are found, scanned, perspective corrected, and then printed at the size of the original mirror and face-mounted to laser cut plexi. The final pieces imply the perfect, erased consumer and the idealized, somewhat unrealistic home. In another series, "Instances of Books as Pedestals (Some Extreme)," Umbrico gathered images of stacked books from catalogues, such as *Pottery Barn* and *Restoration Hardware*. Interestingly, the stacks are often comprised of art books upon which are placed wine glasses and mugs. Shown and collected extensively and on the web via Rhizome and Ubu Web, Umbrico is represented locally by Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA. [www.penelopeumbrico.net](http://www.penelopeumbrico.net)



**BRIAN ULRICH, BLOOMINGTON, MN (BLANKET WORLD), FROM THE SERIES "COPIA," 2004, C-PRINT, 40 X 50 INCHES, COURTESY OF ARTIST AND JULIE SAUL GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY**

Please see page 9 for an exciting public program related to AD | AGENCY or visit our website at [prcboston.org/programs.htm](http://prcboston.org/programs.htm).

**Please note:** The Montserrat College of Art Gallery is presenting a related exhibition, *Cornucopia: Documentation of Plenty* (November 9, 2007 – February 2, 2008), which includes Ulrich, and we are working to cross-promote these related, timely shows. For more information, please see the exhibition listings and [www.montserrat.edu/galleries/montserrat.shtml](http://www.montserrat.edu/galleries/montserrat.shtml).

2008

# PRC STUDENT EXHIBITION

FEBRUARY 8 – MARCH 16, 2008

From large universities to smaller colleges, New England is rich with gifted students and scholars. Among these schools and programs, photography has always flourished, making this an area celebrated within the history of photography. In 2002, the PRC was proud to bring back the popular annual Student Exhibition. The current exhibition pays tribute to academic diversity and thus features work selected by the schools themselves. Students and visitors alike enjoy the opportunity to witness each program's unique approach to photography and related media. Below you will find short descriptions of the schools that are Institutional Members of the PRC. These students, professors, and staff use the PRC as an extension of the classroom—visiting exhibitions, attending lectures, and making use of our library. For more information about joining the PRC at this level, please visit [prcboston.org/institutional.htm](http://prcboston.org/institutional.htm).