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"Promiscuous Pictures at Pier 24"

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Infiltrating and cutting across mediums, "found" imagery is all the rage in the fine art world. Perhaps this in-vogue phenomenon is a function of the onslaught of throwaway digital photos and the Internet, a behemoth engine that allows greater access to all manner of vintage pictures and millions of snapshots. But let's face it: we're a promiscuous picture-taking species, motivated by an obsessive desire to record moments for posterity, or to simply stop time. *Secondhand*, an expansive, varied new show now at Pier 24, highlights the inventive forms appropriation and manipulation of found images can take in the hands of Larry Sultan, Matt Lipps, John Baldessari, Viktoria Binshtok and the Dutch art director, collector and curator of amateur photography Erik Kessels, who are among the 13 artists included here.

Kessels' pointed installation *24 HRS in Photos* (held over from the previous exhibition), of 350,000 of the 1 million pictures uploaded to Flickr during a 24-hour period, is a wry commentary on the perils of oversharing and compulsive shutterbugging. Piles of once-valued pics, banked on the sides of the gallery and reaching to the ceiling, coalesce into a metaphoric garbage dump. An intern is stationed at the entrance to prevent visitors from climbing around the dead snapshot playground and making a mess, I kid you not. What is the world coming to? Other series by Kessels, though none quite as affecting as *24 HRS*, are also on view. A component of the *in almost every picture* series features light boxes depicting stunned deer at night in the snowy wild; they were caught in the headlights, so to speak, when they tripped wires that took their pictures. Kessels pulled the images from a hunting website.

Richard Prince's "Untitled (Cowboy)" (1991-92), one of the artist's numerous reappropriations of the Marlboro Man, the avatar of the high-end, 1960s cigarette ad campaign, hangs majestically behind the reception desk in the front gallery. The rugged, chaps-wearing, lasso-twirling, horseback-riding macho cowboy, galloping through Big Sky country, retains his virile allure and is as seductive as ever, even though the famous idealization of masculinity and the American West that promised viewers a chance to live the myth, if they'd only light up and inhale, served as an effective tool in luring people into addiction. In this rendering, he looks a little like James Dean in a white Stetson, cancer warnings be damned. (Two of the Marlboro Men models, who eventually died of lung cancer, came forward and attacked Philip Morris publicly for the advertisements.) So when does the act of appropriation constitute theft? Prince was working at Time-Life in the 1980s when he began re-photographing the iconic ads, removing text and product references, but the implicit critique of the original images in his appropriations was evidently too subtle for some. He was sued, though he ultimately prevailed. One of Prince's "cowboys" was reportedly the first photograph to fetch over \$1 million; since then, they've sold for more than three times that figure.

Arriving at Pier 24, after making one's way through the throngs of tourists on the Embarcadero, is like entering a hushed indoor oasis where one can be virtually alone in the midst of art. Unlike previous shows at this splendid space, individual rooms are dedicated mostly to single artists and series they've produced. Mixed in are a few collections of vernacular objects – postcards, rows of employee badges – which aren't particularly compelling in this context. There are also selections from treasure troves like the Canada/UK-based Archive of Modern Conflict, whose reserves total 4 million "lens-based" prints of seemingly infinite variety. One can free-associate and ruminate on the history of photography while mulling over black & white panoramas of Norway, and the surface of the moon; a passenger atop an Asian elephant; a lone parachutist floating above farmland; a paper lion costume; Robert Frank's shot of cars parked on the beach near the breakers, displayed next to a picture of a ship

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teeming with immigrants. A pair of Chinese acrobats, lying on their backs outdoors, juggling end-tables in the air, answers the question of what to do the next time you're on the patio.

From the old to the thrill of the new: 34-year-old Daniel Gordon combines pointillism, a touch of the surreal, and the not readily identifiable with verve in tactile, collaged still-lives. For his intricate sculptural constructions, which may represent his very own art-form, Gordon gleans images from the Internet and magazines, prints them, sometimes altering and heightening the colors, before piecing together and arranging them in life-sized, 3-D tableaux, which he then re-photographs. And presto: entrancing strangeness materializes. Take "Still Life with Lobster" (2012), a picture of vases filled with flowers or feathers, a congregation of vegetable-dyed red and blue lobsters clamoring for position, surrounded by a profusion of patterned cloths and backdrops. It's a composition an inch short of too busy, but somehow not too much. While pondering what's real and what's fabricated, and sorting fact from fiction, imagine for a moment what might have resulted if Bonnard or Matisse had access to Google and an inkjet printer.