

CHÂTEAU SHATTO

Jean Baudrillard's photography: Ultimate Paradox

Opening Saturday December 12, 2015

6 – 9 pm

Through February 20, 2016

Is there still an aesthetic illusion? And if not, a path to an “aesthetic” illusion, the radical illusion of secret, seduction and magic? Is there still, on the edges of hypervisibility, of virtuality, room for an image?

–Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, 2005

Château Shatto announces an exhibition of Jean Baudrillard's photographic works with great joy. The gallery has the pleasure of working with Marine Baudrillard to realize *Jean Baudrillard's photography: Ultimate Paradox* and to contemplate these photographs in relation to Jean Baudrillard's life's work.

Jean Baudrillard captured, and often exhibited, these photographs during his lifetime. Titled only for the city or town where the photograph was shot, they appear as fugitive confrontations between the lens and the surface of things. Scrims, veils, warped reflections and defective facades recur in these photographs as it is in these moments that reality, the major subject of Baudrillard's discrimination, appears most conjectural.

Each photograph is a record of an apparent absence: an absence of subject, an absence of meaning. The 'gossamer thin difference between illusion and the real' (*Cool Memories III: Fragments*, 1997) articulates itself in these works through the diaphanous, illusory layers that stack upon each other. Baudrillard chose photography not for its erroneous claim that it reproduces what one sees in the world, but precisely because to him, photographs looked like 'nothing on earth' (*Impossible Exchange*, 2001).

Now the banal reality has become aestheticized, all reality is trans-aestheticized, and that is the very problem. Art was a form, and then it became more and more no more a form but a value, an aesthetic value, and so we come from art to aesthetics... And as art becomes aesthetics it joins with reality, it joins with the banality of reality. Because all reality becomes aesthetical, too, then it's a total confusion between art and reality, and the result of this confusion is hyperreality. But, in this sense, there is no more radical difference between art and realism. And this is the very end of art. As form.

–Jean Baudrillard, 2005

Beyond the qualities of the photographs, there are the attendant questions surrounding Baudrillard's relations with contemporary art. As Chris Kraus describes it, a 'double-helix' was formed between Baudrillard and what gets collectively termed as the 'art world.' The forceful embrace of Baudrillard's theories and philosophy by artists and critics was something he remained wary of. For Baudrillard, art's claim of exceptionality was dubious. Aesthetic concerns were being dispersed into every crevice of reality and this drew the function of art into question. Having exhibited his photographs within galleries and museums, he then wrote *The Conspiracy of Art*, a book that empties out all of the purported privilege of art and the sand that its meaning is built upon.

In *The Conspiracy of Art* Baudrillard writes: 'Art can only ally itself with general insignificance and indifference. It no longer has any privileges. It has no final destination other than the fluid universe of communication, networks and interaction.'

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Baudrillard's admittance into and absolute discrediting of the system of art is perfectly suited to his philosophy, according to his longtime friend and publisher Sylvère Lotringer: *He is a practicing artist of his own concepts. This is an art he never betrayed, his only claim to artistry. Exhibiting his photographs was part of his work as a pataphysician, as much as attacking art was part of his work as a Situationist. That people would be angered at him for these gestures simply proved that they didn't have a clue. They hadn't understood anything about his theory, or about the world we live in for that matter. For Baudrillard the actual photographs are beside the point. It is what precedes them that counts in his eyes – the mental event of taking a picture* (Sylvère Lotringer, *The Piracy of Art*, 2008).

Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) was a French sociologist, cultural critic and theorist of postmodernity. He developed the notions of 'simulacrum' and 'hyperreality' to describe the postmodern condition, where reality is displaced by layers of virtuality, simulation and copies. These ideas deeply influenced art, philosophy and sociology of the late 20th century and subsequently made their way into popular culture. His major published works include *Oublier Foucault*, 1977 (*Forget Foucault*); *Simulacres et simulation*, 1981 (*Simulacra and Simulation*); *Amérique*, 1986 (*America*); *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu*, 1991 (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*); *Jean Baudrillard: Photographies 1985–1998*, 1999, and *L'Esprit du terrorisme*, 2002 (*The Spirit of Terrorism: And Requiem for the Twin Towers*).

Jean Baudrillard's photographs have been exhibited in the Biennale of Photography in Moscow in 2002 and Venice Biennale in 1993, as well as the Daelim Museum, Seoul; Fridericianum, Kassel; the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and Times Museum, Guangzhou.

Château Shatto thanks Marine Baudrillard, Cool Memories, Chris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer for their collaboration.