

PIERRE BISMUTH

MARY BOONE GALLERY / TEAM, NEW YORK

24 MARCH - 28 APRIL / 29 MARCH - 30 APRIL

Few could claim a more auspicious entry into American culture than Pierre Bismuth. The French artist, long known for his playful, parametric conceptualism on both sides of the English Channel, first sparked New World interest when he shared a screenwriting Academy Award for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) with Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman. If Bismuth's contributions were secondary to Kaufman's frenzied, hydra-headed plot, his current solo debut in New York – at three galleries, no less – provides a decidedly clearer representation of his unique creative practice.

Ever the covert semiotician, Bismuth trains his attention on the various syntaxes of the New York art industry, producing exhibitions with something of a common working method, in that each deadpans the dominant sensibility of its venue and demographic. *Artforum*, pp. 25/26 and *Art in America*, pp. 11/12 (both works 2007) exude the type of monumental, industrially manufactured flash befitting Mary Boone's palatial Chelsea digs, yet ridiculously amount to over-size sculptural reproductions of magazine pages. Faithfully adhering to his sources, Bismuth has reprinted both the front and backsides of the pages advertising his exhibition. Paula Cooper Gallery and Sikkema Jenkins & Co. may be getting more foot traffic as a result of this unusual type of press, but the relationship of advertising to the art market, as Bismuth persuasively demonstrates, is never without a degree of ethical unease.

Further downtown, Team gallery hosts *One man's masterpiece is another man's mess* (2007), a new series of large-scale photographs that finds Bismuth smashing, scanning, inverting and then printing empty glass slide-covers. The resulting images betray very little of their messy, gestural origins, which is probably their point: scores of white lines fossilising on vacant, jet-black grounds share a fashionably slick, high-contrast look with the work of fellow gallery artist Banks Violette, while emitting just enough of a funereal stench to suggest that something vital has been lost along the way.

Commercial fatalism finds its comedic counterpoint with *Wall Paper* (2006), a small room in Boone's uptown space which Bismuth has plastered with repeating lists of the names of seven male art stars (Warhol and Buren, for obvious reasons, have made the cut). Things start going awry with the hanging: first and last names rarely align, thereby drastically widening the art history annals to make room for Bruce Ruscha, Andy Duchamp and worse. Designed in a mauve Garamond font on crimson (which politely screams 'old boys' club'), *Wall Paper* saves collectors the pretence of its claiming to be anything more than a ready-made interior, albeit one plagued by the occasional nomenclature.

Yet for all of the assurance with which Bismuth foists himself into these stateside niches, some reservations remain. The artist's defamiliarising techniques have previously yielded great insights into various and frequently disparate modes of communication, but prove far less compelling when narrowly delimited by artworld discourse, which already routinely exhausts itself in the performance of self-critique. There may exist a cocktail of obfuscation, juxtaposition, criticality and humour potent enough to cut through the been-there steeliness of the average art insider; if this new array of works is any indication, however, Bismuth has yet to discover it. *Tyler Coburn*



Most Wanted Men/NYC
(Banks Violette), 2007,
c-print, spray paint/
Plexiglas, 122 x 200
cm. Courtesy Mary Boone
Gallery, New York