



Picking the Next Picasso

by Richard Phillips
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The artist Richard Phillips, a judge on last night's episode of *Work of Art*, discusses why the show might just be better than anything in the "real" art world.

Unlike the unending chain of non-reflexive biennial productions by celebrity curators, the reality show producers succeed. *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist* is the new Anti-Aesthetic to the self-obsessed and parasitically over-professionalized Art World.

Having just watched my guest judge appearance on the Bravo reality show *Work of Art*, I was struck by how effortlessly the participants responded to each of the environments they were given—from the commercial zone to the studio/critique and on to the gallery judgment. It was fascinating how the construction of each tableau impacted the perceptions about the success or failure of the participants, and interesting to see how these perceptions advanced the narratives within the show and provided a mirror to the external narrative of passive consumption.

Miles Mendenhall, the participant print-maker who appeared to be favored by the judges during both the critique session and the final analysis of his work, serves as the best example. On one hand, Miles could be praised for completely ignoring the challenge presented on the show in order to perform his self-designated role of "sensitive artist". But the work he made was one that simply sought to aestheticize poverty and homelessness in a way that seemed to promote art as a disengaged touristic activity. Miles's photographic evidence of a piss-soaked cardboard bed in an alcove was magically transformed by "art" into his quiet space to get away from the noise of the big city. My criticism last night centered on Miles's exploitation of this site of human degradation, and that politically this kind of effort aligns itself with the foundations of malevolent systems of human abuse. But Miles wasn't the only one who received my critique. Referring to other participant's efforts, I mentioned that in one case looking at the work was "cringey;" in another I stated that "the very idea that lifestyle figurative painting is going to be some kind of rebellion anyway has to be thrown out along with all three of these canvases;" and in a third I applied my newly coined term, "painterbation," for a painting that seemed to be only concerned with self-pleasuring.

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Richard Phillips. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

Part of the show's success is that it draws one into the minutiae of the individual personas, efforts, and relationships that obscure the real nature of the experience. Work of Art reveals that the structure of reality entertainment does not discriminate in how it codifies and subsequently neutralizes its subject, whether it is food, fashion, or art. The work of art that is actually being made is not the specific dish, dress, or art object made by the participants, but the larger construction of the show itself. Unlike the unending chain of non-reflexive biennial productions by celebrity curators, the reality show producers succeed in demonstrating that conventional notions about art production, display, consumption, and critique are in "reality" unexceptional and replaceable role-play scenarios that involve no more than the most basic of social agreements. Work of Art clearly shows that the pose of creative resistance within a system is in fact an act of voluntary submission in which the participants must completely sign off on the production of their image—permitting themselves to be observed, restrained, edited, and branded as an image of creative freedom. This image production in itself is the most accurate reflection of the conditional agreements that make up the majority of contemporary art today. Work of Art is the new Anti-Aesthetic to the self-obsessed and parasitically over-professionalized Art World.

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Richard Phillips is an artist living in New York City. His work is represented by Gagosian Gallery.