

**CONTACT:** Leslie K. Brown, *Curator*, [lkbrown@prcboston.org](mailto:lkbrown@prcboston.org), 617.975.0600

Exhibition to showcase photo-based work that mimics or mines advertising—ads, products, stores, and processes—and addresses issues of consumerism

## AD | AGENCY

**November 9, 2007 – January 27, 2008**

Curated by Leslie K. Brown, PRC Curator

Opening reception, Thursday, November 8, 5:30-7:30pm



Jonathan Lewis, *Lidl*, from the series "WalmArt," 2006, Pigmented inkjet on smooth watercolor paper, 23 x 28 inches, Courtesy of Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York, NY



Matt Siber, *Suavitel*, from the series "Compare to...", 2006/2007, Digital C-print, 24 x 20 inches, Courtesy of the artist

**Boston, MA.** The Photographic Resource Center—a non-profit gallery, education, and resource center—is pleased to present a group exhibition of 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 work 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. Not all Ad | Agency artists are completely critical of consumer culture, although some do act as agents of political and social change. They do so by holding up a mirror to consumerism as well as their own consumer habits. The artists of Ad | Agency take an active role by borrowing the trappings of advertising and promotion—the look, language, method, and sometimes even marketing avenues—in an effort to initiate an aesthetic and intellectual dialogue about this cycle of consumption, of which we are all a part. Situated somewhere between Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, these artists also address issues of consumer culture aesthetically via pleasing compositions and bright "Pop Art" colors. Some artists also place emphasis on the "ready-made" object itself, partially removing the hand of the artist in order to comment on such issues.

Artists include **Kate Bingaman-Burt**, **Dean Kessmann**, **Jonathan Lewis**, **Michael Mittelman**, **Matt Siber**, **Hank Willis Thomas**, **Brian Ulrich**, **Penelope Umbrico** as well as the work of **Diana Shearwood** in our storefront windows. Please note that 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.

## ABOUT THE ART AND ARTISTS

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

Kate Bingaman-Burt is "Obsessive Consumption." As a part of this larger brand, company, website, and artistic endeavor she created, Bingaman-Burt photographed her purchases for two years. On display in the PRC gallery will be 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 is represented by **jen bekman** in New York City, where she recently had a solo show, and teaches at Mississippi State University. [www.obsessiveconsumption.com](http://www.obsessiveconsumption.com)

### **Dean Kessmann** (Washington, DC)

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 the colors of what are likely full-bleed ads and recall bar codes and abstract paintings. In the series "Plastic on Paper," he placed plastic bags, which carry 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. They are beautiful and haunting at the same time; the bags will not decay and outlast the marketed items they carry as well as us. Represented by Conner Contemporary Art, DC, Kessmann is an Assistant Professor and coordinator of photography at George Washington University. [www.deankessmann.com](http://www.deankessmann.com)

### **Jonathan Lewis** (London, UK)

Jonathan Lewis looks to the trappings and wrappings of packaging and stores. Known for his abstract line prints derived from candy wrappers featured in *Blindspot*, Lewis turns to photographing 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 abstract and Pop Art combined a distinct dose of humor. A former artist in residence at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY, Lewis now resides in his native UK and is represented by the Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York. [www.jgdlewis.com](http://www.jgdlewis.com)

**Michael Mittelman** (Boston, MA)

Holding an MFA from MassArt'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 objects 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. [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." This work is currently featured in a solo show at the Silver Eye Center for Photography and was recently published in the *FOOD* book, co-published by Alphabet City, Toronto, and MIT Press. Shearwood's images of advertising and industrial trucks will be installed in the PRC's storefront windows, which is on a major Boston artery upon which such vehicles travel. Her series questions the ideas of advertising by relocating commercial photographs and 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)

**Matt Siber** (Chicago, IL)

An MFA graduate of 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 in which all logos and text have been digitally removed; in the adjoining panel, the removed 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 various generic products that mimic brand names in look—from fonts to phrasing, to even the shape of the bottle. These vibrant images underscore the power of branding and play off of the palette as well as the look of product photography. [www.siberart.com](http://www.siberart.com)

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

One of powerHouse/ Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies 25 *Under 25: New American Photographers*, Hank Willis Thomas holds an MFA in photography and 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 the ads' wording and his added text, Thomas hopes will expose generalizations within advertisements. Thomas is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery, New York City. [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 US economy and combat terrorism. Ulrich is represented by Julie Saul Gallery in New York. [www.notifbutwhen.com](http://www.notifbutwhen.com)

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

Holding an MFA 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)," she finds images of mirrors from home improvement catalogues, such as *Pottery Barn* and *Restoration Hardware*, and then photographs, perspective-corrects, and prints them at the size of the original mirror. The final pieces imply the perfect, yet erased, consumer and the idealized, yet unrealistic home. In another series, "Instances of Books as Pedestals (Some Extreme)," Umbrico gathered images of stacked books from similar catalogues. Ironically, the stacks are often comprised of art books, upon which are placed glasses and mugs full of coffee, wine, or brandy. Umbrico is represented by Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA. [www.penelopeumbrico.net](http://www.penelopeumbrico.net)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND IMAGES CONTACT:**

**Leslie K. Brown, PRC Curator, 617-975-0600, [lkbrown@prcboston.org](mailto:lkbrown@prcboston.org)**

**UPCOMING PRC PUBLIC PROGRAMS:** For locations and admission, visit our website, [prcboston.org](http://prcboston.org).

- **LECTURE:** Albert Watson, Thursday, November 1, 7pm. *This lecture is co-presented with Phaidon Press.*
- **LECTURE:** Andrea Robbins/Max Becher, Thursday, November 15, 7pm. *This program is presented in affiliation with the New Center for Arts and Culture.*
- **LECTURE/BOOKSIGNING:** Naked Ambition: An R-Rated Look at an X-Rated Industry with Canon Explorer of Light Michael Grecco, Monday, November 26, booksigning, 6pm, lecture 7pm. *This program is co-presented with CIPNE.*
- **LECTURE:** Ralph Gibson, Thursday, December 13, 7pm.

Guest accommodations generously provided by the Hotel Commonwealth



**\* PLEASE NOTE \* :** *The PRC gallery and library will be CLOSED for campus closings November 22 – 25 and December 22 – January 1.*

**LOCATION AND HOURS:**

Photographic Resource Center, 832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215. 617.975.0600 (tel), 617.975.0606 (fax), [www.prcboston.org](http://www.prcboston.org), [prc@bu.edu](mailto:prc@bu.edu)

**MBTA:** B Green Line, BU West T-stop **HOURS:** Tuesday through Friday from 10 to 6pm, Thursdays from 10 to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 12 to 5pm.

**ADMISSION:** \$3/general public, \$2/students and seniors and FREE to all Institutional Member Schools. In addition, the PRC is FREE to all on Thursdays and on the last weekend of every month. The PRC is always FREE to members, member schools, children under 18, BU students, faculty, and staff, as well as all school groups with appointments. The PRC is accessible.

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