

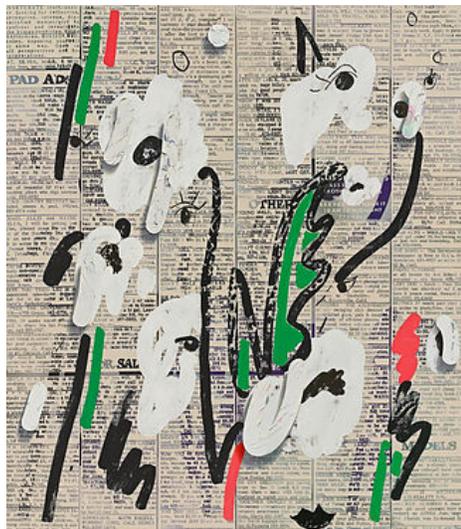
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Like-ness, the Internet, and the Work of Laura Owens

February 12, 2015

Hannah Dean



As part of his juror lecture for *Beyond Printmaking 4: 2015*, artist Kevin Haas discussed the notion of atemporality in printmaking, citing *Portlandia's* parody of hipsters: "It's the dream of the 1890s in Portland (microbrew or die!...my mustache curls up nice!)." While he focused on 19th-century print shops and their relationship to modern-day artisan butcher-shops, he used the contemporary artist [Laura Owens](#), participant in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, as his prime example of atemporality in artwork itself.

Here is where I want to linger. Owens' paintings are atemporal: like the internet in that they hyperbolize, break down, and disseminate image and text (often cliché) of various eras until they collapse in on themselves, devoid of any easily recognized hierarchy. For example, in "Untitled," the pastiche classified ads refer to a real-time mode of

communication. However, Owens subverts them (without using conventional subversion) into functioning like an internet tag—a randomized, non-sensical grouping. They focus on sameness. I submit that they *are* like the internet, but an idealized version of it.

The web is proclaimed to be a level ground, a democratic forum where anyone can be heard. Yet, when confronted with the slew of comment feeds, cyberspace seems to be more polarizing than we hope it to be. Owens' work gives the illusion of depth, but upon closer inspection the images exist on the same plane, entailing a flattening of information, devoid of context. Yes, the internet allows an availability to span time, space, and culture, but it leaves me with this question: where, now, is the margin? With the polarization of opinion and belief, the new margin seems to lie in the middle. This middle contains the true multi-layered absorption of information, moving themselves into the everything-existing-at-the-same-time web, shedding linear modes of categorization. The middle becomes the unseen and unheard (not loud enough, not extreme enough), in that any compromise or willingness to entertain contradictory points of view (insert the shared shape in the middle of the Venn diagram) results in dismissal from the conversation. Wouldn't the ideal internet provide us with a multiplicity of logics, rather than flood the idea environment to the point that no viable conceptual structures can be distinguished from the ocean of unconsidered (maybe "underconsidered") information?

This is not to say that those who use the internet to lobby and/or evangelize are in any way oppressive (maybe it is). Public forum, and its accessibility is necessary. It is not to say that those who use Facebook to share, even bombard others with their opinion is unreasonable practice (okay, maybe it is). It is to say merely that there is a place for discussion of sameness, of *likeness* (excuse the conceit), like the works of Laura Owens.

Image: Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2013, Flashe, acrylic, and oil on canvas, 137.5 x 120"

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