

# ArtReview

March 2008, pp.84-85

FUTURE GREATS

## Matt Keegan by Shamim M. Momin

The seemingly oxymoronic notion of 'connective interruptions' provides a useful way to consider the work of Matt Keegan, whose various incarnations as artist, editor and curator exemplify an idea of expansive practice so prevalent in recent art. His exhibitions, participatory publications and curatorial projects explore ideas of community without idealism, interrogating both literally and metaphorically how social spaces are staged and described, and where absence, incision and removal can more powerfully frame identity than emphatic presence.

In 2005, dealer Andrew Kreps invited the artist to programme his interim space (itself an oddly shaped space, evoking a kind of transitional, interstitial sensibility) for five months. Expanding the notion of discourse among artists, and his interest in intersection and collaboration, Keegan's efforts resulted in *Etc.*, a kind of exquisite corpse series of events, lectures, exhibitions and screenings by invited artists, who in turn designed their own events, often including other artists or performers. Eventually the series was documented in a folder-style publication, which contained discrete documents of each individual effort – a format evoking the important conceptual conceit of communal function that maintains the authorial mark (quite literally holding together linked but distinct approaches loosely but deliberately under a single cover). This constellated approach to an artist's community of ideas is further expanded in Keegan's ongoing publication *North Drive Press*. A limited-edition *boîte-en-valise* of artist interviews and multiples, and a clear conceptual descendant of the seminal *Aspen* magazine project, it is approached by Keegan and his co-editor as a way to collect and disperse those linked conversations.

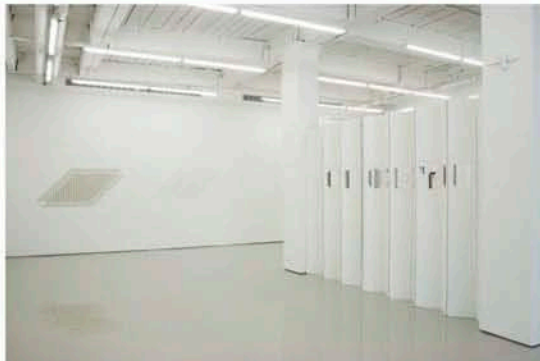
The central component of Keegan's most recent exhibition, *Any Day Now* (2007), might here function to capture these interleaved interests. A large wall sculpture wended its accordion-like way diagonally across the gallery space, serving to redirect the flow of viewers in the gallery and thus activating the space of transit itself. Keegan's interest in the idea of – perhaps more accurately the *construction of* – social space is further reflected as one navigates around the drywall structure. Literally

stripping down the architecture to its basic elements, Keegan has excised letters from the Sheetrock that spell out 'good to see you'. Passing viewers look directly through the letters, alternately engaging the people or space beyond and being rejected from that connection, with the wall serving as both membrane and barrier, a means to circumscribe a community of viewers in a shifting state of identification (*You, Me, I, We* being the title of a work in the show), what Keegan has called 'a space of perpetual implication/engagement'.

The exhibition overall is replete with an interest in layers and double-sidedness. For example, a stencil of the word 'men' is excised directly from the wall, repeated and layered to create shaped abstractions that hover between a formal composition and a frighteningly intense invocation. Elsewhere, images of men lounging casually in a chair are layered onto the space of a larger version of the same man's face, whose visage has been excised. Much like the wall text, they evoke both community and regimentation.

Keegan described *North Drive Press* as a 'conduit product', a phrase equally applicable to his other endeavours. Similarly, a collaboration in 2006 with the artist Leslie Hewitt, *From You to Me and Back Again*, elegantly refined this current of motion and reversal, individuality and community, and the ever-shifting shape of our most meaningful exchanges.

this page: *Any Day Now*, 2007 (installation view);  
facing page: *Humberto, Humberto, Humberto*, 2007,  
three digital c-prints mounted on gatorboard,  
246 x 104 x 2 cm, edition of 2 + 1AP. All works:  
Courtesy D'Amelio Terras, New York



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## The New York Times

FRIDAY, September 7, 2007, E33  
ROBERTA SMITH Art in Review

# Matt Keegan Jedediah Caesar

In their first shows with this gallery, Matt Keegan, from New York, and Jedediah Caesar, a newcomer who lives in Los Angeles, are separated by more than a continent. In “Any Day Now” Mr. Keegan goes for surgical precision from start to finish (the X-Acto knife is highly favored), while in “Three Views From Space” Mr. Caesar starts with randomness before finishing up with some slicing of his own. Both artists emphasize extreme detail.

Using language, photographic collage, incised walls and seemingly simple but actually complex printing methods, Mr. Keegan conjures up the intimacy of friendship, maybe sex and a sense of social or political solidarity. Layers and double-sidedness seem to fascinate him, most overtly in a screenlike structure, made of drywall and aluminum studs, and perforated with big see-through letters. They spell the over-used greeting “Nice to See You.”

In four works trapezoids are meticulously cut into or painted on the wall (look carefully); they repeat the word “men,” evoking both solidarity and regimentation. But Mr. Keegan’s affinity for randomness is signaled by several large color photographs, documenting either a found installation piece or carefully arranged chunks of pavement-on-pavement.

These variously smooth and rocky aggregates point directly to Mr. Caesar’s updates of Process Art, which involve filling makeshift boxes with quantities of trash — everything from grass and lemon rinds to an easy chair — and then topping off the mélange with different amounts of resin. The results hover disconcertingly between geology and garish artifice; they seem to scream Las Vegas.

His pieces employ different applications. One uses a minimal amount of resin, resulting in a bristling aggregate. In others, dense trash-resin chunks have either been left alone; trimmed of outer layers (which remain part of the work); or thinly sliced into a mural-size expanse, which effectively tiles a wall in symmetrical patterns reminiscent of sliced agate, terrazzo and a deviant form of marble. Seeing Mr. Caesar’s work in quantity reveals what might be called an Arman problem: While visually alluring, his work verges on gimmicky.

The pairing of these two artists is astute and mutually beneficial, but it also suggests that Mr. Keegan could use some of the juice and muscle taken for granted by Mr. Caesar, who in turn needs more of his colleague’s Conceptual subtlety.

*Through Sept. 29 at D’Amelio Terras, 525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea; (212) 352-9400.*

# MODERN PAINTERS

The International Art Magazine

December 2007-January 2008



MATT KEEGAN, HUMBERTO, HUMBERTO, HUMBERTO (DETAIL), 2007. DIGITAL C-PRINT, 45 X 34 IN. COURTESY D'AMELIO TERRAS, NEW YORK.

## MATT KEEGAN

D'AMELIO TERRAS

Matt Keegan's work, with its precise lines and hard edges, reveals the artist's conceptual clarity. Mixing words and images with recurring voids in serial patterns and compositions, Keegan emerges from a generation of artists of the '60s, most notably Joseph Kosuth, who gave precedence to the notion of art-as-idea. Yet, while Kosuth strove to eliminate ethnicity, gender, or eroticism from his work, Keegan aims to reinsert these particularities. *Humberto, Humberto, Humberto* (all works 2007)—a life-size cutout of a male silhouette constructed of multiple C-prints—has a smaller cutout of the same form in lieu of the face. The title evokes the protagonist of Nabokov's *Lolita*, but Keegan's contemporary Lothario figure is ambiguous: he can be seen as either sexual predator or prey. The voided visage, infinitely repeating in a mise en abyme effect, is a site for substitution and can be filled by anyone. This aesthetic realization of the shifter, a linguistic sign that gains significance only because it is empty, motivates much

of Keegan's work, including *You, Me, I, We*, in which viewers are invited to become the subjects of personal pronouns, and *Good to See You*, where they are tempted to literally fill the work by, in this case, occupying the voids left by the cutout letters of the title phrase in the life-size installation. While acknowledging the viewer's role in imbuing art with meaning, Keegan nonetheless remains true to the tenets of Conceptualism, reasserting that the illusion of individuality is simply a function of language.

—NUIT BANAI

# NEW YORKER

## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Sept. 24, 2007 page 62

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### GALLERIES—CHELSEA

#### **MATT KEEGAN**

Classic Conceptualism gets a stylish update in Keegan's works, which rely for their considerable charms on text, photographs, and the X-Acto knife. Color photographs with excised elements are stacked to perceptually challenging effect. The relationship between graphics and linguistics is explored in a grid of shadowy photograms. A drywall screen with the words "Good to See You" cut out of it bisects the gallery, and photographs of concrete fragments recall Smithsonian or Matta-Clark. Keegan's earnestness to show his whole hand at once can result in an overeager, unpruned display. But his rock-paper-scissors aesthetic tenderly pairs old and new forms. Through Sept. 29. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-924-7545.)

## ART PAPERS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2007



MATT KEEGAN  
NEW YORK

The work on view in Matt Keegan's one-person show *Any Day Now* is flat—silkscreens, photographs, paper-thin incisions in the surface layer of drywall, cut and layered or mounted and freestanding images [D'Amelio Terras; September 6—29, 2007]. It is flat in other ways, too. The phrases and words he chooses for his text works are those that have lost the roundness of meaning. His photographs—two, three or multiple shots of the same subject—are literal; they can only be described by describing what they depict.

All this flatness is about itself, or more precisely, about the deception of flatness. A deadpan presentation of everyday worn-down stuff, the exhibition constitutes a critique of the images and words we take for granted. His paper-thin works offer, in fact, a textured reading of our meaning-making and of the tools we wield in this enterprise.

At different places in the gallery, the letters M, E, N, repeat, inscribed in typeset on the walls in horizontal lines that form overlapping trapezoidal shapes. The generic noun "men" jumps from the pattern only to dissolve into a field of lines as the letters jumble and the cuts become less distinct. A deflated word re-forms, invisible and everywhere, and once-dormant connotations strain against its three-letter simplicity.

An eight-foot-tall accordion-like structure made from crudely cut, studded sheetrock spans the gallery's two central pillars. Here, the popular greeting "Good To See You" is cut out at eye level, each enlarged letter taking up a fold. As the viewer passes, the phrase unfolds rhythmically, echoing the musical way it is often delivered. Known as the socially savvy salutation—avoiding forgotten names and blurring the particulars of earlier meetings—this empty, boneless sentiment is here an actual screen.

These and other text-based works featuring similarly innocuous phrases flaunt their plainness and point to

language's inability to describe even the most basic stuff of life. "You and Me" appears out of a blizzard of overlapping typefaces in a series of monochrome silkscreens, unmoored and lost.

Keegan's untitled series of snapshot photocollages echoes his cuts in the gallery's surfaces. Each depicts a man casually seated in a chair, but Keegan has sliced into the picture's surface, removed his body, and filled the silhouette with random accumulations of image fragments. In one work, many legs fill the void: layered one atop the other, they kick in unison.

Keegan emphasizes the thingness of pictures as he gives physical form to overused words—to take issue with their descriptive capacity. He emphasizes the image's literal thinness by cutting and rearranging the material itself. In this, he points to the lack in portraiture. Angled in a gallery corner is the oversize cutout image of another young man seated in a chair. His irregular shape is mounted and precariously, but perfectly, balanced against the wall and floor by his elbows and the toe of a hush puppy. The man's face is excised and replaced by a to-size repetition of the cutout, a reiterative move that renders his features an indistinguishable blot.

At its best, Keegan's work has a slight presence that echoes the two-dimensionality of its content. This lack of fullness implies that something is missing—a feeling of absence that runs through the works in *Any Day Now*. The words and images that populate our everyday and attempt to define us come up short. With this show, he makes these plain things plainer, revealing that they are the most peculiar of all.

—Erin Shirreff

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Matt Keegan, *Untitled*, 2007, collaged c-prints, approx. image size: 7 x 5 inches; framed: 12.5 x 10.5 inches [courtesy of the artist and D'Amelio Terras, New York];

Matt Keegan's "Any Day Now" reviewed on Art Fag City



Matt Keegan, Work From Home 2007, collaged c-print, 8.5 x 9 inches, Image via D'Amelio Terras

Given the importance of narrative and representation to emerging and mid-career artists, we can expect to see text continue to play a more dominant role in art. For example, growing art star Matt Keegan's *Any Day Now* at D'Amelio Terras this month (through September 29th) includes a number of intellectually rigorous text based works inserted into gallery walls. Known for pairing words and images as method of investigating the experiential, the artist manipulates personal snapshots voiding the subject's identity, while creating drawings that employ nouns and pronouns as a point of figurative reference. Saul Chernick similarly investigates identity in his exhibition *Protosapia* at Max Protetch (through November 3). The treat in this work lies in part, in his virtuosity with line, evoking masters such as Albrecht Durer, Goya, and Rembrandt, but his exploration of creation myths, masculine identity, and pictorial narrative give the work weight and depth. Titled after the artist's name for a breeding ground of a new human species, *Protosapia*, examines sexual politics while asking the basic questions about our existence.

Without a doubt these two shows represent an incredibly rigorous intellectual studio practice, setting Chernick and Keegan apart from many of their contemporaries. While most artists need not be held to the kind of intellectual standards these two artists maintain, irony permeates the art world in such a way that it seems to keep artists from taking a stand on anything. Try naming even a few emerging artists who make overtly political work. Even professionals will have a hard time calling out those names. Feminist artists such as A.L Steiner, *The Brainstormers*, and Nicole Eisenman for example, are a rare breed in the contemporary art world, and suffer scrutiny for it. I know it sounds horribly unfashionable, but I'd really like to see a little more didacticism in art, particularly since a climate where this kind of expression is discouraged can be very harmful.