

MAX WIGRAM GALLERY

John Houck

ij

20th November 2013 – 18th January 2014

Private view: 19th November 2013

- Only that which is singular is desirable, and in this regard exceptional. I only desire what seems exceptional to me. There is no desire for banality, but a compulsion for repetition that tends to banality: the psyche is constituted by Eros and Thanatos, two tendencies that ceaselessly compose with each other. The cultural industry and marketing strive for the development of the desire for consumption, but in reality they strengthen the death drive to provoke and exploit the compulsive phenomenon of repetition. In this way they thwart the life drive. - Bernard Stiegler

Max Wigram Gallery is proud to announce the opening of *ij*, John Houck's first exhibition in the UK. Consisting of fourteen new works from the *Aggregates* series, the exhibition represents a new development in Houck's practice. A suite of seven large, chromatically subtle *Aggregates*, is interspersed by small scale works in saturated colours, in a rhythmic alternation of colour and size.

John Houck's practice is informed by an interest in the dialectic between desire and repetition in our hyper-industrialised culture. Houck refers in particular to Bernard Stiegler's notion that a loss of life-affirming desire or libido is connected to the repetition and loss of individuation that characterises our society. Houck explores these concerns through the combination of repetitive digital and analogue processes, as exemplified in the *Aggregates*. The title of the exhibition is a direct nod to this core theme of repetition, and to Houck's own experience as a software programmer: the letters "ij" are the first two variable names used in programming for a double nested loop, and the letter "i" specifically is a common variable name in computer science for iterative code.

Transcending medium definition, the *Aggregates* are the result of a complex synthesis of processes. They originate with an algorithm designed by Houck to produce all the possible combinations of colours inscribed in a set grid, resulting in thousands of configurations - stated in the works' titles, such as *Untitled #265, 331,775 combinations of a 2x2 grid, 24 colors*. These myriad combinations are turned into index sheets by self-authored software, printed, then creased, digitally re-photographed, and printed out again. Houck repeats these steps several times, and finally frames the prints mid-process, with one actual fold. The smaller *Aggregates* represent a further step in this process: their colours are sampled from the larger works, resembling a zoomed-in view on a single combination of the original grid.

Through this process, Houck layers intuitive and unpredictable elements onto an otherwise highly rational system. The digital camera itself produces a number of errors, which accumulate each time the print is rephotographed; remarkably, it creates a fringe of colour around each pixel, adding new chromatic gradients to the index sheets. This is exacerbated by the addition of three-dimensional creases, a gesture that further breaks up any visually logical system, creating an optical confusion akin to the camera's inaccuracies. The smaller works act as a magnifying glass: the coloured backgrounds recall the fringing occurring at pixel level in the matrix sheets, and the layering of shadows provides an extra chromatic dimension. Such complex stratification allows Houck to transform the non-dimensional into sculptural: the objecthood of the works in *ij* is re-affirmed by the fold that runs across six of the monochromatic *Aggregates*. Alluding to the space beyond the frame, it confers unity to the installation and activates the space of the gallery, breaking the hermetic nature of self-contained works of art.

This for Houck is a way to reclaim and alter the highly rational and repetitive systems that govern our lives, epitomised by the generative index sheet. In the *Aggregates*, the grid is interrupted by the desire to over-photograph, print, crease, and choose colours. With *ij*, Houck upholds individuality, desire, intelligence and joie de vivre and disrupts repetition, making this exhibition a testament to his belief that art is a way to provide an intensified form of attention that runs counter to our daily experience.

MAX WIGRAM GALLERY

John Houck (b. 1977 in South Dakota) lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent solo exhibitions include *A History of Graph Paper*, On Stellar Rays, New York, 2013; *To Understand Photography You Must First Understand Photography*, Kansas Gallery, New York, 2012; *Recursion*, Bill Brady/KC, Kansas City, 2012. His work has been included in exhibitions at Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris, 2013; Art in General, New York, 2010; The Kitchen, New York, 2010; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2007; Millennium Museum, Beijing, 2006; Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2006. In 2010 Houck participated to the Whitney Independent Study Program, New York.

[For further information, interviews, or images please contact Rebecca Gremmo on rebecca@maxwigram.com](mailto:rebecca@maxwigram.com)