



**Seth Price**  
**“Danny, Mila, Hannah, Ariana, Bob, Brad”**  
 MoMA PS1  
 03.06. – 05.09.2018

The forensic, high-sensor camera that Seth Price used to create this series of photographs has an edge on everyday vision: it displays tonal pitches outside the legible ledger line – the ultraviolet abrasions that we cannot see. Unlike telescopic imaging, his six large-scale portraits, titled with the first names of otherwise anonymous models, thus comprise only unrecognisable images of human flesh, which were realised with the help of satellite imaging software, 3D graphics, and a fashion retoucher. The synthetic images, printed on cloth

that was pulled across lightboxes, reveal in the etymological link between tapestry (stretched fabric) and tempo (stretch of time), stitching flashes of moments into quilted abscesses that become needlepoints of shared dislocation. His choice of technology points to a larger cultural exit from traditional photography: no longer is the telephoto lens used to reveal the detritus of the real and maximise what was once invisible. Instead, today’s satellite magnification makes the visible become hyper-visible, and what is invisible, immaterial, and atomic is repressed again. We’ve replaced the vision of autopsy (seeing through one’s own eye) with techno-optics (seeing through human and digital eyes at once).

There’s no longer a singular macropanopticon that spurs a dialectics of recognition enacted on a microscale, only one macro-micro instant replay, pre-filtered for the voyeur within. The self surveys itself in a mass solipsism. By using post-photographic technology against itself, Price reveals the obscene, off-frame of contemporary perception and his portraits arrive at a time when the selfie has seemingly culminated the history of portraiture in retrospective museum shows that teeter on the inane. What could a portrait mean – or matter – in this moment of peak connectivity, over documentation, and hyper-representation? What is the artist’s way of asserting a skewed angle onto a world that has lost the pathos of distance,

Photo: Ron Amstutz, Courtesy the artist and Perzel, New York

Seth Price, “Danny, Mila, Hannah, Ariana, Bob, Brad”, 2018, exhibition view

the bank signature, and the *rückenfigur* avatar to stand in for the gaze? For now, the signature has been replaced by DNA-swiping touch identification, and Price presents what a next level portrait could be: the scopophilic scores of our bite-sized Thumbelina panopticon. If paint, the alphabet, and the pixel were the last-ditch efforts to graft an affect of distance, they have now been erased by a hyperreal social media that claims pure presence of sensation without the mediation of generic mediums. No more can we look to the modernist grey area of depersonalised, formalised blur. Instead we’ve been overwhelmed with an under-formalised regime that allows tags to triumph over fragmentation. We’re trapped in a hell of unbreakable connectivity that keeps all the part-objects and phantom limbs together via a hierarchy of likability. Price’s portraits show the viscera that lies beneath the intractable social surface. He denudes the nude and finds layers of stubborn human data that match our desire for formless multimedia utopia with the indelible fact of undying alphanumeric form. Following Kant, nature became beautiful when it “denuded the appearance of art”; Price has denuded the *appearance* of surveillance forensics, creating a thing of beauty. In this series, Price pitches the towering inferno of “glowing” humane warmth as miniscule patches of flesh. Like Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* camera trick (zoom in, dolly out), we peer in so close that we find ourselves dangling off the ledge of vertiginous high-density scratches. Price is, in this way, in the avant-garde tradition of Luther Price, Stan Brakhage, and Carolee Schneemann – artists who let the materiality of the body speak for itself. However, our contemporary digital universe has a new anti-bject understanding of body: Instagram filters create hyper-smooth skin, akin to Price’s earlier use of vacuum-formed plastic packaging. Today’s social body is stuck in a tutorial towards purification, normalisation, and spot removal. Price’s alternate form to social media shows instead the brute materiality of memory and optics, no matter how illusory and grotesque, abstract and perverse. **Felix Bernstein**

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