

## SPIKE

**Charlotte Prodger and Jason Loebs***Essex Street, New York  
21.7.–19.8.2012*INDIREKTE PORTRÄTS

Few gallerists branch off from the preordained, inflated Orchard Street real estate and into the wilds of Chinatown – and for good reason. Jumping over a pool of fetid »Chinatown juice« and walking past the Japanese joint whose owner is known to have the sushi rolling skill set of a toddler, one finds the gallery Essex Street (now located on Eldridge Street) two blocks west of the far less odoriferous Orchard. I'm greeted by Essex Street's owner Maxwell Graham, one of the more loquacious dealers in Manhattan. Graham, who started his career by curating group shows at the TriBeCa gallery Renwick, is liable to regale his visitors with stories ranging from Robert Smithson and Mel Bochner's *The Domain of the Great Bear*, 1966, to the dearth of new takes on pornography in fine art.

Essex Street's summer exhibition, a dual showing of the Glaswegian Charlotte Prodger and the New York-based Jason Loebs, evinces the dealer's tendency to pair seemingly disparate practices to great effect. The exhibition presents five sumptuous pastel-colored digital prints by Loebs of the backs of credit cards, seemingly ready to be plucked off the wall and stuck into a collector's SUV, while Prodger offers the less salable combination of a video installation comprising two Hantarex monitors, a vintage boombox, a newsprint leaflet, and a 16mm film splitter installed on the gallery wall.

Loebs's series of credit cards began as an attempt to document the contents of his wallet, the impetus of which, in the artist's words, was »to produce some archive of the material we move through the world with on our bodies«. Loebs predicts the obsolescence of the credit card, itself an abstract mode of commerce, and its replacement with even more immaterial payment sources – such as the Bitcoin or Google Wallet. While considering the obsolescence of traditional forms of commerce and new modes of information dispersion is something of a vogue task today, as popularized by Seth Price, among others, Loebs diversifies his photo-documentation project by weighting it with the concerns of self-portraiture. The signature in this work bears a dual function: it acts both as a security measure proving the identity of the card user and as the artist's signature, proof of the artwork's authenticity.

Prodger's videos rip footage from the YouTube account *nikeclassics*, featuring ritualistic acts involving collectable Nike sneakers overlaid with audio reciting the YouTube channel's comments as well as queer diaristic passages. One video appears to depict a young man deconstructing his cherished sneakers, cutting them in half and ripping off leather details – a not-so-subtle metaphor for the »deconstructive« aspects of Structural film, such as Tony Conrad's landmark 1966 film *Flicker*, which the artist makes specific reference to. In another film, two young men in track pants and Nike sneakers gingerly play footsy, the footage becoming more sexualized and fetishistic in nature as it goes along. Indicative of the type of comments recited is the following gem by YouTube user *wettrev*, apparently a wet clothes fetishist: »Should both play in the mud or water in those nikes and trackies too – squash each others nikes into the water«. Prodger's highly collectable Sharp GF 767 boombox is meant to act as another fetishized object removed from its original purpose, a medium on the verge of extinction.

Both Prodger and Loebs succeed in expanding discussions surrounding the obsolescence of analog media and material commerce by connecting these with issues concerning identity – queer identity, in the case of Prodger, and the artist's identity, in the case of Loebs. Though both artists' works may be encumbered by a few extraneous allusions, the combination of Prodger and Loebs is a welcome, fresh perspective in a neighborhood on the verge of becoming staid itself.

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Exhibition view / Ausstellungsansicht  
»Charlotte Prodger and Jason Loebs« Essex Street, New York 2012