SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 The Legacy of Narcissus, Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, Texas

2018 The Light of Other Days, Hooke-Epstein Galleries, Houston, Texas

2017 The Space Between Grief and Morning, Art League Houston, Houston, Texas

2014 Read All About It (Collective Exhibition: 6 Solo Exhibitions), FotoFest 2014, Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston, Texas

2010 Mediation, Wagner Scosa Modern Art, Galveston, Texas

2009 On Joy: On Somnus, Houston Center for Photography, Houston, Texas

2006 Intervital Spaces, Middleton-McMan Gallery, The Light Factory, Charlotte, North Carolina


2002 Blurred Boundaries, Gallery 101, Houston, Texas

2000 Fashion-Accessories, FotoFest 2002, Vince Street Studios, Houston, Texas

1996 Image as Word, Project Row House, Houston, Texas

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019 Experimental Film & Video 2019, CICA Museum, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea

2018 India: Contemporary Photography & New Media Art, FotoFest 2018, Houston, Texas

1996 J Sigalakasi-Boma, Palazzo Vela Exhibition Hall, Rome, Italy

1996 Anglo-Hughes Gallery, London, United Kingdom (Traveling)

What’s Right, What’s Left: Democracy in America, Phoenix Gallery, New York, New York

1995 Sightlines, Kendall College of Art & Design, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Center Forward, The Center for Fine Art Photography, Fort Collins, Colorado

1994 Mess With Texas, Aurora Picture Show, Houston, Texas

Snap to Grid, Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, Los Angeles, California

1993 Texas Biennial, Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas

2002 Houston Center for Photography, Carol Crow Memorial Fellowship, Beaumont, Texas

2015 Art Prize 7, Time-Based Media, Jurors Selection, Houston, Texas

2015 Faculty Development Leave Grant, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas

2013 Merit Award, Artists and Creative Individuals Grant Recipient, Houston Arts Alliance, Houston, Texas

2012 Emerging Artist Fellowship Grant, Cultural Arts Council of Greater Houston and Harris County, Houston, Texas

PUBLIC ART PROJECTS

2019 George Bush Intercontinental Airport, United Airlines Terminal, Houston, Texas

2016 City of Houston, Wayfinding Project, Houston, Texas
The Legacy of Narcissus

PRINCE VARUGHESE THOMAS

On view September 22 - December 1, 2019

PRINCE THOMAS:

THE VIRTUES OF VARIOUSNESS

In its impressive range of mediums and formats (video, drawing, text art, photography, interactive audio installation, photomontage) and in its equally expansive and inclusive scope of subject matter (identity in all its complexity, war, mourning, landscape, current politics), the work of Prince Thomas reminds us that the practice and function of art, the job description of “artist,” are very much in flux. While his work is keenly aware of art-historical precedents, and, in fact, is constantly finding ways to connect with art history, he has developed a practice that is emphatically contemporary. Much of the work in “The Legacy of Narcissus,” for instance, is concerned with the impact of social media on our society, and in previous work Thomas has often zeroed-in on the impact of journalism (as in a series of striking videos about how CNN and the 24-hour news cycle emerged via spectacular coverage of the First Gulf War).

Like a number of other contemporary artists (Trevor Paglen, Hito Steyerl and Paul Chan come to mind), Thomas configures the artist as a skeptical media watchdog over the more insidious forms of manipulation and propaganda. Of course, there have long been artists who criticized their society through satire and protest, from Goya to Käthe Kollwitz to Thomas自己 rarely points to social media or political themes. Rather, he prefers to leave such conclusions to his viewers. He is an artist who points to the serious artistic achievements of history and the debased, commercialized instant language of today to his viewers. He is an artist who proceeds without preconceptions, he is to type away at a laptop keyboard. First and foremost, he is an artist who points to the material that I use to make an artwork or what medium is best to translate an idea.”

So, what are we to make of Thomas’s frequent conflation of past and present? In the present exhibition, examples of this strategy can be seen in the marriage of Old Master paintings and YouTube stars in Masters of the Universe, and in the melding of William Morris wallpaper designs and statements from the Trump Administration in What Are Words For. At first it might seem as if Thomas is using the past to draw a contrast between the serious artistic achievements of history and the debased, commercialized instant language of today’s digital technology. But his transhistorical perspective could also be seen as arguing for continuity, and maybe even equivalence, between past and present. By his own account, Thomas does not intend any value judgment in his juxtapositions of old and new, nor in his works on political themes. Rather, he prefers to leave such conclusions to his viewers. He is an artist who points to things rather than preach about them.

When asked about the variousness of his practice, Thomas points to his background as an Indian national who was born in Kuwait and then became a naturalized U.S. citizen. He also cites his university studies, which encompassed philosophy, history and computer science, eventually leading to a degree in psychology (he only discovered art by chance during his final semester as an undergraduate). In interesting ways, Thomas’s multi-national, multi-disciplinary background makes him ideally suited to be a contemporary artist. His practice is nomadic and adaptive. As he explained to me in a recent email, “the idea dictates the material that I use to make an artwork or what medium is best to translate an idea.”

Of course, this flexibility has everything to do with how innovative technologies are constantly eroding traditional boundaries between mediums, and, giving birth to new forms of communication. And yet, Thomas is very far from being a technophile artist. Perhaps aware of the cautionary tale of the Italian Futurists whose mania for the new led them into the arms of Mussolini, Thomas hasn’t succumbed to the seductive promise, the sheer excitement, of technology; he is as likely to pick up a stick of charcoal as he is to type away at a laptop keyboard. First and foremost, Thomas is an artist who proceeds without preconceptions, and in that spirit that we must come to his work.

Raphael Rubenstein, September 2019

Raphael Rubenstein is a New York-based poet and art critic.

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