

## ALLAN McCOLLUM



Allan McCollum, "Plaster Surrogates," Installation, Metro Pictures, 1984

Psychoanalytically speaking, it is understood that the desirous subject does not pursue a real object; this subject is actually aiming at an imaginary object (absent object, lost object) through which the real objects become just so many lures, rendered indefinitely replaceable by their substitutive qualities. If the skoptophilic impulse, by definition, keeps a distance separating the source of this impulse from its object, then one might say that, unlike orality or anality, the need to see metaphorically becomes a "figure for the absence of its object," as Christian Metz has noted. Then, the subject's compulsion becomes that of perpetually seeing a real object renewed/represented – a little like the way color slides in a carousel are constantly changing – instead of the unattainable imaginary object. If the visual arts are founded in this gap... on the character of exchangeable signifiers of their representations, on their quality as perpetual surrogates which open into the imaginary before closing down into their nature as things... we might claim that the "false paintings" of Allan McCollum present themselves as pure signifiers of an absence for which no image could be substituted.

Displayed on the walls (which it envelops *in toto*), an "arrangement" by McCollum is composed of an infinity of "false pictures" containing insignificant variations. Each arrangement, endlessly recreated according

to the wall spaces offered to the artist, presents itself as the equipment of pictorial representation: the painted frame, the white matte which usually separates the frame from the painting, a black rectangle replacing an image - an image represented by its absence. As such, the simulacrum of McCollum appear as signifiers of signifiers, surrogates of surrogates, free of any iconographic referents. They work, in their total equivalence, as a metaphor for the fetishistic function of the icon normally placed within the picture frame. Or as McCollum has said: "...I think I can transform the seemingly innocent act of looking at art into a slightly nightmarish duplication of itself."

If we leave the psychoanalytic field for the social arena and its representations, McCollum's "false pictures" work as metaphors for the function of cultural objects in our society, where each simulates an autonomy and authenticity and whose exchange value reduces it to a generalized equivalence. McCollum stages for us the grand ritual funeral of the accumulation of legitimizing signs – legitimization of power, of wealth, or of social status – and of its reversibility. As proliferate and repetitive as any commodity, McCollum's objects end up by repeating themselves only as pseudo-events and manifestations of the death wish.

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*Translated by Judith Aminoff*