

Gareth James continually challenges normative procedures of art making and reception. Following in the footsteps of Duchamp, institutional critique cohorts such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, and John Knight, as well as Guy Debord and Situationist ideology, James's methodology varies but can always be considered iconoclastic. Perhaps not just destroying images, he reveals a larger one, hence exposing institutional and economic networks and their latent agency otherwise inchoate to the public. Many times he introduces the in situ framing involving the gallery and gallerist and has even performed works which develop diachronically throughout the course of a given time period, puncturing unquestioned procedures which have become neutralized, such as the usual month long exhibition, the artist as the singular knower and bearer of meaning, promotional material being outside and unrelated to the gallery space, the distinction between the market and historical criticism, and so on.



In an exhibition called Break Even, at Andrew Roth Gallery, the press release explains “Gareth James and Nicolás Guagnini proposed that the gallery place a full-

page, blank advertisement in the 2006 summer issue of Artforum. They invited seven well-known artists to intervene on the blank ad. The seven original works constitute a “deluxe edition.” The balance of the print run of Artforum is considered the “popular edition.” The profit from the sale of the “deluxe edition” will be divided between the invited artists and the gallery.

The art magazine has become a socially acceptable political platform for representing and staging a conflict of interests that remains unspoken while being obvious. Break Even claims that the ability to convert symbolic capital into financial capital – which in fact sustains the economy of the art magazine – is a means of production; and as such, the artists have taken it upon themselves to use the magazine as a site, a catalyst and a recipient for devising a work of art and an exhibition, hence creating value on their own terms.



By advertising nothing in Artforum and using that blank space in the magazine as a site of production (bypassing editorial criteria) the work of Guagnini and James collapses the traditional roles of the artist, the dealer, and the curator, and makes apparent the relationship between discourse, art, and advertising.”

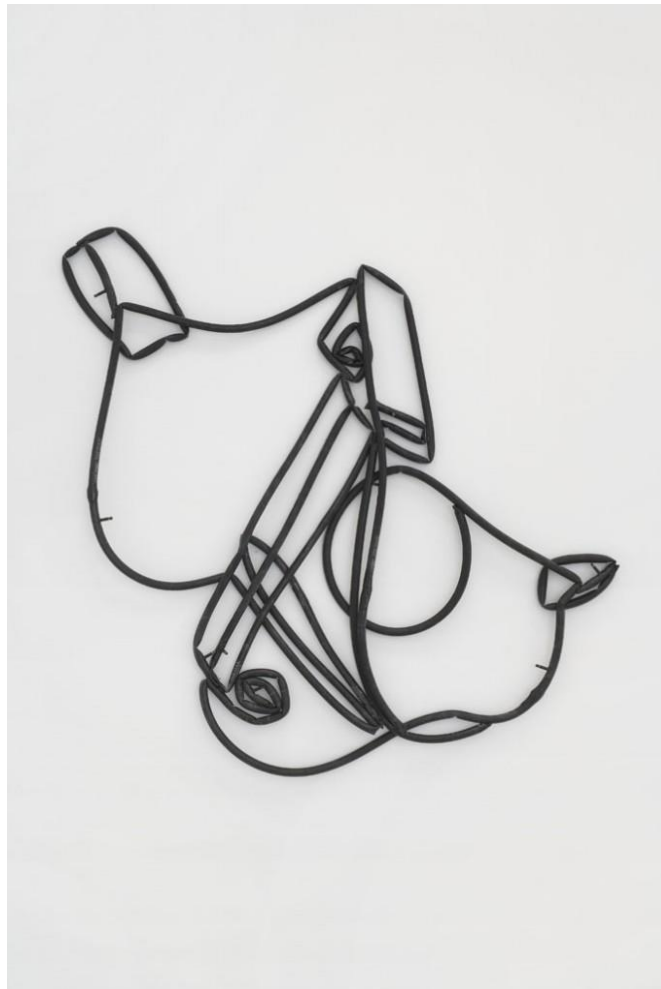


When James was first invited to show at Elizabeth Dee gallery he proposed for the historian and educator David Joselit to attend every exhibition that year and be paid to produce "a short text over which Dee would have no editorial control" and whose subject "would not be determined in advance" - ostensibly a response addressed to the gallery and to what he had encountered there. At the end of this cycle James used this text as a running subtitle for an excerpted and détourned part of *Manderlay*, a movie by Lars Van Trier. The movie and running text were only exhibited for a short five days in the gallery, emphasizing the importance of the whole interaction between artist, gallerist, and critic from the very beginning. The complete work addresses issues of the

usual instrumentalisation of the paid critical historian and their somewhat hidden role in the symbolic production of valuable artistic culture. The conflation of criticality and the usual relationship between gallerist and artist is inconspicuously explored throughout a whole season of typical display, culminating into a cryptic and co-authored work that would usually find itself in a critical book or magazine. The distinctions of different audiences, whether regular walk-ins during the normal exhibition display, followers of a well-accredited writer with a very specific audience, or amongst internal gallery agreements and relations is poignant. Joselit's readers join the local audience of the artist James, which are then connected to the community of Dee's artists and then the larger interest represented by fans of Von Trier's film, and so on. These fragmented audiences are at least rhetorically brought together; creating collisions of typical contexts and disrupting neutralized notions of audience reception, readership, and accessibility.



At Galerie Christian Nagel, James exhibited a stolen bicycle along with the details necessary for its owner to claim it, inviting a conflict between the owner and the collector who bought the artwork. In an interview he states “I considered this work incomplete until someone bought it: it only gets interesting when it bifurcates ownership: there is the owner of the bicycle and the owner of the work of art. Once this occurs, it is no longer a case of the object reverting back to its “proper” expressive, communicative relation to the world, but of considering expression as a binding of objects and worlds. Clearly, the bicycle cannot return to the world of riding untouched by having been an artwork, and the world of art, bereft of its bicycle, is marked by this happy new negative presence. It has more than one bicycle after all.”



A starting point for another body of work is a diagram used by the famous Marxist theorist Louis Althusser. Althusser is famous for his theories of ideological state apparatuses, which proclaims the capitalistic interpellation of individuals becoming a shaped subject by the socio-economic relations in which they are a part of. James had found Althusser's diagram while researching his theories yet hadn't a clue what it meant. After further research, even contacting friends of Althusser, he came up short with its meaning, yet decided to center a show around this non-meaning and lack of knowledge, disrupting the usual pretense of interpretive stability and authorship. Repeating this meaning and using inner bicycle tubing connects this new symbol, more of an anti-symbol really, with his previous work using the stolen bicycle. Other gestures such as vandalizing gallery windows, forcing them to be removed, and replaced out of the gallerist's own pocket, or using bubble wrap as pedestals are all reminders of the economic maintenance which is usually taken for granted in the art context.

Gareth James's work operates in a becoming space of performativity and criticality, involving the capitalist structures, which inflate the work of art into a speculative instrument complicit with class hegemony. His formalism exceeds any object and considers the power structures he is working in. Using materials with a specific history of their own and breaking away from artistic notions of purity and autonomy, James actually re-claims critical autonomy with his hyper awareness of the ideologies he is taking part in. He problematizes notions of identity and incorporates the before and after exchanges of an artwork, dismantling the pure ideal space of contemplation and asking what that space dialectically entails in the material world and why that social space may exist in the first place.

