

Matthieu Laurette: Yvon Lambert

ArtForum, Summer, 2005 by Jean-Max Colard

More than video, photography, or any other medium, Matthieu Laurette's favored mode of appearance is, precisely, the appearance. This tautology says a good deal about his art of endless refraction, a self-reflective oeuvre that nevertheless takes on, perhaps not the lowest forms, but in any case the least reputable ones in the realm of television and media, from talk shows to celebrity gossip. It's not surprising to have seen his appearance--excuse me, exhibition--at Yvon Lambert open with some man-in-the-street interviews: Made with a team from NOATV, the local cable access network in New Orleans, *The Louisiana Repo-Purchase*, 2003-2004, shows passersby being asked to sign a petition to keep France from buying back the Louisiana territories: "That's ridiculous!" "We don't like Louisiana, so sell it!" "Yes, I want to sign that. We live here now, and we're here to stay." The video turns into a documentary on the difficulty of French-American relations in the wake of the war in Iraq: "It's sometimes easier to talk about real issues in a playful way," the artist himself has said. "People can listen more easily because you don't frighten them with ideologies."

If Laurette places trust in television--something rather unexpected these days--it's because he has been able to make it his tool and his workplace. The proof comes with his recent *Apparition: The Today Show*, NBC, December 31, 2004. That day, in front of Rockefeller Plaza, where the network has an outdoor set and where hundreds of people brandish signs and posters, wave, send personal messages, and moan in collective hysteria as soon as the camera gets them in a shot, we suddenly see a sweet little pink poster: GUY DEBORD IS SO COOL! A fifty-nine-second appearance, enough time to send a message to television about television, enough time above all to broadcast on-screen an obviously inoffensive critical discourse: Reference to Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) has today become the custard pie of media studies, the most worn-out cliché of all discourse on (or against) the media.

Next comes the highlight of the spectacle: the celebrity appearance. As he'd done before--at openings at the ICA in London (for the show "Publicness" in 2003), at the Castello de Rivoli in 2001 (for "Form Follows Fiction"), and for the exhibition "Au-dela du spectacle" (Beyond the Spectacle) at the Centre Pompidou in 2000--to make *Deja-vu: The Seventh International Look-Alike Convention* at Dia 's Fall Gala, 2004, the artist invited look-alikes of famous people to mix with the art-world crowd who had come to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Dia Art Foundation. Look-alikes of Robert De Niro, Whoopi Goldberg, and Howard Stern, among others, were photographed, notably, alongside the real Lou Reed.

Beyond playing on the true and the false, Laurette's "performance" can be seen as an

institutional critique, as an investigation of context via the mise-en-scene and mise en abime of the social dynamics of the spectacle, and as an examination of relationships between the art world and the celebrity system--all in three easy steps. In a surprising and symptomatic reversal, the exhibition itself, with its posters, publicity glossies, and "making of" video, took the form of a media event. Marshall McLuhan is so cool!

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

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