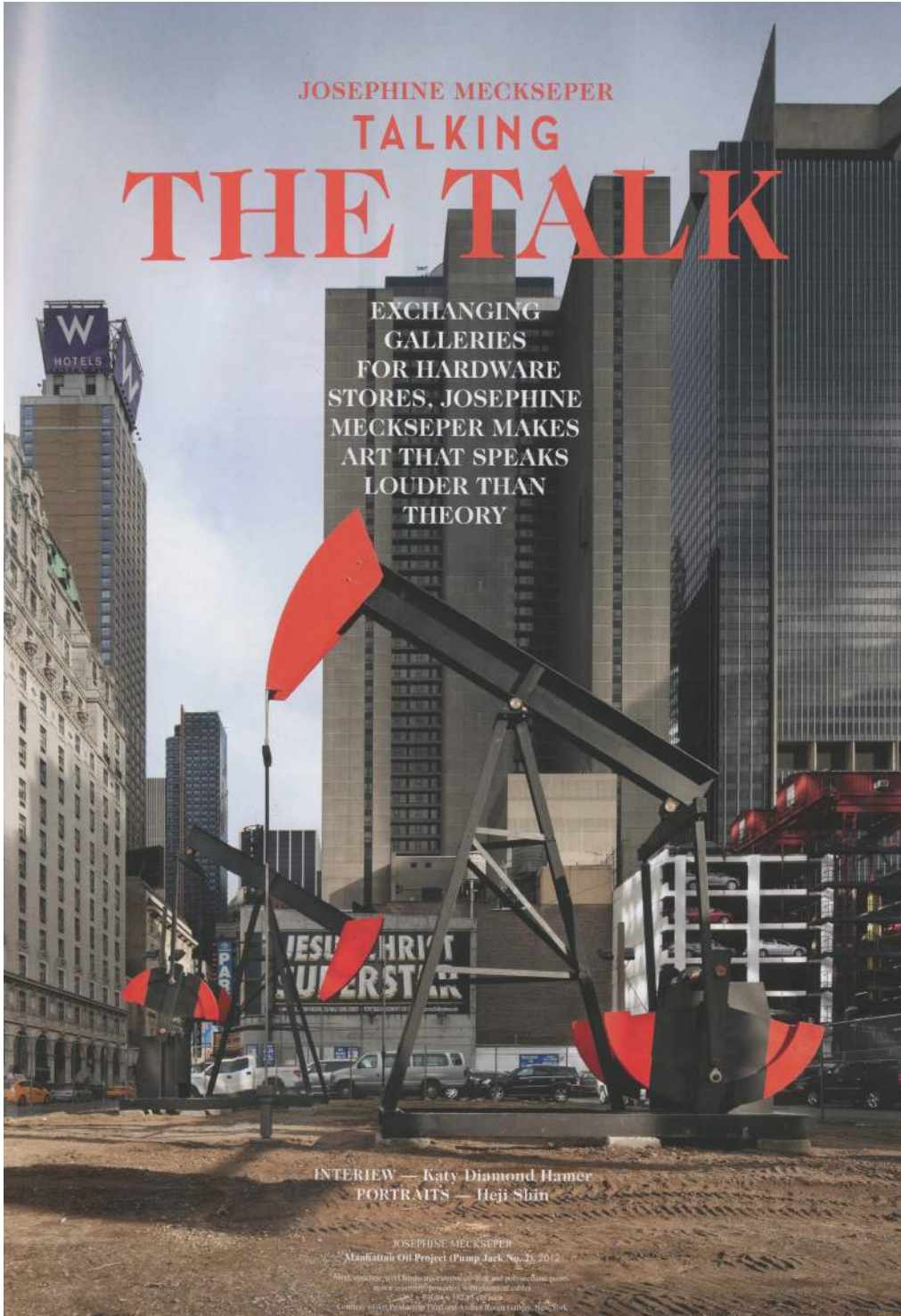


# sleek



Submission, 2015

Acrylic sheeting, mirror polished stainless steel, PVC blinds, paper, LED light, blackened, patinated, aluminium frame  
125.1 x 125.1 x 6.4 cm  
Copyright the artist, New York  
Courtesy Timothy Taylor, London  
Photo: Delfaanc Photography, London



In 1916 the German philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote a bizarre theological essay called "Language as Such and the Language of Man", in which he claimed that everything in the world speaks a language. Lamps, chairs, foxes, mountains, they all partake in the "magical immediacy" of expression. The only difference, he said, is that human language is verbal, whereas the language of, say, a coffee press, is shown through its transcendental energy that people transform into words.

And although it might sound strange, the work of German-born artist Josephine Meckseper also speaks this silent, mystic idiom. In her recent solo show in London, her works seemed to be talking to visitors as well as to each other. At the centre of the room, the angular sculpture "Empire", made from steel racks, points to a denim canvas with a pair of jeans attached to it, and "Becket", a tribute to the Sixties film about the medieval English prelate made from acrylic, neck ties, LED lights and toilet rug fabric. Dented, stained, scratched and worn, these pieces communicate aspects of the social relations that produced them, and are a thematic continuation of Meckseper's previous work.

For example, her 2009 film "Mall of America", interrogated politics and capitalism through footage of shopping centres, protest demos and military manoeuvres and installations. Another consistent aspect of her practice is her fixation with glass, which functions as both a frame and a symbolic threshold



between the real world and her art. Today, her work operates in a less direct fashion, but it still functions via the juxtaposition of the object and the image in order to question the world in which it exists.

Originally from the bohemian town of Worpswede in Lower Saxony, she has lived in the US since moving to California to attend CalArts in 1992, but currently resides in New York, from where Sleek met her to talk about her background, theories and latest exhibition.

**SLEEK: Your hometown is famous for being a home for artists. Did it influence your practice?**

**JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER:** Yeah, it became an artist colony at the beginning of the twentieth century, and you can see that in its combination of Jugendstil, German Expressionist and Modernist architecture. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a book about it and Werner

Fassbinder shot one of his films there. But also the political climate of the Seventies had a bigger influence on me, especially when the Baader-Meinhof group began revolting against corporate capitalism. One of my first videos shot in the US is a documentation of a 24-hour happening, coinciding with the Rodney King riots on a rooftop in Los Angeles. The idea was to occupy a space, and inhabit it through deliberate action and accumulation of spatial and filmic materials introduced by the group members. It was vaguely based on the concept of the Situationist International, who advocated experimentation with the construction of situations, namely setting up environments as alternatives to capitalist order.

**You often use glass display cases in your work, as in your 2010 film Mall of America. Why?**

For me shop windows and vitrines reflect the role of the artist in our

current consumer society and point to the instability of capitalism. The pairing of oppositional voices, such as advertising language and protest signage, was a crucial factor in the conceptualisation of many of my displays, and the window installations are intended to look like protest 'targets'.

In terms of Mall of America, the idea was to document the iconography of US consumer rituals amid the recession and military expansion. In some scenes, the camera zooms in and out of the mall before focusing on an aviation store or military recruiting station. It also features military footage, which enhances the disillusioned atmosphere of the mall. The paradox presented in the video recalls Karl Marx's prediction that capitalism cannot perpetually sustain the living standards of the population because of its need to compensate for deteriorating profit margins by decreasing wages, cutting social benefits and practising military aggression.

**Compared to previous exhibitions, your current solo show at Timothy Taylor in London seems to have a limited palette. How come?**

This perception hinges on a piece called "Here and Elsewhere" from 2015. It's a shelf featuring liquor bottles with black and white labels, which is meant to be reminiscent of the monochrome palette of early cinema. Elsewhere in the show I also use objects and techniques that, in some instances, are



SCOTT & CO

references to films. These include "Becket" starring Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole, as well as Jean-Luc Godard's short "Film-Tract n° 1968", where he and French artist Gérard Fromanger filmed red paint dripping down a French flag, as an act of solidarity with leftist anti-government movements. There are also nods to the material aspect of analogue cinematography, too. Overall, I have an ambiguous relationship with colour. The problem with art is that it's so contained and specific that only a certain group of people have access to it, and taking the artiness out of art is something that interests me, which is why I'm always drawn to mundane objects.

**One such object in your retrospective is a pair of denim jeans. What is its function?**

The choice of ordinary materials is simply a fascination that I share with artists like Martin Kippenberger, who have used the most banal objects to get away from the exclusivity of art. So in my current show, this is manifested in the form of metal wall vitrines illuminated by fluorescent lights that contain jammed window blinds and toilet seat rugs, business ties, and a grey pair of denim jeans on a denim canvas. These denim objects reflect on social interactions within the art world and employ an object – in this



FILMTRACT NO. 1, 2015

Acrylic sheeting, acrylic paint, tape, vinyl, blackened, patinated, aluminium frame  
244.8 x 122.9 x 6.4 cm  
Copyright the artist, New York  
Courtesy Timothy Taylor, London  
Photo: DeLamie Photography, London

case pieces of denim stained with semen – to create a narrative rather than an image. Marcel Duchamp did something similar: in 1946 he made a painting called "Paysage fautif"

("Faulty landscape"), using a black piece of fabric and his semen. In my work, the denim didn't relate to a particular story – it's more about the act of me as an artist making decisions in a particular moment and specific environment. I chose to use denim because it's a fabric that could have been at someone's home. It's something most men wear, but then again, I could have just as easily chosen a bath towel.

# I'M INTERESTED IN NOTHING AND EVERYTHING. THIS INCLUDES POLITICS, ASTROPHYSICS, OR A TOILET BRUSH.

JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER

**Your work has a thread of humanity running through it.**

I'm interested in nothing and everything. This includes politics, astrophysics, or a toilet brush. Politics do of course play into my work because it shapes our lives. I've always been fascinated by artists and how they've made art in the midst of war. When I was in high school I studied Picasso's "Guernica" and the paintings of mangled veterans by Otto Dix from the 1920s. Indeed, today, the 'explicitness' of the human body in advertising can only be seen as symbolic of universal capitalist rhetoric. These elements are often present in my work but always with a theoretical and coded approach that shifts the focus to something that is slightly different. These references raise questions such as: "Does what we produce culturally have an accumulative aspect, or is it just a process without ultimate consequences?" In some ways, every object is also about the non-existence of that object.

**How do you conceive and produce your art?**

My work is fundamentally conceptual. There is no real formula, but I do work with different people in several parts of the world who help me realise some of them. I usually come up with too many ideas and then there usually isn't much time to produce them. But since I have worked with the same people for many years things can happen quickly. I'm pretty involved with every aspect, it's never something

that I just hand off to someone else. There are almost always new technical challenges that need to be resolved, and I also work with engineers and architects for site-specific works or large scale sculptures like the life size oil pump sculptures on Times Square. This technical interest in the way things are made is probably very German. There are several plumbing stores near my studio, specifically one right around the corner. In their display window, they have pipes, toilet seats and a yellow ad dating back to the 1960s of two women in the shower. I prefer to go to hardware stores than galleries. Any day I get to them is a good day.

JOSEPHINE MECKSEPER AT TIMOTHY TAYLOR RUNS UNTIL DECEMBER 12, 2015



Above  
Mall of America, 2009

Video  
12:52 min  
Copyright the artist  
Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York  
and Timothy Taylor, London