

## Détournements

Re-figuring slogans, advertising images, marketing campaigns or simply everyday commodities or mass-produced goods – since the early twentieth century, such artistic “détournement” has been used by many visual artists as a favoured means of expression.

In the wake of the *collage* experiments initiated by Braque and Picasso towards the end of 1911, and of Marcel Duchamp’s purposeful transgressions in 1913-1915, when he first introduced the so-called ready-mades which consisted in found objects, such as a bottle drying rack, a bicycle wheel or a urinal, that he chose for their aesthetic neutrality, artists have increasingly shifted away from classical means of visual expression – in particular, from those prescribed by tradition, chiefly oil painting, and from all the requirements of widely accepted artistic conventions.

For many of them, idea would now take precedence over form. Admittedly, in many cases, artists do not renounce altogether to the traditional visual arts language, which they sometimes even decide to re-embrace, but it should be noted that over the decades of the past century, most practices have been quickly and aggressively breaking away from such ‘archaisms’.

There are several reasons for this. First, the new visual approaches bring about virtually endless expressive possibilities that give totally free rein to those who explore them. While the ordinary functional use of most source materials employed may be clear to everyone, the artworks derived from them are inherently fully innovative thanks to the very gesture, the very idea that has been added to them, and inevitably put across a new meaning, often oppositional to the original message.

The term *détournement*, which was first coined by the Situationist International (SI, founded in 1957), a revolutionary group that sought to put an end to the dictatorship of commoditization, also often points to some kind of satirical parody that employs more direct reuse or faithful mimicry of the original objects or works. In this sense, the initial aim of and common denominator to all practitioners who express themselves through such culture jamming is the overcoming of art. *Détournement* as such should be contrasted with recuperation, in which works are themselves appropriated by mainstream media. The use of *détournement* by the American conceptual artist Barbara Kruger (1945) popularized the technique, which was at first readily associated with subverted advertising messages.

However, one cannot reasonably deny the legacy of the inchoate ideas to be found in Duchamp’s early concept of ready-made, that Pop Art later re-activated in an effort to take further the process of visual disincarnation of art objects. And it is also unthinkable to ignore the influence Marcel Broodthaers’ ideas have had on the praxis of current artists, in particular in their relationship to *détournement*. Following the lead of Magritte, Broodthaers diverted words and images so as to emphasize the “taste of the objects”, creating works half-way between sculpture and painting that engaged in a critical and poetical questioning tinged with forceful irony.

All these approaches aimed at reconsidering art gain a new resonance in the works of Nelly Agassi (1973), El Anatsui (1944), Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Mounir Fatmi (1970), David Mach (1956), Christian Marclay (1955), Carmen Perrin (1953) and Gal Weinstein (1973), some of whose “détourned” pieces are presented in this exhibition. Some artists use their body, sidetracking its energy for the sake of concept and of its result. Others, more environmentally-minded, make use of surplus, *assemblage*, recycling and recovery, as noble ways to implement *détournement* in order to substantiate their stance. Still others strive for the physical presence of vibration by deflecting the means of its expression. All of them, magicians of the earth, transcending the ordinary, conjure up grace from contingency.

Keitelman Gallery, 2012