

Mark Van Yetter

GETTING THE PICTURE

In 1929, German neurosurgeon Otfrid Foerster performed surgery on a conscious patient who during operation on his midbrain began to uncontrollably blurt puns and sound associations at the doctor. Though disjointed, the patient's utterances reflected an awareness of his condition as a subject undergoing surgery yet immediately proliferated into an unexpected series of connections through language and sound.

Thought of as the basis for metaphorical thinking, these leaps in logic rely on a kind of lateral deviation beginning at one subjective point and its departure into the realm of contingent associations æ surfing on coincidences, contradictions, reversals, and juxtapositions.

The work of artist Mark Van Yetter draws on these associative sequences, relating to the tipping point at which formalism becomes untethered to reveal multiple possibilities while referring to the underlying impossibility (absurdity) of its original premise.¹

This is where the construction and operations of a pun come into play æ the deliberate conflation and misuse of language, sounds, and symbols to logically improbable effect. Yetter's practice employs this strategy, pointing to a lexicon of staid art formalisms and the risky limit at which the very destabilizing maneuvers become an easily recitable pun.

¹ Known as Foerster Syndrome or *Witzelsucht* derived from the German *witzel(ei)* meaning pun or joke, and *sucht* meaning addiction or yearning.

Re: hey hey hey hey

Primarily a painter and draftsman, Yetter pulls from a range of intuitive and art historical styles, sometimes recalling the color and gesture of Eugene Delacroix or late Edgar Degas to the frenetic compositions of Georg Grosz and melancholic expressionism of Edvard Munch. Other times his work recasts elements of early conceptual art using language, installation, performance, and architecture. At play is an irreverent conflation of academic modern art and the historic avant garde rendered as a series of stylistic and representational cues. At the same time, there exists a subtle critique of our habitual fondness for legacies that have since receded over the horizon æ those appearing as one undifferentiated aesthetic off in the distance. Equal caution is given to emergent contemporary practices that are destined for the same fate.

His exhibitions consist of arrangements of seemingly mismatched work both in style and medium yet rooted in the practice of painting. These are spare constellations of painting, collage, drawing, watercolor, found object, word pieces, woodwork, and sculpture situated in considered spatial orientations. The early projects of expressionists and surrealists resonate in the arrangements; however, this could be a misperception constructed from the parallels, parallaxes and anachronisms Yetter convincingly presents us.

Re: sorry last time sent the unfinished here is finished

This is where the processes of metaphoric thinking enter as a means to connect unrelated and often contradictory information in a new

context. Yetter cites Arthur Koestler's book "The Act of Creation" (1964) as a reference to the way various types of analogical thinking subvert the rational and formally routine logic of everyday life.²

Just as Yetter's exhibitions consist of different series of object arrangements, the compositions and themes of his individual works continue these multidimensional relationships. To achieve this effect, he employs collage strategies and anachronistic period quotations to comprise coherent, presentable images to the viewer. The juxtapositions, however, are rife with oppositions, symmetries, and parallaxes. The painting "Anywhere" (2007) depicts a protest rally scene placing a Vietnam war veteran demonstrating in front a pastiche of German Reich architecture, the cornice of one building defaced by an incomplete graffiti tag. "Bourgeois" (2007) is an oil work on a misshapen piece of wood that extends the subject of 19th century bucolic revelers into a scene including a looming battleship on the horizon and a desert camel entering the scene.

As demonstrated here, Yetter's work is not one of reactionary aesthetics or modes but rather an attempt to articulate the contemporary moment with various urgencies of the past.

Waiting for the punch line

Referring to Martin Kippenberger's practice as an "infinity of anticipation", Yetter seeks to prolong the contradictory tensions in his work to an extreme, keeping the pun going as an continuing generative process without closure æproliferating and fugitive. It

²I have coined the term 'bisociation' in order to make a distinction between the routine skills of thinking on a single 'plane', as it were, and the creative act, which, as I shall try to show, always operates on more than one plane." Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*.

forestalls authoritative finality through constant interruption and transfers with humor as the intrinsic leveling device.

With the playful reworking of one word in the expression "laughter is the best medicine", Yetter explains how a proverb can profoundly turn on itself: "laughter is the only medicine". The macabre joke here is about the idea of closure is at odds (complicit) with what Koestler described as the ridiculousness of the punning patient "tied facedown to the operating table with his skull open." Laughing in the face of death.

In the performance piece "rhythm in chaos" (2006), Yetter is seen sitting at a drum set attempting to play a continuous beat. With his drumsticks slipping out his hands with each movement he is unable to complete a coherent run, yet in the fluidity of these accidents and flubs it has accomplished something else, a potential generative process.

Caracas Arepas Bar

Jean-Luc Godard's film "Pierrot Le Fou" (1965) uses the disjunctions and intrusions of mass culture and market in a narrative about the adventure of two characters whose lives are itinerant, fugitive, and on the make. As with Godard's earlier films there is a mixture of conflicting parody and tribute. Towards the end, the characters arrive at a roadside club called Marquise Dance Hall from where a sequence of relationship mix-ups and betrayals ensues.

Taking the name from the film, Yetter and his wife opened a short-lived business in Brooklyn, New York in 2005 called Marquise Dance Hall. A record store, bookstore, occasional gallery, studio, and hidden home, it was a situation in which the form and content operated at the bare formalisms of a store. It had an inventory of vinyl records and used books, opening hours, cash register, and some customers. At the same time it was a little bit more. It was an arrangement of a series of activities that intimated a certain sensibility: the avoidance of habitual practice without abandoning the premise.³

Perhaps there is still something in language, music, and art that could be a great beginning of an inappropriate pun. Always on the move. Perhaps then, it is not a stretch of the imagination that Marquise Dance Hall has now moved to Istanbul in some form and its former location in Brooklyn is now a fancy Venezuelan restaurant, Caracas Arepas Bar.

Howie Chen, 2009

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³ "They put up minds for sale on the market, everyone liked his own mind" is a Turkish phrase that Yetter references to an upcoming project.

