



NEW YORK

Hito Steyerl

Andrew Kreps Gallery // July 2–August 15

“HOW NOT TO BE Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational Installation” is a must-see, delivering a caustic yet funny upbraiding from the title alone. Steyerl pursues concerns of photographic representation that are arguably retardataire in today’s post-identity art world. The Berlin-based German-Japanese artist’s polemical works—like *Is a Museum a Battlefield?*, 2013, a recorded lecture-performance linking art patronage to the military-industrial complex, and *November*, 2004, a video tracing the disappearance of her activist friend Andrea Wolf—seem light-years removed from millennial artists’ obsession with Internet-branded digital imagery. The brilliance of *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013, the centerpiece of the exhibition, lies in how Steyerl twists the rhetoric of her detractors—and the formal signifiers of digital representation—to deliver an acerbic critique of their blind spots.

The 14-minute video delivers five lessons on invisibility from “how to make something invisible for a camera” to “how to become invisible by merging into a world made of pictures.” Narrated by a text-to-speech engine and a montage of digitally manipulated shots, the work traces the changing terms of photographic visibility, beginning with an analog-resolution target painted in a California desert for aerial military photography, decommissioned in 2006 because of the rising digital-resolution standard. “Resolution determines visibility,” the video argues, yet “the most important things” (love, war, capitalism, and, presumably, drones) remain invisible. Lesson 4 escalates the lecture’s speed and bile, claiming that factories, museums, gated-community dwellers, and being a woman over 50 makes one “invisible by disappearing”—the last a personal jab, considering the artist, born in 1966, is approaching this particular visibility expiration date. Amid animations of twirling figures in green-screen-colored burqas and the girl group Three Degrees performing “When Will I See You Again?” Steyerl’s video concludes with a spoken fantasy of disappeared people being the vectors who “prop up our digital world” and rogue pixels capturing a military plane and throwing glitter. Far from didactic, Steyerl’s video takes up the absurdity and hysteria of contemporary digital imagery, forcing us to confront its distortions. —Wendy Vogel

Hito Steyerl
Still from *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. HD video, 14 min.

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“Purple States”

Andrew Edlin Gallery // June 27–August 16

THIS GROUP EXHIBITION explores the still-controversial genre of outsider art and stakes a claim for its practitioners that is buoyed by this show’s strength. Artist-curator Sam Gordon envisioned it as the third iteration in a chain of “insider/outsider” conversations, following 1992’s “Parallel Visions” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and “Parallel Visions II” at New York’s Galerie St. Etienne in 2006.

While outsider art remains fraught with questions (Is the genre just an excuse for collectors to champion and sell the work of mentally disabled, unsavvy, or otherwise disadvantaged creators or, worse, to mythologize their “noble” disadvantage while reinforcing the distinction between outsider artists and other artists?), Gordon approaches the subject with sensitivity. He pairs works by celebrated outsiders with contemporary insiders to set up immersive dialogues that cram the small space. The duos are shown in close proximity, but picking out the matched works from the salon-style hanging arrangement frequently requires recourse to the checklist. For his part, Andrew Edlin has a vested interest in the genre: His company purchased the Outsider Art Fair in 2012, and many of the works come from the gallery’s inventory.

As an essay accompanying “Parallel Visions II” observed, Americans’ relationship to outsider art is even more uneasy than that of Europeans. We like the idea of untrained artists achieving success through ingenuity and gumption. But this doesn’t exactly square with the fundamental elitism of those who categorize an artist’s practice as outsider. The makers in this show range from folk artisans to the developmentally or mentally disabled (including several from the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland) to self-trained painters. But the in/out dichotomy is sometimes subverted, for example, in the partnering of John Lurie, the Lounge Lizards musician and ultimate downtown scenester, with the young painter Andrea Joyce Heimer, who is arguably his insider counterpart in this context.

There’s plenty of formal overlap between duos, and it’s easy to see the relationship between Sabrina Gschwandtner’s textile-like *Camouflage*, 2012, made from repurposed 16 mm film prints, and the Gee’s Bend quilt with which it’s linked. Yet by this same logic, the couplings can occasionally feel superficial. (Does the creepily whimsical, deeply private outsider Henry Darger really have much in common with the hyper-articulate, politically driven practice of Paul Chan?) But when they work, as in the pairing of Brian Belott’s *Bubbletag*, 2014, interwoven socks pressed in glass, with William Copley’s joyful *Super Bowl No. 2*, 1969, it’s magical. The works’ cumulative exuberance makes both pop from the wall, a kinship of sensibility rather than formal or process-based similarity. —Cat Kron

Installation view of “Purple States” at Andrew Edlin Gallery, 2014.

