



ARTIST

John Freyer

TITLE

Untitled

DATE

1995

DIMENSIONS

9.25 in H x 6.25 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 10 x 6.875"

CATALOGUE NUMBER

1999.049

CURRENT LOCATION

1620-24B

JOHN FREYER

BORN

1972

BIRTHPLACE

Syracuse, NY

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Employee/Associate, 1996 – 1998
Lab Manager Light Work Hallway Gallery, 2002
Book Collectors Program, 2004
Urban Video Project, 2011
Artist-in-Residence, 2013

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 122
Contact Sheet 173
Contact Sheet 177

BIOGRAPHY

John D. Freyer is an interdisciplinary artist working at the crossroads of photography, video, audio and performance – both on the internet and in real-world exhibits and installations. Broadly speaking, his work explores the role of everyday, personal objects in our lives – as commodities, fetishes, totems and touchstones. He is interested in systems of exchange – how the circulation of objects and stories enriches social ties between individuals and groups. Past projects include *All My Life For Sale*, in which he sold everything he owned on eBay and then travelled the country visiting its new owners, and *Second Hand Stories*, a documentary video in which he toured the U.S. investigating second-hand practices and economies.

His work has evolved recently from a focus on objects-as-commodities and how and for whom they acquire value – monetary or otherwise – towards the human flow of memories and stories, especially across generations. Becoming a parent and being faced with the reality of his own parents' aging has led to an interest in how domestic spaces and objects shape identity within a family. His most recent exhibitions; *Dress Up* as part of the Urban Video Project in Syracuse, NY and *Almost Home* at Viterbo University in Lacrosse WI, both address objects, domestic space and family identity.

ESSAYS

Trying to categorize the artistic work of John Freyer is not a simple task. He can be considered part story teller, part cultural anthropologist, part photographer, part filmmaker, and part performance artist with an insatiable passion, or perhaps more appropriately, obsession, with the 'American Roadscape.' Since graduating from college, Freyer's fascination with the open road has sent him, and various accomplices, on numerous trips across the country in search of new encounters and experiences. On one such journey, using the pretense of seeking out the best bacon cheeseburger in the country--purported to exist at the Uptown Grill in Utica, NY--Freyer and two of his friends traveled across the country collecting images, mementos, and stories of their journey. In an effort to share the experiences of this journey, as well his other travels, Freyer produced a series of limited edition books made in collaboration with the other artists and writers he traveled with. In an interview he once said, 'I like telling stories often more than once...maybe my friends got so sick of hearing my stories that I had to find a new audience.' In 1995, Freyer launched the website which served as an open repository for past, present, and future projects, as well as an open invitation for others to participate in his ongoing adventures and travels. In 2000, while attending graduate school at the University of Iowa, Freyer conceived one of his most ambitious projects, *All My Life for Sale*. The project was based on the premise that if one was defined by their possessions, what would happen if they no longer possessed these objects, and how would these objects then alter the lives of their new owners. With the assistance of a group of friends, he systematically tagged and inventoried virtually every object in his apartment. Over the course of the next six months, Freyer turned the selling of his life into an art project on the internet auction site eBay. In most online auctions communication between buyer and seller ceases after the transaction is completed. For Freyer, this is the point where it became interesting. Many of the high bidders provided him with updates on the objects they purchased. 'I thought about all of the places my stuff had gone that I had never seen,' Freyer states. He was soon mapping out a trip across the county in an attempt to visit the individuals who bought his once cherished possessions. *All My Life for Sale* evolved into a media sensation with stories appearing in numerous publications including the London Times, New York Times, and Newsweek. Freyer was featured on National Public Radio, Good Morning America, and Late Night with Conan O'Brien. The project culminated with a book published by Bloomsbury Press and a possible movie deal. In the course of his travels Freyer began to produce a series of elaborate video animations under the title *motion_pictures*. In this work the artist created several short video loops of particular scenes, and then reassembled these segments to form a completed image, with each segment playing independently of the next. The scenes go from a quiet moment overlooking a field of tulips with Niagara Falls in the background, to a chaotic activity of New York City's Times Square, to a view of Times Square from the New York New York Casino in Las Vegas, NV, and then back to a view from a park bench along Gilbert Street in downtown Iowa City, IA of cars and pedestrians passing by. Reproduced here as still images, this animation resembles the photographic assemblages made famous by artist David Hockney in the 1970s and 80s. Hockney perceived a limitation in the photographic image and through this technique of layering multiple images from different vantage points he felt that he was able to expand the perception and possible interpretation of the image. In a similar vein, Freyer allows the viewer to experience these places through multiple perspectives in both space and time. When we consider this work, along with Freyer's other internet based projects, we feel as though we are invited to take part in the journey, to exchange stories, and offer alternate perspectives. As an artist, Freyer creates a point of convergence where multiple points are reconstituted into a single vision mediated through his own idiosyncratic manner of perceiving and disseminating the world around him. Gary Hesse 2002 Getting To Know John Freyer Having spent the majority of my adult life living outside of the United States, I recently stayed in a lovely Baltimore boutique hotel that curiously chose to hang the world's largest flatscreen TV in the small, sweetly decorated common breakfast area, and it was blaring a morning news program. I was overwhelmed by the (still very un-European) onslaught of crawl text, multiple image panels, statistics and numerical data, and

overly coiffed blonde talking head all at once, all too early in the morning. I thought: John Freyer would know what to make of this. I have email correspondence with John Freyer dating as early as 2003, which now feels like it should be mounted behind glass. I had previously discovered All My Life For Sale (having also recently discovered eBay) where he systematically deaccessioned a lifetime collection of carefully curated personal effects and was then inquiring about a poster purchase from the follow-up "institution," the Institute for Adaptive Reuse. There is a painstaking attention given to these most mundane objects, and I appreciate and identify with that sort of commitment. It is ironic—for two working styles that both revel in the spirit of Americana—that John Freyer and I first really met in 2011 in Stockholm, where he was taking his IKEA research to the next level via a Fulbright award. The idea of a multi-faceted seminar dedicated almost wholly to exploring the ubiquitous Billy Bookcase manufactured in flat-pack form by IKEA seemed in this instance not only useful, but an idea whose time had come. The unearthing and exploration of that which enters our daily lives in a seemingly unconsidered manner is one of the primary focuses of John Freyer's artistic attentions. "Hello friend" is a salutation often used by John Freyer. There is something intentionally approachable and folksy about this greeting; it calls back to an era of community and neighborhood that seems to be missing in our increasingly short hand culture. His compendium website temporama.com lists its function as "archival preservation." Beyond photography parlance, there is a sense that John Freyer is holding on to a complex history of social rituals and customs and ensuring their proper documentation. He is a collector, a chronologist, an archivist, an oral historian, and a folk researcher implementing a variety of formats ranging from the kindly analog to the comprehensive digital, the tangible and the abstract. His attentive curator's eye hits on the everyday sky high shelving units of Wal-Mart. Cherry picking the ultimate selection of quotidian objects to best represent a culture of consumption. Can we actually purchase what we need, when it comes down to it? Would we recognize it when we saw it? Discussing via Skype the specific images produced for his Light Work residency, John mentioned that they felt like "provisions for a barbecue that was never coming." A sort of postponed celebration. Don't the Boy Scouts advise to "Be Prepared"? These images subject inanimate objects to the typified world of the portrait session, lending them personhood or personality. They remind us what we should be commemorating and how we might best go about it. Some of John Freyer's artistic fodder: collective memory, corporate branding, object culture, oral history, commodity evaluation, talisman investigation, value systems, the second-hand economy, mass production, technology, domesticity, the gift economy, social anthropology, social practice, and performative installation. Additionally: corn on the cob, apple pie, Bob's Big Boy, gingham picnic blankets, soda fountains, cheeseburgers deluxe, pizza pie, road trips, yard sales, tire planters, Sears Portrait Studios, fried chicken, tailgate parties, Polaroid, Celebration Florida, Waffle House, free refills, the red and yellow condiment vessels at a hotdog stand, corn bread, bacon bits, egg creams, Brillo boxes, backyard barbecue, seersucker trousers, Ray-Bans, the American Dream, an honest dollar, a Coleman lantern, a chip off the old block, and a piece of the action. Here are conversations had while pumping gas, standing in the check out line, sitting at the diner counter, queueing for lottery tickets, filling a prescription, in trains, on Skype, at beer gardens, in university auditoriums, and while arguing over tchotchkes at IKEA. Identifiable arenas beyond the museum realm where everyday transactions and interactions occur. These to me are the refined talents of a photographer expanded into many other arenas. These are the things we do: bargain, shop, collect, organize, itemize, compartmentalize, barbecue, take road trips, patronize diners, inventory possessions, spring clean, raise children, prepare dinner, evaluate our accomplishments and tally our progress. This work is a form of civic monument to us all. Christine Hill Christine Hill is the Berlin-based proprietor of Volksboutique and professor and chair of Media, Trend & Public Appearance at the Bauhaus-University in Weimar. volksboutique.org John Freyer lives in Richmond, Virginia, and completed his residency at Light Work in March 2013. John Freyer: The Dress Up Portrait Project April 1 – May 31, 2011 Thursday – Saturday, dusk to 11pm UVP Everson, Everson Museum Plaza 401 Harrison Street, Syracuse, NY About the WorkThe Dress Up Portrait Project 2011 Total Run Time: 10:00 I am an interdisciplinary artist working at the crossroads of photography, video, audio and performance – both on the internet and in real-world exhibits and installations. Broadly speaking, my work explores the role of everyday, personal objects in our lives – as commodities, fetishes, totems and touchstones. I am also interested in systems of exchange – how the circulation of objects and stories enriches social ties between individuals and groups. Past projects include All My Life For Sale, in which I sold everything I owned on eBay and then travelled the country visiting its new owners, and Second Hand Stories, a documentary video in which I toured the U.S. investigating second-hand practices and economies. My work has evolved recently from a focus on objects-as-commodities and how and for whom they acquire value – monetary or otherwise – towards the human flow of memories and stories, especially across generations. Becoming a parent and being faced with the reality of my own parents' aging has led to an interest in how domestic spaces and objects shape identity within a family. Currently, I am at work on "Almost Home", an interactive, digital documentary on my parents' retirement community in central Florida. How do objects from the past function as repositories of memory and signs of authenticity in a brand new, but final 'home'? How do people use simple, tangible things – a weathered table, a Depression-era wooden box, a tennis ball – to make sense of such intangibles as ideals of family and community? With these questions I hope to cast everyday products in a new light – not as mere goods of trade, but as unique markers of personhood. My desire to re-invest the mundane with the promise of a narrative that connects speaker to listener, performer to viewer, shapes my new work, Dress Up. In this series of videos, my 5-year-old daughter and her friends take turns posing for the camera – for periods of several minutes without moving. At first, the static video images of little girls in Cinderella skirts or mom's high heels appear as cute clichés familiar from advertising and family photo albums. However the children's mild discomfort at standing still and silent becomes increasingly unsettling over time. The girls struggle not to fidget or speak, opening a space for a more complicated reading of their self-presentation. Their chosen objects of 'dress up' – the clutter of pink hair curlers and ballerina frills – become a costume that liberates, rather than obscures, the personality beneath. Dress Up deploys an everyday visual vernacular to explore this deeply human ritual that is fundamentally about the expression of the self in the world of Others and objects.