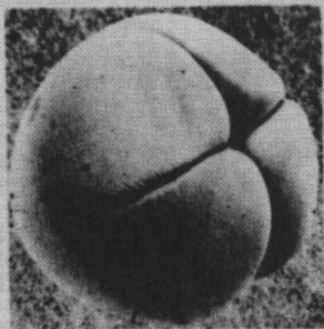


Mitchell Syrop
MATRIX/BERKELEY 113

University Art Museum
late October - mid January
1988

Open Marriage, 1986-87



OPEN MARRIAGE

Mitchell Syrop pairs microscopic photographs of organic structures such as germs and cells, called micrographs, with familiar slogans drawn from the culture at large--"private sector," "open marriage," "insider trading." Conditioned to the notion that a caption, a linguistic sign, sheds light on the accompanying image, the viewer tries at first to attach meaning to each titled photo and even, with a little imagination, may meet with some success. It becomes evident, however, that Syrop is up to something else; both the twenty-four images and their accompanying text that are included in this exhibition are ambiguous and, in fact, interchangeable. Those familiar with structuralist philosophy know that a linguistic sign is arbitrary; there is no natural, only a conventional, link between it and the thing that it signifies.

Syrop is not merely illustrating structuralist principles in his work; nor is he critiquing the manipulative practices of Madison Avenue. In fact, he suggests that advertising, particularly public relations, which is designed to sell ideas or images rather than products, may be a real-life analogue to Conceptual Art. By making his images and words interchangeable, however, and letting viewers create their own interpretations, Syrop--unlike Madison Avenue--hopes to put viewers in positions of control. Syrop also relinquishes power over his own work as he invites multiple and individual interpretations.

Syrop cut his artistic teeth

on the teachings of such first-generation Conceptualists as Douglas Huebler, Michael Asher (MATRIX 67) and John Baldessari (MATRIX 94), all of whom are on the faculty of the California Institute of the Arts, where Syrop did his graduate work. The original Conceptualists were dismayed by the increasing commodification of the art object that began in earnest in the 1960s (although Duchamp expresses the same disgust half a century earlier); younger Conceptualists, however, like Syrop, Barbara Kruger (MATRIX 100), and Jenny Holzer, use mass marketing techniques as an intrinsic part of their work. Holzer's medium is the commercial electronic sign, and Kruger sells matchbooks and postcards that reproduce her graphic messages. Syrop, going one step further, set up his 1984 Kuhlenschmidt/Simon Gallery exhibition as a pseudo-museum giftshop, thereby implicating himself, the artist, in the marketing and distribution of his own product. For this MATRIX exhibition, Syrop has produced for sale in the Museum bookstore common household sponges and black balloons that each bear one of the twenty-four generic phrases that appear in his micrographs. Syrop delights in the confusion between art and commerce while slyly hinting that they may be just two sides of the same coin.

Syrop was born in 1953 in Yonkers, a suburb of New York City. After receiving a B.F.A. from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, Syrop moved to Los Angeles and studied at California Institute of the Arts where he received an M.F.A. in 1978. He currently lives and works in Los

Angeles and is represented by the Kuhlenschmidt/Simon Gallery.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX:

All works are dated 1986-87 and are black and white photographs mounted on board. Works are lent by the artist, courtesy Kuhlenschmidt/Simon Gallery, Los Angeles.

1. Academic Freedom, 40 x 26-1/2".
2. Acquired Taste, 40 x 26-1/2".
3. Aesthetic Surgery, 40 x 26-1/2".
4. Assume the Position, 40 x 26-1/2".
5. Authentic Reproduction, 40 x 40".
6. Campaign Trail, 40 x 26-1/2".
7. Chamber of Commerce, 40 x 40".
8. Conflict of Interest, 40 x 40".
9. Defensible Borders, 40 x 26-1/2".
10. Diminished Capacity, 40 x 40".

11. Double Agent, 40 x 26-1/2".
12. Insider Trading, 40 x 26-1/2".
13. The Layered Look, 40 x 26-1/2".
14. Meaningful Relationships, 40 x 40".
15. Open Marriage, 40 x 26-1/2".
16. Penetrating Coverage, 40 x 40".
17. Press Release, 40 x 26-1/2".
18. Private Sector, 40 x 26-1/2".
19. Provisional Government, 40 x 40".
20. Public Relations, 40 x 26-1/2".
21. Recreational Vehicle, 40 x 40".
22. Routine Re-organization, 40 x 26-1/2".
23. Spare Change, 40 x 26-1/2".
24. Striking Distance, 40 x 26-1/2".

Selected one-person
exhibitions:

Richard Kuhlenschmidt
Gallery, L.A., '84;
Kuhlenschmidt/Simon Gallery,
L.A., A Plied Art, '86.

Knight, Christopher.
"Darwin Meets Madison Avenue
in Mitchell Syrop's 'A Plied
Art'," Los Angeles Herald
Examiner, Nov. 2, '86.

Gardner, Colin.
"Mitchell Syrop," Artforum,
Jan. 87.

Relyea, Lane. "Mitchell
Syrop at Kuhlenschmidt/
Simon," Art in America,
March '87.

Cotter, Holland,
"Eight Artists Interviewed,"
Art in America, May '87.

Selected group exhibitions:

Artists Space, N.Y., Los
Angeles/New York Exchange,
'83 (catalogue); Feature
(Gallery), Chicago, '85
(three group exhibitions);
New Langton Arts, S.F.,
Word/Image, '85 (catalogue);
LACE, L.A., TV Generations,
'86 (catalogue); Camerawork,
S.F., Products and Promotion,
'86 (catalogue); Hoffman/Bor-
man Gallery, Santa Monica,
CA, The New Who's Who, '87;
The Renaissance Society,
University of Chicago,
CalArt: Skeptical Belief(s),
'87 (catalogue; travels to
Newport Harbor Art Museum,
CA); Los Angeles County
Museum of Art, Avant-Garde in
the Eighties, '87
(catalogue).

Selected bibliography about
the artist (see also
catalogues under group
exhibitions):

Russell, John.
"Review," The New York Times,
June 24, '83.

Knight, Christopher.
"Mitchell Syrop's Art: Ads
With a Generic Twist," Los
Angeles Herald Examiner, June
2, '84.

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Supervisors' Art Support
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