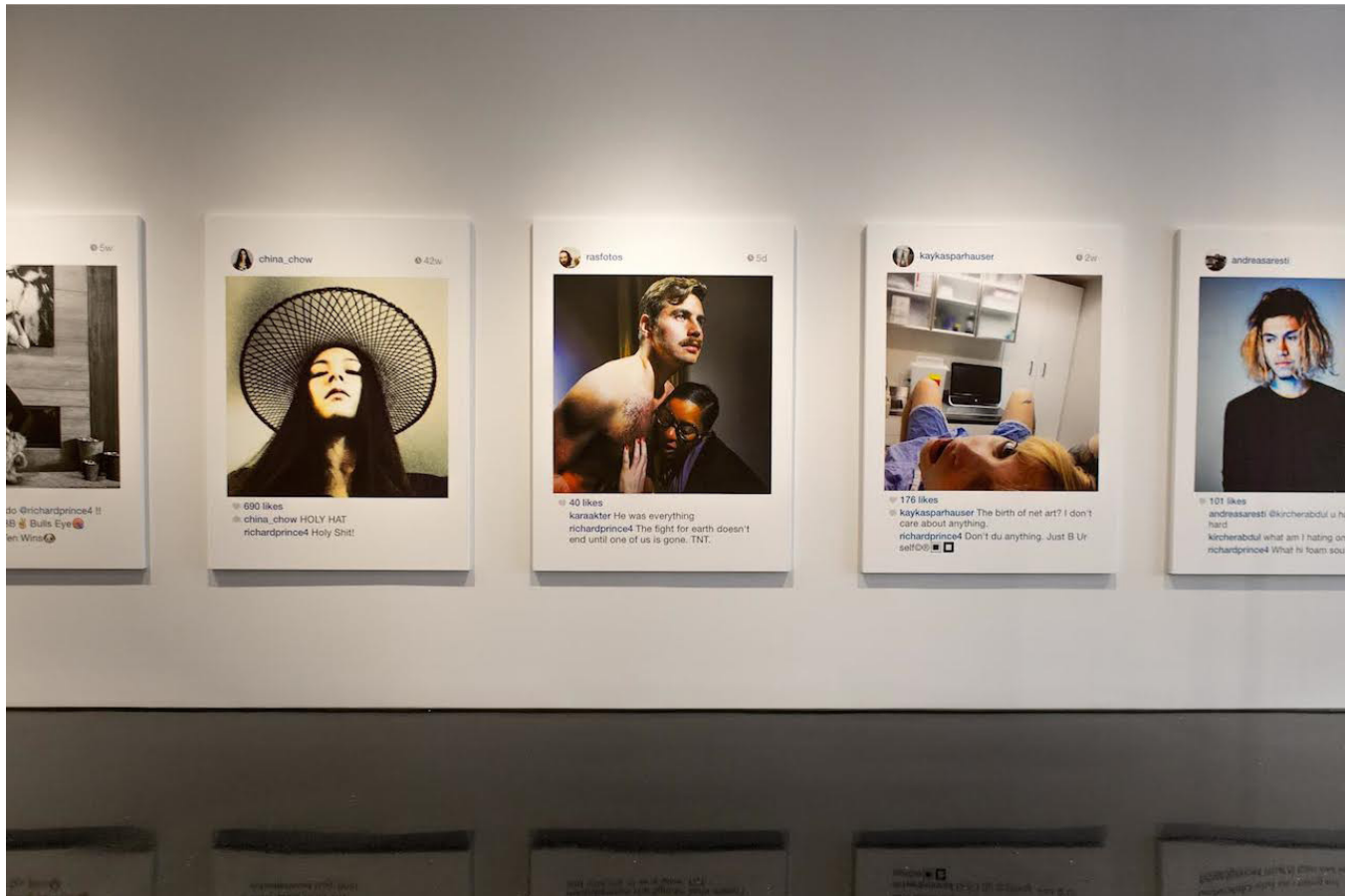


HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

A Young Artist Debuts at Gagosian, Thanks to Richard Prince

by **Benjamin Sutton** on October 23, 2014



Installation view, 'Richard Prince: New Portraits' (2014), Gagosian Gallery, New York (all photos by Sean Fader)

Richard Prince unwittingly gave an emerging conceptual artist his Gagosian debut.

The appropriation artist's current Gagosian exhibition *New Portraits* — which Hyperallergic's Tiernan Morgan dismissed as “an amusing exercise, but it doesn't translate as great art” — features an Instagram photo from Sean Fader's social media art piece “#wishingpelt.” For that piece, Fader prompted participants to make wishes as they took selfies and rubbed the artist's chest hair. So long as the photos were posted on social media, he promised, the wishes would come true. In May one of those wish-granting selfies ended up in Prince's Instagram feed, and has now it has made its way onto a canvas at 976 Madison Avenue. But for Fader, this is hardly a dream come true.

"There's obviously that part of me that's mad because I'm a poor starving artist with six-figure student loan debt, and you're just a giant that runs through Instagram pillaging, taking things into your own museum, and calling them yours," Fader told Hyperallergic over the phone. "If I sued him it would make the work look better. If I sued him it would make him look like he's thinking about rights in digital spaces, and that the work is questioning authorship in contemporary society. But that's definitely not what he's doing, I don't even think he's thinking about much, he's just thinking, oh, this would be cool."



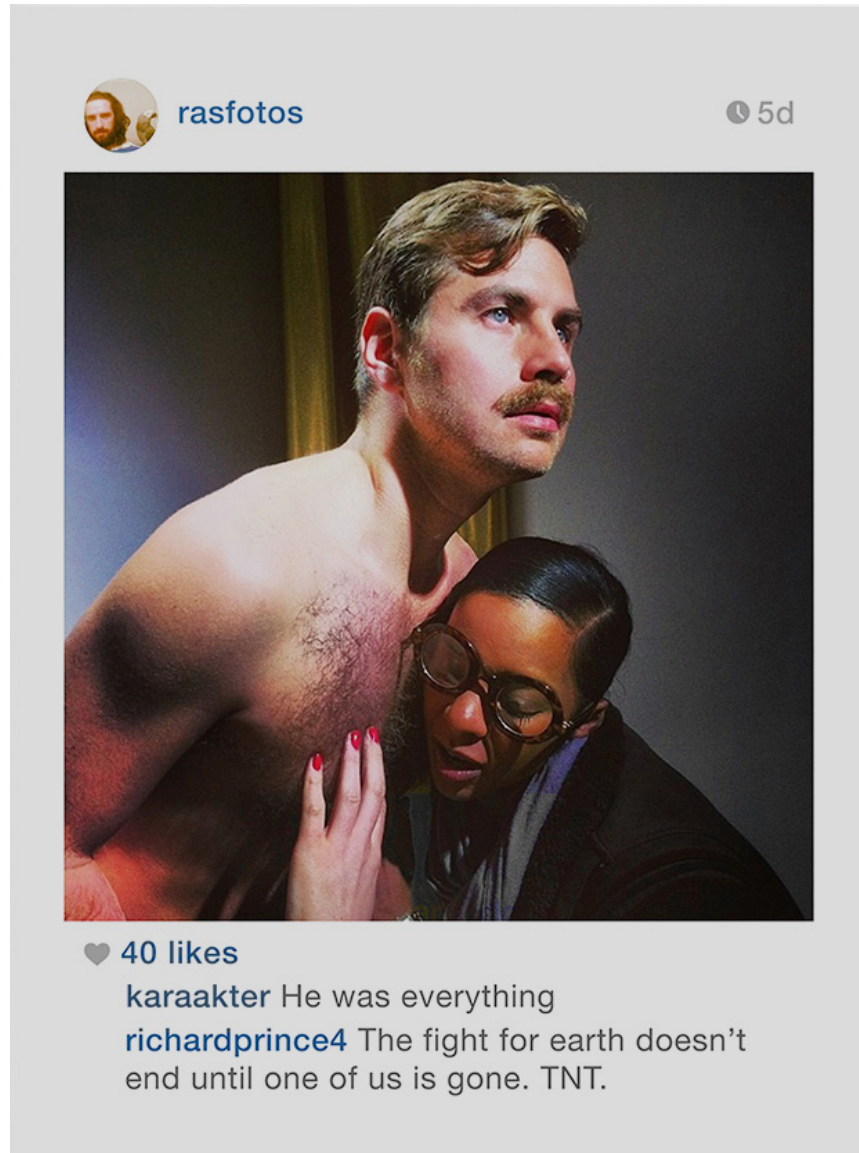
Sean Fader taking a selfie in front of his "#wishingpelt" photo in "Richard Prince: New Portraits," Gagolian Gallery, New York

Rather than sue, Fader saw an improbable opportunity in Prince's appropriation.

"I'm really interested in the idea of re-appropriating my own work and taking the work out of the frame that he's put it in, re-engineering it to continue the conversation that I was interested in from the beginning, and shifting the work back to that space," Fader said. "I struggled for a while to decide how I felt about it. When I went and saw it I was fuming. I would be psyched to be appropriated into work that was good. I just think the work is flat. It flattened the work in a way that I was not thrilled about its denial. By not communicating with me, by not talking to me, he denied every level of shared authorship, or engagement, all of those things that were so important to

me in the work. That's what irked me about the whole thing. So Prince made his move, now I'll make mine."

Instead of dwelling on the way that Prince's work emptied his participatory social media project of all its meaning and context, Fader engineered an appropriation of his own, sending out a press release inviting the public to see his work at Gagosian "in an exhibition organized by Richard Price." The incident has been instructive, helping him to focus his practice and his interests.



Sean Fader, "#wishingpelt" (2014) at Gagosian Gallery, New York

"In a weird way it's been really helpful for me to clarify for myself the kind of engagement I want to continue to be doing," Fader added. "It's one of those moments when you see someone do it all wrong and you're like, oh god, don't ever wanna be that guy. It helped me clarify my relationship to working in digitally and socially engaged spaces. What that looks like, why I do it, what my value system is in that space. And that is always a good thing."

Richard Prince: New Portraits, including Sean Fader's "#wishingpelt" photo, continues at Gagosian Gallery (976 Madison Avenue, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through October 25.