

Meliksetian MB Briggs



FEBRUARY 2005

Angus Fairhurst

CFA / CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS, BERLIN

Angus Fairhurst takes an unusual approach to collage: iconoclasm and censorship. “Body and text removed” is the refrain in the titles of these works, which were constructed out of magazine ads and billboards—and with a sharp pair of scissors. Instead of simply leaving blank spaces behind the removed bodies and words, Fairhurst superimposes more cutout pages to produce complex layers of advertisements whose messages and messengers have gone missing.

These collages demand detective work and voyeurism; they combine the efforts of a puzzle, where the image is known but must be reconstructed, with the pleasures of peekaboo, where the image cannot be seen in its entirety. In *Three double pages from a magazine, body and text removed*, 2004, a beauty lounging on a couch becomes a window revealing other objects, shapes, and rooms in the outline of her banished body. The billboards—four, five, or six are cut out and pasted on top of each other—are intended for distribution around cities in Germany, Austria, and England; their origin can be deduced from the truncated ads and their frames, which are standardized in each country as wallpaper for public space. Here, a perfume bottle anomalously

Meliksetian MB Briggs

mingles with the orange of an airline company, the trademark lines on a cigarette pack, and the sunny skies over an unknown destination. With their many levels and missing parts, Fairhurst's collages recall Jeff Koons's "Easyfun" paintings and Luc Tuymans's blocked portraits. Yet the shift in medium and tools, from paint to paper, from paintbrush to scissors, reveals the strong architectural, if not purely decorative, element in all of these oeuvres.

Beyond formal issues, Fairhurst's handiwork—which tends to cut out the female figure—would please a strange set of bedfellows: feminists who disdain the "sex sells" approach of the advertainment industry; religious leaders who cannot tolerate images of women; and even terrorists. Consider Osama bin Laden's take on US advertising: "You are a nation that exploits women like consumer products or advertising tools calling upon customers to purchase them" ("Letter to America," November 2002). The Taliban banned all images of the human body, even abstract stick people on safety signs. Fairhurst's *Everything but the Outline Whited-Out*, 2004—a billboard with the YSL Opium perfume ad featuring a reclining nude—could have been the Taliban's work, or that of the ultra-Orthodox rabbis in Israel who demanded that Sarah Jessica Parker be covered up in her racy billboard for Lux soap. Fairhurst's magazine sculptures—an entire issue of *Tatler* or *Elle* "body and text removed" hanging limply on the wall—recall Emily Jacir's series "From Paris to Riyadh (Drawings for my mother)," 1999–2001, black blocks on tracing paper that show the sections in *Vogue* (of naked skin) that the artist blacked out with her mother every time she took a plane to Saudi Arabia. These strange alliances—where Islamic terrorists might agree with feminists and rabbis—point not to similar political platforms but rather a form of belonging that is crystallizing around images, particularly images of women. If, as Guy Debord claimed, spectacle now mediates all social relations, then it seems that democracy must give way to an imagocracy based not on the redistribution of capital but on the circulation of images. As the ban on headscarves in French schools attests, citizenship is about liberty, equality, fraternity, and visibility. Fairhurst's collages, while echoing iconoclasm and censorship, attest to an insatiable consumption of images and our inability to find ones that can be consumed collectively.

—Jennifer Allen