

Gwenaël Rattke: Not Fun And Not Free at Romer Young Gallery



Gwenaël Rattke. *Not Fun and Not Free*, 2015; installation view, Romer Young Gallery, San Francisco. Courtesy of Romer Young Gallery.

Gwenaël Rattke's exhibition *Not Fun And Not Free* opens with the captivating collage *Transparent Radiation* (2014). Rattke juxtaposes images of mushroom clouds with landscapes, views of car-crowded freeways with the exposed circuitry of a server, and hard-edged grids and squares with organic, flowing orbs. A few words and phrases pepper the collage, including "Transparent," and "Radiation," from the title, and a cluster of text near the top left that includes "Illusion," "winning," and "prayer." All of these disparate images and fragments of text are not only hard to identify, but hard to make sense of. Rattke does the viewer no favors either, covering the entire surface of the collage with a patchwork of semitransparent vellum. In many ways *Transparent Radiation* is the system from which Rattke derives the rest of the works in the exhibition.

On the main wall opposite *Transparent Radiation*, the rest of the exhibition unfolds like a maquette for a book; Rattke's screen prints and collages alternate above and

below a centerline created by bordering frames. The works read like a text, too, as the artist playfully borrows, repeats, and rearranges images and phrases. The mushroom cloud from *Transparent Radiation* makes several appearances, and the garish red-orange screen print *New Cities* (2014) borrows a cityscape and beach scene from its neighboring works. This recycling happens at a very basic level in the artist's process, as each finished print starts out as a collage that is then copied and made into a screen. The result is an added level of distortion in each screen print that is often amplified by Rattke's brash, '70s-inspired palette.

Writing about systems aesthetics in his book *Great Western Salt Works*, Jack Burnham argues that 1968 marks a moment of transition from an object-oriented culture to a systems-oriented culture.[1] Burnham warns of a subversive power that comes when systems dictate the outcomes of production, and calls on artists to expose how technological systems affect relationships between people and their environments. Rattke heeds Burnham's appeal, creating a meticulous system to generate his collages and screen prints. And with a glowing, sun-like coin looming over the San Francisco skyline and couples canoodling on a beach in his work *New Cities*, Rattke, like Burnham, cautions against laying idly by while technology steps to the fore.

Gwenaël Rattke: *Not Fun And Not Free* is on view at *Romer Young Gallery* through *May 30, 2015*.

Danica Willard Sachs is an art critic and independent curator based in San Francisco. She is a regular contributor to Art Practical, and is currently working on a retrospective exhibition and catalogue on the photographs of Danny Lyon.

[1] Jack Burnham, "Systems Aesthetics," *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: G. Braziller, 1974), 15–25.

By Danica Willard Sachs