

**Garry Neill Kennedy: *Pattison*
Or Gallery, Vancouver
Nov. 1–Dec. 7, 2013**
by Stephen Horne

“I’d like to be known for the art and museum more than real estate.”
— Bob Rennie¹

In this recent Vancouver exhibition, Garry Neill Kennedy has continued his long-standing interest in public figures. Focusing on two local rags-to-riches corporate heroes, Jim Pattison and Bob Rennie, Kennedy has invited the Or Gallery to show itself in the design of Pattison’s well-known media corporation, the Pattison Group. As a result, upon entering the space, we are confronted with a room-filling version of its logo, a familiar lozenge form containing a boundary and a name painted on one long wall and around one inside corner. The entire wall has been painted, floor to ceiling, in orange with the figure given in blue, but the name Bob Rennie has been substituted in the logo for that of Pattison. Proper names such as these are generally understood to present a claim to presence, for example, “here is...” or “I am...,” but in this case, a

contradiction arises. Pattison and Rennie function here as personifications of a corporate globalization in which the fundamentalism of aura and authenticity has been undermined or “critiqued” by media’s mode of operation; that is, by exchangeability, circulation and dispersal. In this epoch, naming no longer holds ground as it has traditionally, but rather functions simply in the mode of a cypher.

Like many artists who have worked through phases of minimalism, conceptual art and institutional critique, Kennedy takes familiar and commonplace environments as a starting point. In his installation at the Or Gallery, Kennedy’s approach fragments into complexity, provoking the pursuit of a network of pluralized connections. In this case, as he has often done in the past, Kennedy reflects on the historical relationships between typeface design, Modernism and the techniques of contemporary globalized corporate media activity. What is perhaps immediately noteworthy is his continuing embrace of complicit rather than oppositional practices, in the sense that he uses parody to implicate his perspective in what is most essential to contemporary art’s relationship with neoliberal culture. Instead of presenting a polemical conclusion, he simply confronts us with a fact, an example, and allows the context to provide the satirical twist whose incisiveness depends upon the viewer.

The circulation of Kennedy’s work also speaks to these complicities. A year ago, Kennedy presented *Pattison* at the G Gallery in Toronto, a different exhibition under the same title as the Vancouver show, highlighting the role of repetition in brand identity. To further add to the repetitions and disjunctions in the story, nearly 30 years ago Kennedy presented an exhibition with a similar interest in corporate media

¹ Bob Rennie, quoted in Rachel Mendleson, “Bob Rennie: Vancouver Housing Bubble Fears Overblown, Real-Estate Marketer Says,” in *Huffpost British Columbia*, Aug. 27, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/08/27/bob-rennie-vancouver-housing-bubble_n_1777122.html

Garry Neill Kennedy, *Pattison*, 2013, Installation view
IMAGE COURTESY OF OR GALLERY, VANCOUVER



stars at Or Gallery (and *C Magazine* also carried a review of this show). These repetitions of time and place disrupt the convention of linear time, an important aspect of the exhibition ritual and the museum convention. Such play derives from the fact that *Pattison* refers to the media corporation whose logo is familiar from its attachment to thousands of billboards, repeating a consumer message across the country.

At Or Gallery, Kennedy interpellates a viewer vis-à-vis the tradition of art and the convention of its exhibition in the museum. In this case, portraiture of prominent individuals is the tradition and the ritual is that of naming. His slight adjustment substitutes a fragment (the personal name) for the person's likeness, but otherwise adopts the convention with which a noteworthy figure is commemorated. A proper name calls what is named into its belonging, into its place, but with *Pattison*, it's as if we are calling or hailing somebody but the response only arrives as a placeless logo. Or, more likely, a logo is calling us into a system of visibility based in reproducibility.

Pattison, that is, Jim Pattison, is a father of and for the Vancouver business milieu and beyond. And Bob Rennie, a younger and very successful real estate marketer would be one of his corporate progeny. Pattison is known as Canada's richest man, and Rennie is recognized not only for his marketing success but also for his dedication to the Rennie Collection, and its museum of contemporary art, which includes celebrated artists such as Mona Hatoum, Brian Jungen and Louise Lawler. What we might want to ask at this point is if these affinities between the corporate rich and the role of the artist don't suggest some loss of the possibilities for difference. This issue of an apparent malaise is an aspect of Kennedy's own line of questioning. As critic Hal Foster once put it, "criticism without history is aimless," meaning that for him criticality is oppositional and grounded by a linear mode of time but that such a dynamic is eroded in the anything-goes pluralism of our epoch. What is more interesting, however, is the question of what's in it for the affluent and powerful, what does involvement in the world of contemporary art have to offer those who can afford to buy and to own almost anything?

If the art museum is the art world's bank, as art historian David Joselit says, what can be withdrawn

from it? Mostly cachet, which is another form of currency in a culture revolving around the image. To be "known" in this case means "renowned." In other words, to be somebody, to be *a* somebody, to have recognition, subject status, are here rendered as aspects of the desire to be seen, that wonderful Warholian insight into the desire for celebrity as the path to becoming "real." If one is a billionaire corporate father, what is left to desire except identity and aura? As Bob Rennie says, he can derive this from art and his museum if not from real estate. What could promise more authenticity, in the sense of self-sufficient presence than a collection of serious "world class" art? What else could so effectively validate one's call into existing? Yet the paradox here is that the environment "developed" by these fathers of corporate desire is exactly destructive of the very rewards they seek.

The exhibition in its banalized contemporary form offers mere display and de-sign. This is the terrain into which Kennedy ventures with his carefully neutral gesture, in the sense that in the current situation any appeal to the aura or to history will be immediately co-opted to reinforce the position of corporate media, as we see occurring in the example of Bob Rennie with his art museum and collection. This is the crux of complicity as an art practice in this moment. The challenge is now to pursue the benefits of mass media's pluralizing dispersal of reality without reinforcing its production of banality, irrelevance and malaise.

Kennedy has adopted the insights of Warhol regarding media celebrity status and Hans Haacke's insights into the art/real estate connection, astutely applying them to the malaise within which we are now immersed. What is most remarkable is the deftness with which he pulls this out of that simple device, the corporate logo. With this exhibition, Kennedy identifies a collusion in which, for a change, it is the sphere of corporate capitalism seeking the rewards that serious art seems to offer, those of the "authenticity" described above.² This is what's left for a billionaire developer to desire in a world where the media systems of his very own corporate culture melt it all down.

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² In their influential text *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (1999), Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello describe "artistic critique" as a perspective opposing the attributes of art (freedom, autonomy, and creativity, which they otherwise call "authenticity") to capitalism's economic oppression and destruction of solidarity. At the same moment, at the Harvard Business School, researchers such as James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II were publishing titles such as *The Experience Economy* (1998), and *Authenticity, What Customers Really Want* (2007). Faced with consumer management of this level, what's an artist to do? Is any attempt to rely on the sort of critique proposed by Boltanski and Chiapello bound to reinforce the sophistication of such technique?

Samuel Roy-Bois: *Not a new world, just an old trick*
SFU Art Gallery, Burnaby, BC
Sep. 14–Dec. 14, 2013
by Sydney Hart

Most visitors to *Not a new world, just an old trick* will be acutely aware of its institutional context. To access the SFU Art Gallery, visitors must go through a complex of Brutalist '60s-era architecture ringed by the Burnaby Mountain Conservation Area, which isolates the gallery at 365 metres above sea level. After weaving through concrete surfaces on this main campus of Simon Fraser University (SFU), the gallery can be found in a space formerly used as a storage locker. This liminal experience of architecture forms an introduction to the institutional motifs and reflections in Samuel Roy-Bois' exhibition. Here, the relation between gallery and university space forms part of a dialectic facilitated through the vision of Melanie O'Brian, director of the three SFU galleries. In the past year, their programming has pursued a line of inquiry investigating academia through art, including critical reflections on the philosophical, historical and economic aspects of this relation. This focus aligns the galleries with the educational turn in