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# The Rules of Appropriation from the Perspective of a Contemporary Artist

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Thesis

The Rules of Appropriation from the Perspective of a  
Contemporary Artist

Submitted by

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(B.A. Art History, Fairfield University, May 2012)

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of  
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## Introduction

Appropriation has become a much talked about subject in the ever changing world of contemporary art. The ability to possess the artwork of others in a way that is transformative, creative and unique allows for the renaissance of traditional artwork through the fresh eyes of modern, innovative artists. George Deem is a prime example of a creative individual who reintroduces the work of the old masters through his own quotations and transformative approach. However, what does this mean in terms of copyrights and the rules of publication? Based on famous legal suits such as the copyright infringement suit with Richard Prince and Robert Cariou, the legal circumstances surrounding appropriation tread sensitive waters. When an artist or heir moves forward with the accusation of plagiarism and theft, what the implications for the work of appropriation and contemporary art? The introduction of appropriation artistic practice have been quite unusual in the sense of its controversial subject matter and overall public reception.

The Mattatuck Museum of Art and the New Britain Museum of American Art house artwork by Deem. They also recognize appropriation as a true artistic movement in contemporary culture. The public reception of George Deem and the display of his art parallels the political opposition of such works due to the controversy surrounding the direct quotations of pre-existing artwork. This research explores opposing theories of appropriation and politics through the examination of George Deem and his artistic technique, political backlash as well as the public reception. Everything reverts back to one remaining question: What are the rules of appropriation? This research works to explain the rules in terms of George Deem's achievements, and the circumstances surrounding art law through Richard Prince's famous lawsuit. Overall, this essay examines the different viewpoints surrounding appropriation while determining its rules. Essentially, the rules are distinguished through the eyes of such contemporary artists as George Deem with the consideration of Richard Prince and others.

The Oxford Dictionary defines appropriation in its artistic sense as "The deliberate reworking of images and styles from earlier, well-known works of art," (Oxford Dictionary) and derives from the Latin

root of making it one's own. Artistic appropriation marks its signature in postmodernism. The topic of appropriation along with its controversial transformative properties has existed since the beginning of civilization: the Roman Empire appropriated many of its conquests, most famously the Greeks and their rich mythological heritage. Renaissance artists, Michelangelo and Da Vinci, studied and reworked the technique of Greek sculpture and artwork, to transform fifteenth century Europe into a rebirth of classical culture. Appropriation is often associated with the cultural aspect in which dominant nations conform to the culture of their conquests.

In David Evans's introduction to *Appropriation: Documents on Contemporary Culture*, he describes appropriation as an appropriate channel of acculturation and colonialism. He states, "Appropriation was in fact integral to colonialism. Not surprisingly, therefore, a major theme in the texts represented in post colonialism is the re-taking of that which is possessed without authority" (Evans 19). In other words, appropriation parallels colonial occupation in which the shift in possession changes from one party to another without the permission of the original occupant. This recalls Roman occupation in Greece as previously discussed or even British occupation in the original thirteen American colonies. Also, as laws dictate in the copyright sector, permission for artistic appropriation is not always necessary. This means that to a specific extent, the simulation of artistic content is viewed freely as a source of creativity and therefore not always frowned upon. Furthermore, Isabella Graw articulates, "Definitions that describe the act of artistic appropriation itself as recoding or shifting in meaning. This means that a shift in meaning takes place purely due to the fact that an original image has been appropriated," (Graw 214) which serves as the foundation of this research in its entirety. In other words, as we will explore in latter sections, appropriation is deemed a method of reworking the original image throughout the appropriation process. This reemphasizes the definition of appropriation through the perspective of those who practice it.

The actual appropriation trend made its debut in postmodern America in the 1950's. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns "attempted to move American Art away from the formalist

restrictions of abstract expressionism,” (Conner 14) and also began the discussion of what is acceptable as artistic expression. This movement soon allowed other thriving artists more flexibility for self-expression. Why do individuals feel the urge to appropriate existing artwork? Much like the Romans and Renaissance painters, it derives from a desire to learn and understand. According to Weinshenker, “Acquisitions of intimate knowledge of a predecessor’s methods and vision is a logical foundation for creative activities” (Weinshenker 1). Thus this artistic curiosity is fueled by the desire to understand the masters who appeared before our time. The cultural appropriation of Greek culture by the Romans represents an admiration for the beliefs of other nations and its individuals. This notion continues with the occupation of creativity during the Renaissance and postmodern movements. It can also apply to the very lessons we learn in the classroom when examining art historical components. In fact, “By 1978...the Whitney Museum of American Art could organize an exhibition titled ‘Art about Art’, where artists of many different stripes—Andy Warhol, George Segal, Robert Colescott, Larry Rivers, Peter Saul, among others—were shown together, united by their common fascination with the art historical past and their efforts to resurrect it in a variety of unexpected ways” (Rosenblum 6). It was the very interest of a group of intriguing artists and their curiosity toward historical art who developed various methods to employ the techniques and revive those elaborate art forms that we regularly view in the classroom, textbooks and museum exhibitions.

This research also follows the trend of artistic appropriation as it contributes to the constant changes in the contemporary art world. The discussion of appropriation among theorists and art critics alike provides the foundation for its significance in academia and the professional art setting. George Deem is a prime example of a thriving appropriation artist who maintained the respect of his peers as he pays homage to other prominent artists from previous centuries through his artwork. Furthermore, the theoretical approach to museum exhibitions is examined through my experience at the Mattatuck Museum as it exhibited George Deem: Quotations, in May 2015. This trend rose to evident popularity in the 1980’s, it continues to draw controversial events such as the copyright lawsuit against Richard Prince in

2011. Through this infringement, my research investigates the role of politics and the ultimate blurred lines between authority and creativity. As a result the topic of artistic appropriation draws from many sources and commentary in order to assist in painting a picture of what it means to portray an aesthetically stimulating image as a means of self-expression.

George Deem, whose paintings began to attract favorable attention from critics like Robert Rosenblum and Arthur Danto in the 1970's, at the same time that appropriation artists like Ellen Sturtevant and Sherrie Levine brought artistic appropriation to prominence, has rejected this label. In fact he claims he does not appropriate anything. Dye transfers or copying and pasting does not suit him, but rather, he prefers to reconstruct the painting starting from its foundation and moving onward (George Deem: We were there 1). George Deem can be considered a critical figure in the expansion and acceptance of such art in the contemporary art world and its reception from museums and galleries alike. It is important to discuss his stance on "recreation" because it is a key topic for this essay. Deem's reiteration of his stance on his own artistic technique represents the nature of appropriation from the artist's point of view.

On the subject of art in general, it is reasonable that as a representative of the art community, Deem specifies that "Art has to be shown," in his opinion, "An artist has to show their work in order for them to know they're an artist... You leave it for someone to see it. You don't hide it," (Deem) stressing the importance of artistic display and the use of appropriation and other transformative outlets to display the spectacle of art in order to provoke the audience. Studying Deem allows my research examine appropriation from the perspective of a contemporary artist, one of the first but one of the least-studied artists in this movement.



## **Appropriation in Theory**

In this chapter, I examine theoretical approaches to appropriation and its origins in the postmodern movement. I go on to discuss the signature components that identify art as appropriation. A brief comparison to the traditional format of historical art along with a differentiation from modernism also play into the critical aspects that set artistic appropriation apart as its own phenomena in the contemporary art world. The key questions to answer are how artists utilize existing images to create new works of art and how such works stand alone in terms of the concept of transparency and enable the offering of further commentary on previous works.

Because it is a much-debated topic within the world of academia and copyright, it is important to understand the theoretical analysis of artistic appropriation. The subject has influenced the ideas of critics and art professionals and their approach to art and curating as it gained momentum in postmodern America. Appropriation counters the traditional notion of art history that, “The histories of art and architecture are composed primarily of monuments to authority,” (Owens 91). The shift to seeing appropriation as a more self-expressive, reinterpreting movement allows for greater and more open debate in academic culture because it changes the way we visualize moments in history and evaluate the relationship between the subject matter and the artist. These historical moments often glorify superior individuals or events, partially due to the fact that artists at those times were commissioned by royalty or wealthy patrons. This is crucial to understanding the rules of appropriation because it also derives from an academic perspective of how our artistic culture interprets this movement. It is a shift in how we view moments in history or current events.

Appropriation is a signature component of the postmodern art world:

“Postmodernism...is characterized by its resolution to use representation against itself to destroy the binding or absolute status of any representation,” (Owens 110). In relation to the histories of art and architecture, appropriation dispels the notion that representation embodies such authorities by refocusing that representation and therefore changing the nature of the work of art in the eyes of the viewer. Postmodernism developed as a continuous critique of representation since it was initially “conceived by modernism,” (Owens 110). In a sense, postmodernism developed in response to the constant representation of power in its ideal state, or what we consider historical art. Therefore, it established a certain flexibility for artists to take that representation of power and rework it in a very parodic system, with much commentary of course.

Critic David Grosz articulates a view of modernism that illuminates how it is responsible for a shift in what is considered historical art. According to Grosz, “Modernism rewrote the rules of art and if you are not careful, realistic illusionism (the technique of utilizing imagery that often deceives the viewer) can be dismissed as old-fashioned,” (Grosz 1). In other words, modernism is the player that restructured the laws of art, but modernist works often appear as traditional after the appearance of postmodernism and appropriation. Appropriated works often display the image but hide the original artist’s hand. Appropriated works alter the representation of an image through representation of itself.

Owen discusses appropriation as it alters the original representation of a work of art and then reinterprets it. As we will later explore with George Deem and his homages to the old masters and even Prince and his infringement case, it is important to distinguish the purpose of appropriation as it not only enhances the original but provides an abundance of newly

represented subject matter and authenticity. According to Owen, “Through appropriation, manipulation and parody, artists [such as Deem] work to render visible the invisible mechanisms whereby these images secure their putative transparency— a transparency that stems, as in classical representation from the apparent absence of the author,” (Owens 111). Classical representation reflects back to the traditional notion of art history and architecture and the fluidity of such manipulation refers to work that creates a transparency that was initially nonexistent. Thus a new representation outside the formal strictures of historical imagery becomes possible.

Owen clarifies the relationship between appropriation and representation: “Appropriation of a painting is a view of representation as substitution: the image is treated as a stand in or replacement for someone who would not otherwise appear,” (Owens 96). In essence, appropriation fulfills its purpose to create a new product with the original as merely a component in the mix of several other elements on a grander scale. The outcome is that much more thrilling when a new product emerges that is completely independent of the initial, classical representation.

Appropriation pursues a variety of strategies in its reinterpretation of classical representational art. Welchman succinctly states, “There are many horizons —thousands in fact— from the academic debate on copying, originality and imitation, to the aestheticist opprobrium levelled at the culture of clichés and the ready-made itself; from the development of photographic theory and new technologies and their feedback into art world practice and surreal automatism,” (Welchman 48). Photography is a key term because along with mixed media it is a recurring medium contemporary artistic appropriation. Welchman goes on to state that, “The first wave of postmodern appropriation associated with this revalidation of photography, also

correlates with the arrival and dissemination of poststructuralist theories of reproduction and repetition,” (Welchman 10). Poststructural theories refers to the ideals of modernism and their death and mourning.

Postmodern appropriation, gaining momentum originally in photography, reiterates the theories of transparency and representation. Transparency is important to appropriation because it allows for us to view the representation of an image through the original version. The recreation then allows us to rethink the original in a way that did not exist before. In Welchman’s re-creation, “Transparency designates a perfect equivalence between reality and its representation; signifier versus signified mirror one another, the one is merely a reduplication of the other,” (Welchman 48). With transparency comes the ability to interpret, to articulate the representation that is set apart from modernism to become a more self-expressive art form. With transparency, the purpose and transformation is of the image is evident as it clearly differs from the original and therefore enhances it. “Transparent...every element of the work of art is significant, that is, it refers to something that exists independently of its representation,” (Owens 98). The finished product, the new work of art is completely independence of the work that initially inspired it.

Burton dispels the myth surrounding artistic appropriation when it parallels institutional critique. She basically separates the two ideals and draws a line between the two since they interconnect but remain distinct from each other. She describes the former as “typically posited as an operation, a kind of technique for displacement, first understood to radically lift the veil of images and idioms —extracting sign from syntax to dispel cultural myths and allow viewers to recognize their own place in a constructed representational field,” (Burton 15). In other words, appropriation allows the viewer to comprehend the expressive aspect of art beyond its

characteristics formal qualities such as those we see in the original works of art of Vermeer as opposed to Deem. This is not to say that the brilliance of Vermeer is overshadowed by the regulations of his time, but that Deem enables the viewer to gaze beyond the content of the image and see themselves in the context of their relationship to the image itself. In a sense, the very notion challenges us to step away from all that we considered fine art, to question what is authentic and to see appropriated works as transformative.

George Baker describes the incorporation of appropriated elements into a work of art as “painting in disguise — a form of painting that speaks in a double language, parading in other modes of practice,” (Baker 228). To apply this to appropriation means to develop a work of art that often disguises the original meaning through its reinterpretation with the assistance of transformative properties and transparency. This notion is remarkable in the sense that it refers to appropriation artists as masters of disguise, talented laborers who work to speak of an existing artist through their own language or personality. Therefore, they produce works that disguise the meaning of the original in the stroke of their own hand. This causes the viewer or those familiar with the appropriated works to gain a new perspective and appreciation of the originals. It also provokes ideas of what may have been missed in the beginning that we did not notice until we gaze upon the recreation.

This coincides with the reprisal of painting that occurred during the post-modern movement —the period where much of the art was questioned in the form of mixed mediums. Baker noted that traditional mediums such as oil and acrylic gave way to ready-made objects, collage and minimalist structures. These mediums are all crucial to the development of abstraction are what noted as abstract. Deem states, “The abstract mode of painting consisted of the histories of abstraction, reminiscent of modernism, were subjected to the strategies of

appropriation or the ready-made,” (Baker 228). In other words, the interpretation of abstract expression was reintroduced in the form of painting, a method that became prominent once again in this time period.

In contrast to Baker, Welchman explains appropriation as a series of responses to the various controversial trends the globe experiences in the present. “Appropriation can only be understood as a set of historical reactions to the determining events of social, industrial, and political modernity; that its shadow is cast well beyond Duchamp and the ready-made...” (Welchman 48). This observation is very similar to the art historical concept in which works of art from the past were painted to address and acknowledge significant moments in history.

Millet’s, *The Gleaners* represented the working class and the harsh realities of a labor-intensive lifestyle whereas Deem’s version offers the same imagery along with the obligation for the viewer to literally reflect on the reality of their own role in the foundation of our society. In essence the original portrays the distinct moments that make up our history through art whereas the appropriated imagery provides commentary as a response to a series of political and social movements. The two notions parallel each other and yet each can be deemed authentic.

Franklin Hill Perrell introduces the notion of Appropriation as allegory when discussing George Deem’s involvement in the movement. He states, “Allegorical imagery, in its contemporary manifestation is appropriated imagery: the allegorist [referring to Deem in this instance] does not invent images. Instead, he lays claim to the culturally significant symbolic narration, acting as interpreter,” (Perrell 1). Again, not considering himself as an appropriation artist, Deem rather reinterprets the meaning of the original symbolically. By doing so, he enhances the significance of the original. In a sense, his reinterpretation not only reimagines the

original in a newly created form but interprets multiple meanings of the original that were otherwise lost.

How do appropriations, copied images from well-known artists, exist as original works of art when the source is evident? Burton argues that it occurs in the process of reconstruction that is unique to the particular artist. Each artist maintains their own individual technique of how they restructure an image or work of art. She explains, “Decontextualizing and recontextualizing an image doesn’t only resituate that image but also serves to remind us that it is available to be infinitely resituated and radically different, often radically incompatible ends,” (Burton 17). This parallels the definition of appropriation as a process in which the use of the appropriated image results in a new, unique art form. As previously mentioned, the art historical imagery that lays its roots in the works of the old masters, serves the purpose of acknowledging the historical events, whereas to take the image apart, reconstruct it, and resituate it, not once but many times on a potentially infinite scale, provides original commentary and therefore, a new and authentic work of art.

A distinct kind of freedom of expression took hold of the postmodern movement in America as appropriation gained momentum in its responses to social trends often ignored by artists from prior centuries. Burton offers more commentary on the effects of this contemporary art movement in a context usually reserved for more traditional forms of analysis: “Yet, with this operation (appropriation) considered today, most often in a formal vein, images so liberated from their original settings are commonly regarded as utilized in the service of cultural amnesia, in the name of the perpetually circulating sign,” (Burton 15). This is important because it constantly reiterates the artistic purposes of appropriation and the flexibility to reshape and rework older masterpieces and contemporary works, as we will explore with Prince and Deem, to create an all

new, finished product. Furthermore, “Given the larger allegorical dimension attributed by critics to appropriation art —the mode in which an artwork speaks ‘other’-wise signifies something beyond itself,” (Baker 230). When imitating the artwork of others, the imitators in turn transform the work into something unique and far beyond the image it represents. At first appropriated art forms often remind us of the significance of the original. Then it moves away from the original for a new, independent response.

Finally Gordon Brown, posed an interesting question in his wrote an article on George Deem. He asked, “What happens to a painter when he copies someone else’s work? The answer is that the masters made copies that were personal expression; also, they were looking for qualities to incorporate into their own artistic personalities (Brown 1). It is an endless cycle of lessons, incorporation and imitation, all to learn more about their own personalities and experiences. The original artists may have copied ideas or images they saw during their daily routines. The theories surrounding appropriation and George Deem in particular further prove the laws of subject matter are the province of those creating and analyzing the content.



## **The Artist in Theory**

This section explores George Deem and his technique from a theoretical point of view. Having introduced several theories and their application to appropriation in postmodernism, here the theories are applied to—and challenged by—George Deem’s techniques and manner in which he creates his own ‘authentic’ work. My close engagement with Deem’s work led me to my interest in using his technique to analyze appropriations. As a student of art history, I felt that his technique brought a fresh and challenging perspective to everything I believed to be art and representation. It also sharpened my sense of the importance of traditional art and its place in the contemporary art world. I consider Deem a highly successful appropriation artist; his talent for reworking traditional imagery only enhanced the significance of the originals.

George Deem, born in Indiana in 1932, grew up on a cantaloupe farm where he learned the value of discipline and hard work. With a Catholic upbringing, much of the artwork he encountered was in churches. He enrolled in the school of Art Institute of Chicago in 1952. His exposure to different art forms was enhanced when he was drafted into the army in 1953. Exploring several art centers in Europe, he studied different styles of art including Baroque and Rococo. After returning to the Chicago Institute, it was clear the direction his art would take. In fact, from the 1960’s on, Deem looked to Vermeer and his famous paintings for inspiration for his subject matter. Other artists like Caravaggio, Matisse, and Picasso continued to be influential to his work (Syracuse Record 1). Up until his death in 2008, George Deem was known as an individual who quoted the old masters and utilized their technique to create new images. In the postmodern world, George Deem is variously categorized as a Pop Artist, Deconstructionist, Postmodernist and a Post-Post-Modernist (Dearinger 33). Deem knew no bounds in his artistic creativity, thus therefore making it difficult to place him in a category.

An early visit to the Syracuse University Art Galleries left him with a very detailed understanding of the characteristics that would define him as an artist. “Reworking paintings by old and modern masters, and exploring issues of representation through carefully composed visual montages of art historical subjects,” (Syracuse Record 1) became a constant focus of George Deem’s art often his visit to Syracuse. It confirmed his interest in reworking traditional paintings and rendering them as all new visual images that in a sense reinterpret the original work of art.

Deem’s work illuminates the use of appropriation as a method to examine the theoretical aspects that art critics and artists use to view historical art and in turn break down the original notion of creating art about art. “Another strategy [of modernism] is to confront the past head on by directly referencing art history. Always bold, this move can be dangerous. The past’s legacy is weighty and it can either inspire or overwhelm an artist,” (Grosz 1). As examined by George Deem through his paintings, the traditional histories of art are not only referenced but restructured to question our bases for interpretation. In a sense George Deem is “bold” enough to address the art of the past using these works as inspiration for his own. Although his work clearly follows the technique of well-known artists, he leaves his signature behind, identifying himself as the original artist of an authentic and meaningful new work of art.

One argument regarding the use of appropriation includes works that too closely resemble the original, often criticizing the artist with accusations of completely imitating existing works. Reagan Upshaw counters that “Deem’s paintings are not copies of paintings but paintings of paintings.” As previously mentioned, Deem does not consider himself an appropriationist at all, “Incorporating the clichés, fetishization, misunderstandings, and other accretions with which the famous works have become encrusted,” (Upshaw 108). By using similarities in the overall

themes of the original works together with the new technique of the artist constructing the image, the outcome is another original painting.

Udo Kulterman clarifies this argument stating, “Through their ordering of pictorial space and color, [Deem’s paintings] are demonstrably a newly structured total form. This notion was introduced and remains in modern art since Cezanne and Manet,” (Kulterman 1). This sums up the fact that George Deem pulls away from the typical appropriationist style by repainting paintings rather than copying them, thus allowing for a new image with only traces of the original that inspired it. Overall, as Allan Weller puts it, “The work of a number of recent artists shows us that it is still possible to use long established traditions with freshness, individuality and intelligence,” (Weller 1). This is only one component of the overall project of artistic appropriation, which also includes to challenging the interpretation of the original and developing a new individual image.

Juxtaposition in the artistic sense refers to placing two images, ideas or concepts close together for purposes of displaying similarities or stark contrasts. In the introduction of George Deem’s famous book, *Art School*, Irene MacManus evaluates these contrasts in Deem’s schoolroom paintings. She describes the phrasing of such similarities and how Deem utilizes juxtaposition to demonstrate his technique: “In art quotation or ‘juxtaposition’ (Deem frequently calls himself a juxtapositionist), the choice to omit certain key figures from famous paintings becomes dramatic device, compelling the spectacle to ponder the artist’s choices,” (McManus 11). This technique is often used to allow the viewer to interpret the image based on their personal relationship with the subject matter. It is also used as discussed below in Prince’s appropriation art, to remove the original connection that was evident in the first image, thus developing a second meaning entirely different from the original. Deem is an expert in this

technique with several of his Vermeer paintings, often creating an absence that further removes the artwork from the original inspiration, thus transforming it into Kultermann's concept of a totally new formation.

In his *Art School*, Deem "recreates his imagery based on themes of various schools of art, including the Hudson Valley and Baroque art, deriving his subjects from the works of past famed artists throughout history. In such appropriation, Deem recreates the style and technique of one of the masters," (Perrell 1). In relation to juxtaposition, his imagery closely resembles the artwork of the old masters he is quoting, including, Matisse, Caravaggio, Vermeer, and David. However, he leaves his signature in such images as the *School of Caravaggio* where he floods imagery from the master's famous paintings onto one canvass but at the same time removes them from their original context, creating a new form of art that allows for an interpretation independent from the original. This validates his techniques in which he creates his work from the ground up with authentic skill differing from the assumed copying and pasting. He recreates the setting and subject matter in the manners of Caravaggio, but placed several images from different works of art together, using juxtaposition to create both a similarity to the original and to enhance its meaning through the other images that share the canvas. By placing the images together, Deem reflects on the similarity of his painting to the original works while transforming them into a new form.

Irene MacManus, contributor to Deem's *Art School*, further explores the juxtaposition in his school motif. One painting in particular, *School of Winslow Homer* is "one of Deem's most effective and exciting exploration of the schoolroom theme. His mirroring of the room in a monochromatic sketch is brilliant-turning the drawing on the desk into a still, dark pool of reflective memory," (McManus 12) His book is a tribute, to the old masters in that he recreated

these works using the same techniques as each artist whose work he appropriates. In fact, "...the process so engrossed him that he ended up doing 40 'school of...' paintings in all, each requiring him to master the style of a new artist," (McManus 12). In theory, Deem differentiates himself from other artists through the very discipline he maintains to perfect the skills of a multitude of talented artists.

In another counter argument to the misconceptions surrounding appropriation, it takes an abundance of skill to master dozens of artists' techniques in order to successfully recreate tributary images. Rather than merely copying, there is an immense amount of skill in recreating, and restructuring, and paying overall homage to the original.

The effect Deem has on his viewers quite remarkable. Each time a viewer gazes upon the works in *Art School*, we are taken aback by the emergence of the nostalgic qualities that we associate with learning in the classroom. These learned qualities derive from traditional aspects that make up art history but we find ourselves in a confusing yet glorified situation of trying to solve this riddle that refers to the appropriation of the old masters. The press release for a posthumous show aptly described the feeling Deem's work evokes: "Every time one is confronted with a work by George Deem, they are compelled to ask themselves: 'Is this history, or does it occur in the present? Is it experience, or merely its residue? Is this an image of the thing or the thing itself?' (George Deem: We were There 1).

Deem's work can also provoke sentiments that are disturbing. Although I reminisce on the moments in my art history career that are disturbing. As an art history student, I learned to respect and appreciate baroque and modern art, but Deem's work opens the opportunity for different forms of translation. "...George Deem's Poetic and nostalgic translations of prints and pictures of the past...may be another expression of the feelings that works of art are simply

objects, and consequently just as available as are natural forms as sources for individual artistic expression,” (Weller 1). In other words, these newly created works of art can show historical art in an objectified light, making past art seem somehow vulnerable for the newly structured artwork to fall prey to reinterpretation and recreation. It raises the question of whether or not art forms are merely objects available for retranslation after periods of time.

Does Deem’s work somehow undermine the overall value of artists like Caravaggio and Vermeer? And of George Deem himself? Although appropriation has existed since the beginning of human culture, artistic and theoretical appropriation, questions whether anything can be left in its initial state. Copyright laws as I discuss below, may try to protect the integrity of works but through loopholes, there is still an opportunity for appropriation.

In general terms, the approach Deem takes in translating the art of the old masters generates a new focus that differs from traditional historical art. “Broadly speaking, this approach places Deem among those artists, of which there are many right now, who make art about art,” (Bond 99). His art questions the authority of those who exert the rights of publication and what can be represented, while exploring both the beauty and provocation that art can be. His works employ quotation, inspiration, paraphrasing, and incorporation; his methodology has been described as collage, montage, and appropriation, (Dearinger 33) him to be an artist who defies classification.

## A Contemporary Artist and his Work in Focus

To accurately describe the technique applied in his work, Deem explains, “Western painting has two distinguishing characteristics, one is the use of oil paint as a medium. The other is the use of perspective to render three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional flat surface. This is the tradition of painting I am involved with,” (Deem 16). This chapter examines Deem through his artwork, particularly focusing on his relationship to the original artist through his work. His intensive study of the original methods of previous artists developed his curiosity about Western art and the reimagining of these works. This is important because Deem as an early practitioner of appropriation can assist in the understanding of the rules of artistic appropriation in the work of a wide spectrum of artists.

Although George Deem looked to a number of old masters for the inspiration of his current work, It is clear that his deepest connection is to Vermeer as witnessed in the abundance of work he produced using Vermeer’s techniques. Every artist has a signature source of inspiration. The major contributions and enormous role Vermeer played is clearly evident in Deem’s fruitful career as an artist. “Deem painted as far as we know 281 works of Vermeer and he became George Deem,” (Augustmoon 1). The connection he made with Vermeer is synonymous with George Deem and his career as an appropriation artist.

What exactly is this profound connection between the two artists? David Dearing points out the that, “since Deem was born exactly 300 years after Vermeer (1632 vs 1932), he was exactly the same age that summer, that summer of 1975, as Vermeer had been when he died,” (Dearing 20). In a sense, he was in the right place at the right time and at the right age. It is important to remember George Deem’s appropriationist style and his homage to Vermeer treats master paintings, not as Pop art, but traditionally as subjects (Petersen 1). There are no dye

transfers, silk screens or collage, techniques characteristically employed by pop artists. Since Vermeer was a recurring source for so many of his recreations, we can examine his technique in these master reworkings to understand the overall distinct features that set the images of Vermeer and those of Deem apart.

As noted above, George Deem was a very skilled artist who mastered the techniques of approximately forty artists to create the images in his book *Art School*. As Upshaw notes, Deem was also aware that those artists adopted techniques from other artistic periods as well. Following a method of design in use since the Renaissance, Deem used a grid system of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines onto which he organizes the elements from Vermeer's composition and builds up his colors (Glass143). It is evident that Vermeer used this technique in his paintings as well. The grid system has been used as a technique in order to distribute space, size and color and is a historically used method of art as well as architecture. Could this use of an earlier technique be seen as a link between Deem and Vermeer as an appropriation artist? The techniques used were taken from artists who lived centuries before Vermeer's time. However, if an individual had no recollection of George Deem but was familiar with Vermeer, is it possible for that individual to attribute the work of George Deem to Vermeer without the acknowledgement of the differences between the two artists? Given Deem's deep study of artists' techniques, perhaps Vermeer's work particularly appealed to him because Vermeer's highly structured work problematized the creation of a definitive line between what is considered original and what has been appropriated.

To answer the question of appropriate attribution, Deem also works to leave his own signature in his images following the technique of the old masters. This sets him apart from the old master. Deem's brushwork often differs from that of Vermeer. Hertel, who evaluates the



brushwork methods further explains his practices. “Deem’s brushwork is also looser, a little more abstract as befits a state one step removed from the original, and, on occasion, he leaves ridges of paint around the edges as evidence of the hand (something Vermeer would have never done)” (Hertel 1). Therefore, an individual who is familiar with Vermeer will find the absolute differences between the two artists no matter how subtle they are. In other words, Deem’s depiction of Vermeer in his work does allow enough transformative properties for the viewer to render the works as original with similarities when juxtaposed.

Deem’s image *Seven Vermeer Corners* is a fascinating painting worthy of analysis. Marguerite Glass sums up the description best. “...*Seven Vermeer Corners* of 1991...is a scale representation in oil of seven interiors on one canvas... From these he has taken away all human figures and most of their furnishings thereby allowing Vermeer’s *Seven Spaces*, along with a few of their contents, to show themselves as spaces somehow existing prior to the Vermeer we believe we know (Hertel 1). To further explain this, Vermeer originally places human figures in his images. These in a sense create a relationship with the viewer because of the emotional connection we all feel through the interpretation of their activities and body language. Through this relationship the viewer is able to evaluate their behaviors and further interpret their meaning.

In Deem’s rendition, the removal of these human figures creates a very different relationship between the viewer and the subject matter. Although these spaces are used in a typical Vermeer painting, the removal of human interaction portrays a world of Vermeer before we all knew him as Vermeer. In essence, Upshaw states that the image reflects the possibility of a world that existed before Vermeer added his hand to create the art we are all familiar with. This example of transformation considers the absence of imagery as a way to reinterpret familiar pictures into something new. In his recreated Vermeer paintings, “Deem often...focuses on a

specific detail, while generally adhering to the style of the original painting,” (Syracuse Record 1). In this situation, the specific detail would be the interior walls.

The image is a clear example of the way in which he remains true to the art of Vermeer, utilizing it in his work but adding his signature to enhance the minute details, which are normally overshadowed due to the figures and their placement. The changes he makes to the original, removing human life, highlights the independence he holds from those originals. For example, “The chair in the background of Vermeer’s “Geographer,” which is cropped by the picture’s edge in the original, is intact in “Seven Vermeer Corners” (Upshaw 108). It creates a very different tone in which a detail as simple as a chair provides a whole new meaning for the interior space.

Deem’s recreation of Vermeer’s works continues to emphasize the absence of central figures, enhancing the typically smaller details and components of the overall image. The image of *Vermeer’s Easel* follows the theme of the single chair and lack of human relationships. “The re-envisioning of Vermeer’s masterpiece is the new picture. The empty chairs, then, might be read as symbols of seeing anew, and their accentuated presence juxtaposed with the empty easel in Deem’s *Vermeer’s Easel* might be interpreted as an allegory of seeing as opposed to painting or, perhaps, more precisely, as an allegory of seeing that leads to painting (Srivastara 1). The allegory of seeing as it is represented by the empty easel refers to viewing imagery that otherwise would not be present. This directly refers to Deem’s removal of images deemed essential in Vermeer’s original works. It is provocative in the sense that the interior pulls the viewer in to develop a relationship with figures that exist subconsciously because their presence lingers but they are otherwise not visible.

Furthermore, “Deem’s reassessments of Vermeer’s images pay homage to the master, but they also are strangely disquieting in the way they hint at life beyond the carefully constructed confines that Vermeer reveals in his image,” (Wheelock 1). As previously mentioned, the images provoke the idea of life through the allegorical absence of the human figures with their lingering presence in the form of the chair and the easel. There is a subconscious effect in which the artist incorporates human presence into the painting despite the lack of the physical appearance. In a sense, Deem continues to include the aspect of the human form, a signature component in Vermeer’s works.

Deem’s long-term exploration of Vermeer’s work shows how ideas about appropriation can develop overtime. These ideas include how we interpret what is truly appropriated and how that makes the work more than a copy of the original. In the circumstance surrounding this particular painting, it is easy to determine that there are enough transformative properties to label the work as authentic even though there are signature characteristics of the original artist. *Vermeer’s Easel* demonstrates how absence provides the original through its reinterpretation. The absence of several images from Vermeer’s original work transforms the recreation into a fresh, new image with a different meaning. Without the beloved human characters that are common in Vermeer’s images, the relationship between the artist and subject matter changes and the relationship between subject matter and viewer changes. Therefore, the new image is set apart from the original.

Another example of Deem’s re-envisioning of Vermeer can be seen in Vermeer’s *Artist in his Studio* which is also examined in the chapter on museum experience below. In his *Easel Painting* (1976), Deem has moved the narrative moment of Vermeer’s *Art of Painting Ahead of Time*. Deem’s reassessments of Vermeer’s images pay homage to the master (Wheelock 1). As

his painting parallels Vermeer's, it is clear to the viewer that the differences in each painting make them authentic and at the same time complement each other with their fresh imagery, bold colors and subject matter. In this display, the two images placed together demonstrate the stark contrast; the left image showing a modern, Americanized version whereas the right image maintains the traditional form of Vermeer's original work. However, these two images do not clash or demean each other but rather enhance the qualities that make each image meaningful.

Furthermore, Deem makes changes to the original work as well as enhance it. Why is it necessary to for Deem to shift the original? According to Perrell, "Deem enlarges the source painting [Vermeer's *Artist in his Studio*] to such a degree that it immediately underscores the fact that this is an expressive reinterpretation rather than merely a replica of the original image. In essence, it is an allegory of the antecedent narrative painting," (Perrell 1). By enlarging the image, Deem utilizes transformative properties to create a new image within itself. In other words, Vermeer's painting on the right is not the original at all but another appropriated art form. This is an interesting concept because although there are major similarities between the images, each one is different from the original in subtle yet profound ways.

The juxtaposition of elements from Vermeer's works with those by other artists, his extension of themes begun by Vermeer within new dynamics of time, and his melding of Vermeer's themes with diverse painterly idioms serve to reinforce ideas on the significance of Vermeer within the context of modernism (Glass 163). Therefore, the image places Vermeer in the context of art that this generation relates to and offers a fresh perspective for the present art community. Deem places the imagery at the time in which it was originally painted with the original technique but offers a fresh lens to gaze upon by adding modern aspects, placing it in a contemporary category.

Glass's study of Vermeer and appropriation places Vermeer and Deem's connection in a larger cultural and historical context and usefully problematizes ideas of art as representative: "Earlier painting is the subject of a present artistic activity, one dealt with appropriately as such, incorporating the information which the old pictures transmit... Thus the past is unfixed, can be changed and newly discovered by each generation," (Kultermann 1). This view of the relationship of past and present art emphasizes the flexibility of appropriation and its ability to provide commentary on historical art. Vermeer, a classical painter is available for reinterpretation. Deem does not parody the work of Vermeer, but utilizes his technique to represent his images in a new way that viewers have not previously thought of. In this sense, George Deem is correct when he claims he does not appropriate but rather quotes these artists, and thus does not take original ideas but enhances them and reminds the viewers of the beauty of art.

Deem's *How to Paint a Vermeer*, is extensively discussed below in the context of its display at the Mattatuck Museum of Art. To clarify Deem's relationship to Vermeer further, we will closely examine it from a technical perspective. Deem demonstrates six consecutive stages of his painting's development from beginning to end. The framing and documentation of these stages are in a sense cinematic, calling to mind efforts to record photographically an artist's work in progress (Glass 143). This description is fitting since photography and media are the major mediums targeted for appropriation in contemporary art. Furthermore, the six stages of recreating Vermeer also reveals to the viewer how Deem utilizes such techniques to master the old master's work. The use of the grid system by both Deem and Vermeer recalls the traditional Renaissance method as noted above. The slow buildup of colors is also a characteristic of the work of Vermeer and his contemporaries. The finished product on the same canvas can be viewed as a

theatrical process within the same frame. It is similar to the process of creating a short film, with each scene chronicled as a series of snapshots on a drawing board. It also recalls the processes of animation of sequenced photographic works like those of Duane Michals, or multiple aspects shown in architectural floorplans.

Mieke Bal offers another insight into Deem's unique work that applies both to the stages of his study of imagery and traditional techniques in *How to Paint a Vermeer* and his recreated versions of Vermeer's works: "Deem who has been probing the point of emptiness, of unfinishedness, and of restraint throughout his career, makes a theoretical point about image-making through this bare surface," (Bal 1). The allegory of seeing, as noted above, assists in the visualization of the emptiness or lack of human interaction. Deem's study of the quality of unfinishedness enables his flexibility in reinterpreting images based on relationships with such emptiness. In essence, with the removal of human figures in the painting, Deem has more flexibility in the abstract brushwork and investigation of the importance of figures in works of art that lacks figures. This is crucial to the study of George Deem's work because it further reiterates his method of painting in which he removes the essential figures of an image, creating a new focus on otherwise minute details, thus creating a new meaning independent from that of the original.

In Christianne Hertel's work on the art historical reception of Vermeer, she notes that Deem's painting *Seven Vermeer Corners* from 1991, epitomizes his relationship with the old master. "In this as in other Vermeers painted since the 1970's, George Deem's project is deeply hermeneutical and often witty, the project of one painter attempting to understand another," (Hertel 1). The reinterpretation of Vermeer's work, displays his attempt to understand the overall perspective of the artist in the context of the time-period in which Vermeer worked. In order to

develop a connection with this particular artist, Deem undertook an extensive study of his technique and artwork. Therefore, he did not copy the work of Vermeer but rather mastered his technique to quote the existing artwork and thus enhance the technique. It is an imitation. In fact, “The original Vermeer that started all this is only an imitation. Deem is doing an imitation of an imitation,” (Brown 1). It is an endless cycle of study, mastering, imitating and transformation.

In a telling incident, Deem was gratified to receive a postcard from a friend who described his own impression of Deem’s recreation of Vermeer’s works. In it he says, “When I saw this [a Deem painting after Vermeer] among others in the bookstore, I wasn’t certain whether it had been painted by Jan Vermeer or George Deem!” (Postcard). This reemphasizes the multiple ways in which Deem’s successful attempts at recreating various works of art attributed to Vermeer enter into dialogue with art, reproduction and recognition. Deem’s deep understudy of Vermeer’s technique and his varied versions and repurposing of Vermeer’s work display his own rules of appropriation.

## **Appropriation in his Own Words**

The secret to success from George Deem's point of view is relatively simple, "I paint every day. It just does not work. My life doesn't work if I can't paint every day," (Deem). Deem has gone on many frank and provocative interviews throughout his career which provide a firsthand look into his artistic technique his highly individual sentiments on the subject of art about art. Deem's theories and ideas about art, art history, literature and writing are demonstrated and replicated in a series of highly conceptual books, which were released by commercial publishers and found a relatively large, popular audience and were published in several editions. In this chapter I will examine his publications and public persona including his many statements regarding himself and his relationship with Vermeer as well as his response to the comments and criticism of art professionals. Deem was never hesitant to defend his artistic practice, and his books and statements lay the groundwork for his rules of appropriation. By listening to George Deem's perspective, we gain insight into his content that remind us that art, nature and beauty are only visible through the interpretation of the work itself. Thus, there are no set laws that governs the limits of appropriation.

In interviews, Deem, has described the natural as a key aspect in his painting technique. The language is relatively fluid and relatable during the course of the article. In his paintings, "Nature," it is not conceived as something external to our human consciousness of the natural world (Lectures 1). Thus, nature is not what actually appears before us but what we perceive it to be. For this reason, notions of art and appropriation are in the eye of the beholder. What people consider to be natural is an interpretation. Deem relates the fluidity of artistic his point of view to the natural around us. We are the world and the world is in us. What is projected in art is our sense, our idea, our image of the world (Lectures 1). For Deem, art does not fit into any



particular category. It is all about self-expression; a way for individuals to interpret, question, and even parody art and representation.

As Deem points out, the notion of ‘untouched nature’ is no longer conceivable. The world is covered all over with people (Lectures 1). In our contemporary culture, it is difficult to with our natural surroundings. The influence of authority pushes us in a direction that focuses more on individuals rather than the natural representation of the world that we interpret through self-expression. People are influenced more by people rather than nature, therefore blurring the lines of our idea of the natural world. Through his paintings, George Deem to the idea of untouched nature. He reinterprets the representations devised by the old masters- a world presented to us conditioned by society- and transforms it as a new depiction of nature.

Our perception of the ‘natural’ world of today is conditioned by contemporary imagery. Deem describes nature as, “A known image that we all carry around in our heads.” These images derive from our shared everyday visual experiences, and these experiences include television and movies and advertising and postcards. These images populate our visual memory equally with what used to be called ‘natural’ images (Lectures 1). It then blurs our perception of what is considered natural. In due course, the constant imagery we witness from different media outlets may replace the natural images of our memories. So where does appropriation fall in this scheme? When artists recreate imagery, they recreate what we consider natural images. Also, by providing commentary and other transformative properties to the images, the artist then reinterprets these visual experiences in a manner that they believe to be natural. In other words, appropriation artists reinterpret what we consider natural as it is depicted in art in such a way as to give a new, self-determined to take on a self-expressed meaning to natural. Art and nature are

in the eye of the beholder. George Deem delivers his personal sense of nature to the viewers, forcing us and problematize what we consider a natural visual experience.

In the previous section on his relationship to his Vermeer paintings, “Deem is equally clear that all of his art-quoting paintings are autobiographical and he is obviously fascinated by serial structures, most especially by a kind of ingenious twinning in his juxtapositions of the life model and master’s or students images of the model, beside passages of art-within art such mirrors, paintings, doorways and windows.” (McManus 8). *Vermeer’s Easel*, for example, juxtaposes Deem’s images along with Vermeer’s in a way that emphasizes Deem’s variations on the original, including structural elements as the doorways and chairs. It is a grand display of his extensive study of such subjects and a profound demonstration of his understanding of the world through the eyes of Vermeer. Such works can also be viewed as autobiographical and as representations of his ideas of art.

Deem recreates the works of art of others to provoke the viewer to reexamine the existing artwork. When Deem quotes the work of other artists, he not only draws attention to the formal qualities of his copy, but also invites the viewer to re-evaluate the original (George Deem: *We Were There* 1). This is one of several intentions of appropriation art in which the appropriated art produces a new meaning that causes the viewer to question the intentions of the original artist. In a way it is like watching a film again, or rather the remake. After reviewing it, there is a decision to make regarding what unaltered and what changed between the two films. His *Art School* series, displays tremendous skill but invites the viewer to recall the original artwork that inspired the recreation. During my visit to the Mattatuck Museum of Art to view *George Deem: Quotations*, I could not help but feel that old masters and their work had been invaded. The sense of familiarity with these images was overwhelming while the difference in the technique and

juxtaposition of images are provocative and disturbing. Revisiting the old masters and discovering their postmodern counterparts made this a profound museum experience.

In a key article on his philosophy of painting, Deem reiterates the process of inspiration and deploying his techniques: “I stay with a painting until it is complete. It is like making love: you know when you have come to the end of it.” (Deem 1). In this deeply-felt comparison, Deem praises the painting process and describes the level of his passion, a crucial element in the wording of a talented artist. If there was no passion, his intensive studies of different techniques would not be as successful. When a painting is complete it is both exhilarating and satisfying. However, his process necessarily mixes passion with professionalism. Emotion often runs thin and he relies on his skill for the inspiration. As Deem puts it, “I do it every day. No time to wait for an emotion,” (Deem 1), It is just another aspect of his artistic occupation.

Deem goes on to describe his thoughts on the transformational of his work. His description in regards to enhancing the original work recalls the critical aspects of appropriation that set it apart from the kind that has provoked a political and cultural backlash of plagiarism. In other words, Deem’s recollection of recreating imagery is directly related to the intentions of artistic appropriation in which the newly created work does not copy the original but enhances it. He says, “My paintings are, it’s like re-reading your favorite novel. When you read it again, you know the story, you know the ending. So it’s a different experience the second time. You could say you’d notice something you hadn’t noticed before...To paint a Vermeer is like changing the end of a famous novel (Agustmoon 1). Similar to the idea of watching a remake of a favorite movie, his paintings provoke a visualization of the paintings by the old masters but with a fresh twist that compares to an alternate ending of a novel. George Deem compares himself to an

author, mesmerized by a famous novel and determined to create a rendition that not only has a different ending but stays true to the original plotline.

His skills as a juxtapositionist speak to a puzzle he attempts to put together as he combines the new and old works in order to enhance the technique and reshape the world of art history. At the end of the puzzle, Deem exposes the discipline and hard work in order to quote an original work. George Deem, who is playing this combination game, calls it, “Quotes from masterpieces.” This game can compare with the highest skill the forger. The technique is the discipline, the challenge, and the work itself. George Deem’s work itself is an art history, (Augustmoon 1) or at least in following centuries, his work will be considered by many as art history. Although, George Deem is not a forger, his work is the result of a parallel skill set, meeting the challenge of creating works that quote from well-known artists. His combination games refers to the juxtapositions of his own work with the work of the old masters.

An index of the popular reception of appropriation in the contemporary art world as well as its importance was the conjunction of two shows. A solo exhibition, “George Deem: Paintings” was paired with a concurrent exhibition, “The Masters Remastered” at the Las Vegas Art Museum in 2001. Four artists who are known for quoting the images of earlier artists also presented their work in one place: David Bierk, George Deem, Max Coyer, and Koya Abe (Vance 1). These artists use different techniques but actively participate in the appropriation movement. They further the cause of reinterpreting original works of art through different venues as a way to enhance, praise or parody the artistic community.

Quoting is a term arguably was the first term used to describe the work of George Deem, further indicating the important effect he has had on other art professionals. In a sense, he laid the foundation for the technique and discipline required for remastering the old masters. Early in

his career, before his identification as a signature quotationist, Deem was receiving attention for his imitations of another artist. Deem's paintings from his early years have often been related to the work of American abstract artist Cy Twombly in the eyes of critics as indicated in a press release for an exhibition of his early work. "His [Deem's] 'handwriting' does not aspire to Twombly's heroically-scaled expressiveness; it is not splayed across the canvas, but rather organized into tight symmetrical registers," (Dearing 16). In other words, his early work is not a total replication, but is differentiated by the technique of his brushstrokes. His drawing is camouflaged to appear to the casual eye as writing; the pleasures of its deft touch are only available to close inspection (George Deem: We Were There 1)). Similar to Twombly, his art draws characteristics from the written word but his own personality traits shines through. This fascination with the style of writing is evident in his book *Let George Do It*, where he expresses his creativity not only in painting but writing as well. As he notes, "Although George did not consider himself as a writer, from early on in his life he felt the need to write down what he could not put into his paintings but considered important and worth keeping," (Dydo 3). This is important because it depicts an alternate side to his creativity. Writing is not often considered a form of artistic appropriation because it is a different medium. However, Deem expressed its relevance through his artistic creativity, and enhanced the meaning of the work of the original artist, as all appropriation art intends.

Deem's versatility provided him more success as an artist because of the multiple outlets he used for expression. Deem's use of popular books to display his ideas on art are unusual and effective ways of circulating his work and concepts. His commentary on his artistic abilities other than painting show how they enhance his skills as a quotationist. "Most ideas come into my mind, and if they stay I start answering them. If they vanish... I write them down, but I realized

... you don't have to write them down, because the ones that are valid will never leave you," (Deem). It is impressive that several ideas arrive at once and they stay until they are expressed on canvas or paper. As mentioned in the introduction, art is meant to be shown, regardless of the medium, it is not art if it cannot be shown.

Since pigments and color mixes were much different centuries ago than they are today, a complete imitation is difficult to achieve. Also, brushstrokes and composition techniques have evolved throughout the centuries. For example, one may recognize a color scheme as Courbet's but in fact the actual painting attributes to Deem. Unencumbered by concerns of subject and authorship, Deem frees himself to concentrate completely on the formal pleasures of applying pigment to canvas (Deem). By giving himself the flexibility to paint what he chooses, it is unnecessary to completely determine the full nature of his work as a copy of the original because he employs his brushstrokes and has the freedom to combine his skills with that of Courbet. In other words, his lack of concern for the similarities to the original allows for the liberty to focus primarily on the paint and brush.

As noted, his connection to Vermeer is clearly evident in his many imitations of the artist. Deem has not subsumed Vermeer's images under his own creations but has celebrated his connection with the Delft artist through his imaginative reinterpretations of Vermeer's paintings (Wheelock 1). Traveling throughout Europe during his military career, he quickly discovered his aesthetic and indeed spiritual connection to Vermeer. The admiration radiates through the perfected imagery of appropriated art and well-disciplined technique.

His "Art School" series demonstrates his versatility in the different painting methods used by previous artists. He is adept at combination and approaches it playfully like a game. His thoughts on creating such works directly reflect his artistic inspiration: "My reliability on

accuracy and immediacy on that painting...is because of doing the studies on them; the studies first; taking the chance of painting, arbitrarily, just washes on that big canvas, hoping the placement will work right...the ability to render the images so easily comes from having done the studies first,” (Deem). To reiterate, Deem did not directly copy the images he recreated, but worked to perfect the techniques of previous artists, therefore, producing original works of art with the influence of previous artists.

A recurring theme in the debate surrounding appropriation is the concern over plagiarism and copyright violations. However, George Deem does not copy any artwork at all. In other words, “The quotations of Courbet, Vermeer and old masters that appear in his work are not collage, as they might seem at first glance, but painted by Deem himself,” (Deem). This is a common misconception of appropriation. What sets Deem apart is the extensive study of the painting methods of different artists. As noted above, Deem worked with passion to perfect the craft of the old masters. The final product is a newly-constructed image with his signature rather than the original artist. Also, as noted previously, Deem displays his dedication for painting by reiterating that painting is what he does every day. Therefore, he leaves no room for copying existing images via collaging or pasting. Deem’s thoughts on his studies of different techniques lead one to conclude that he is as talented and original as those artists he takes inspiration from.

George Deem has had great success with his artwork and publications. The process along the way has opened the door for much negotiation and criticism. Deem’s *How to Paint a Vermeer* is one of his most successful accomplishments. It was also subject to multiple art world conversations and critique. An email exchange between Peter Warner and Jay Kramer illustrates the many compromises made in the production of the book. “...we do not want to publish a book that demeans his work or makes it look silly. At the same time, I do not want to publish a

book that looks like an academic monograph or a catalogue to a minor exhibition,” (Warner 1). The quality of the cover and the content was heavily negotiated in order to preserve the commercial and educational purposes and at the same time reveal his accomplishments.

The Introduction by noted critic and art historian, Robert Rosenblum opens the door for further for further negotiation of Deem’s artistic status as he has much to say about the topic of appropriation. Rosenblum insightfully placed Deem in historical context and in his relationship to current art:

“It goes without saying that Deem’s immaculately crafted retrospections, with their mixture of personal history and art history, are a singular achievement; yet enduring artists don’t work in a vacuum but reflect those aspects of the changing world they live in that will also be mirrored in the art of their contemporaries. Deem is no different. His private vision in fact coincides with what older and younger generations of artists, not to mention architects were thinking and making during the last four decades when contemporary art began to look backwards as well as forwards...” (Rosenblum 12)

Deem’s work was represented by the Pavel Zoubak Gallery in New York’s Chelsea gallery district. The last show Deem prepared appeared in 2009. Titled, “George Deem: We Were There,” the gallery described this exhibition in a press release: “Named for the recent work by Deem...it celebrates the life and work of a pioneer in the art of appropriation and quotation,” (Immediate Release 1). George Deem was a pioneer who laid the groundwork for artists like Richard Prince to take the necessary steps and critique our world and the history of traditional art. On this occasion of this exhibition, Charles Molesworth wrote:

“These striking works recapitulate and yet extend Deem’s wit and stylistic panache. In *Quartet* (2008), for example, he isolates single Vermeer women against panels of solid color, echoing the notion of formal repetition he had mastered in the *Art School* series. In *String Theory* (2007) he renders a vivid but distant Vermeer interior but zooms out from it and places in the foreground an intricately patterned rug, a portion of which seems to have drifted in from a Van Eyck. And the facing profiles of the woman in *Profiles* (2007) echo the face in his much earlier *Restoration* (1967), where the framed face becomes a comment on the formalized figuration of portraiture. Taken as a group these paintings show Deem was not only still probing



but yet more willing to reconfigure and recast Vermeer's signature images into one more act of praise, one more turn of the frame," (George Deem: Quotations 1)

During a recent visit to the New Britain Museum of American art, I participated in a gallery talk surrounding appropriation art. The artwork included in the talk were *Madame X* by John Singer Sargent and Michael Theise's reprint *Madame X Desk Blotter*, as well as Deem's *The Studio of Jacques Louis David*. The talk emphasized the impact appropriation has on current art. This is important because the trend not only evolves but it continues to gain momentum. Today, Modern art museums are receptive towards works from artists that rework paintings from old masters. It is a political movement in which artists are making statements based on their interpretations of the common representation of art.

George Deem and other critics and professionals prove to the audience that appropriation art is similar to other trends. He was a talented artist like many others before him. However, his love for learning techniques to paint pictures in the exact manner of so many artists places him a different class from the rest of the contemporary appropriationists.

In his own words regarding painting, Deem reflects on his persona through the eyes of his contemporaries. It is refreshing for an artist to make it a point for others to understand how he views himself and his response to other's opinions. He said, "We all think painters paint with a lot of gestures and hope as they work. Sometimes it's true and sometimes it isn't. I think those who are not painters prefer to think that way... There are times when you just sweat and get that article in there, whether it's true or not... You just get it in, because it's the painting that's talking to you. You're not talking to the painting anymore... The painting is talking to you," (Deem). Through his opinion on the "natural", the art of writing, and the world around us, it is clear that he is interested in reinterpreting the actual world around us as well how previous

artists saw the world. Therefore, Deem helps illuminate not just the work but also the thoughts of others through his studies, reworkings and quotations.

Traditional, or historical are terms often used to describe what is commonly taught in a classroom setting. It is also what we view on display in grand museums like the Louvre. The fact that appropriation is making its way into museums and history books, it offers the chance for a change in the visual representation we produce based on media, advertising and television. In other words, what artists today are considering natural will have an opportunity to occupy more space in our visual memory than what resides there from different media outlets. In a sense these artists are removing the restrictions against self-expression and are redefining our sense of the world and what we consider to be natural. The essence of appropriation art, through the perspective of a contemporary artist, works to change how we originally interpret traditional art through text books or museum exhibitions. According to Deem, certain ideas regarding the natural world and what these representations would look like are often entirely different than the original thought, (Deem) which is the basis for viewers and artistic professionals to enjoy and ponder.

Nature and painting are factors that motivate him when continuing his craft. In his own words, Deem reiterates the relationship he has to painting and how it differs from the painting of the old masters like Vermeer. He also verifies the emphasis he puts on studying the techniques of other artists, placing him in yet another category that differs from other appropriation artists; he does not copy a painting, but paints a painting. How does this relate to the overall rules of appropriation? George Deem makes his own rules. He follows his own guidelines and moves throughout his as an artist of original and substantial subject matter. His own rules included quoting, juxtapositioning and paying respect to those who inspire him.

## **Introduction to Appropriation in Museums: From an Artist's Point of View**

As critic and art theorist John Welchman puts it, “In the 1990’s a shift had taken place in staging the historical self-consciousness of the museum or gallery and its parameters of exhibition” (Welchman 2). With the appropriation movement, there is a change in the manner and types of artwork exhibited related not only physically, but also theoretically. The change in spectacle of the museum display is related to my analysis of George Deem’s artwork and his impact. This also serves as introduction to my analysis of Deem’s technique which forever changed the face of appropriation.

The exhibit at the Mattatuck Museum of Art, *Quotations: The Art of George Deem*, on view April 9 2015 through May 17 2015, displayed several works from the artist that provoke discussions surrounding reproduction, and spectacle. The late artist, famous for recreating works from old masters, with a little twist, works to engage audiences in an old conversation about the beauty of art, with a new topic encompassing the notion of Art about Art. As a former employee at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and United States Army Veteran, his global travels and exposure to art introduced Deem to the works of Vermeer, Matisse, Velazquez, and many other original masters of the art scene in the 20th century.

In an interview, George Deem refused to describe his work as reproduction and preferred to use the term ‘quoting.’ He said, “When I quote the painting of another artist I integrate the quoted work into a new composition with its own design and structure and inherent meaning. That meaning includes the recognition that every painting has in it the possibility of another painting,” (Quotations 1). In this chapter, I apply the critical theories of museum studies, most importantly theories of reproduction, spectacle, and the public audience to the George Deem

exhibit and examine the social responses and sentiments to the recreated images. It also considers the dialogue opened to other critics to discuss their own analysis of his technique. As Deem says himself, he does not reproduce, he quotes. Therefore, this exhibition raised questions about how viewers responded to his art, the intention of his work and the overall difference between his approach to the art world and reproductions of the Old Masters.

The exhibition helped me focus on the authenticity of his work since it includes images from existing paintings. I also thought about how his work criticizes, yet glorifies the art world, particularly in his horizontal *How to Paint a Vermeer*, *Painting with a Mirror* and *The Diptych Artist Studio*, how these were displayed to everyday people, challenging them and us to look at ourselves as located within class structures, and to focus on the beauty that is art.

The exhibit's was straightforward, reminiscent of a classic museum display. A room with four walls hung simply with different works of art from the artist, provided the viewer with a singular focus on the artwork, opening the works for different responses toward the artist's school of thought. Deem's Work both interrogated popular media, as in his Frans Hals Postcard Series, and received a degree of popular success through his commercial books.

George Deem's Mattatuck exhibition, and aspects of his work, can be illuminated through analysis of the social role of spectacle. Debord's "The Spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images," (Debord 107). The relationship between individual responses and how the images mediate this relationship allows us to consider this exhibit as a commodity because it creates an advantageous meeting place for the exchange of aesthetic and mental stimulation. The exhibit is a commodity because as an academic spectacle, it utilizes the images to mediate the scholarly discussion and reaction toward George

Deem. As the images reflect several memories of the great masters beginning in the eighteenth century, they open a dialogue among the viewers. Since a spectacle is often coupled with units or events as attractions that bring people together, George Deem's practice of quotations is related to the idea of spectacle.

Debord's idea of spectacle as social, affirming, and organized can also help us theorize George Deem. "The concept of spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are appearances of a socially organized appearance..." (Debord 107). George Deem work brings together diverse art and history. As a commodity that brings individuals together to reminisce about the work of the old masters, Deem's exhibit exemplifies a spectacle because it is an organized display for social purposes. Also, "Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is affirmation of appearance, an affirmation of all human life, namely social life..." (Debord 108). Viewing this and other exhibits of Deem's work, and indeed the complex work itself as a spectacle, helps us understand the impact of George Deem having created several works outside of their original forms. Deem's work can attract a crowd to its representation of or homages to past artists and recreates the art of art history for all to view. His gathering of past art and artists can be seen as an affirmation of social organization and human life.

The Mattatuck exhibition also led me to focus theoretically on the reproduced works and the difference between the authenticity of his work and the element of reproduction. According to Walter Benjamin, "The unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence..." (Benjamin 220). The time and place for the work of art determines its authenticity, which is an aspect that applies to George Deem's work.

As noted above, Deem claims he does not reproduce other artists' work but quotes them

and pays homage to them. However, the original work, like that of Vermeer, is considered authentic because it existed within its time. Whereas Deem's work is a representation. Debord believes the reproduction to be, "...a negation of life...a negation of life which becomes visible..." (Debord 108) or evident as it appears solely as a reflection of the works' authenticity. Deem's image *How to Paint a Vermeer* portrays his knowledge of the old artist's technique. It also raises questions regarding the difference between reproduction and memory strategy to pay homage. Critic Robert Ayer describes Deem's relationship with Vermeer as one of master and pupil. Ayer argues, "At one level, he treated Vermeer as a modest seventeenth century pupil might have, by not seeking to depart from the master's example, but rather by emulating, borrowing from and reassembling fragments of it to make what are effectively homages," (Ayers 1).

Meanwhile, Charles Molesworth moves away from Benjamin's theory of the original work holding a unique existence. He believes Deem's work also holds its own meaning rather than just acting as a representation of the original. According to Molesworth, "He paints versions of Vermeer but not in the usual, and by now superficial, post-modern sense of quoting or appropriating the Dutch master. Rather, he skillfully executes a Vermeer, but without the people present in those lush, redolent interiors...or he shows us what would be read as a detail of a Vermeer masterpiece as if resting comfortably on an art history textbook," (Molesworth 22). In other words, George Deem's works are not reproductions because he incorporates his own technique, a significant difference from the original work.

In contrast, it is possible that because the images from old masters like Vermeer are recreated to constitute a different perception from the viewer, Deem's intentions can still fall into the category of reproduction. According to Benjamin, "a work of art has always been

reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft...” (Benjamin 218) which serves as an indicator that Deem’s practice of his craft by closely examining the work of others lies within the restrictions of reproduction. He goes on to argue that the manner of the organization of human perception and how it is accomplished depends on the nature and historical circumstances (Benjamin 222). In other words, the time period effects the relationship between the artist and the viewers. It effects the social atmosphere of the museum exhibit because of the time period and social circumstances.

Deem’s artwork is a reproduction because the historical context in which his work is placed moves away from the authenticity of the original work. The authenticity is compromised because of the different reactions of viewers in the present. When viewing his work, *Painting with a Mirror*, the reproduction of Millet is evident. However, the addition of the mirror offers a new meaning to the affirmation of human life at the time the painting was created. In fact, the mirror engages the viewer in a dialogue that was not present before; since the subjects in the image are not making eye contact with the viewer, it is originally impossible to respond to the artist. The mirror allows for a discussion of not only the class status of the subjects in the image, but also with themselves as they gaze at their reflection.

Benjamin argues that the difference of the historical periods affects the audience’s perception. This can be interpreted to mean Deem reproduces the work rather than quoting or paying homage. However, this image yields a different interpretation in which Deem creates an original, meaningful experience based on the artist’s intentions of that time rather than the artist of the original period in which the painting was created.

The social setting also dictates the overall experience for the viewer when engaging in a dialogue with George Deem's work. From a political standpoint, Deem offers a refreshing alternative to the concept of art about art in which he introduces traditional works back to the public, changing the outlook of the art world. Deem also couples this new outlook with the intellectual stimulation that draws those from art academia to revisit not only the subject matter but the overall museum-going experience. Jurgen Habermas says the process of making public, in this case George Deem's public recreation of a spectacle of the old masters, makes these images "worthy of acclamation in a climate of nonpublic opinion," (Habermas 78). In other words, Deem challenges the public opinion of the traditional persona surrounding the original works of art by recreating them through his own technique in order to critique and even glorify the common conception of the art world. It provides an aesthetically pleasing visit for a common museum goer as well as intellectual satisfaction for the private, academic crowd. Also, since Deem rose to prominence during the shift in the public sphere in regards to how museums view their content, it is only fitting that much of his work raises such points about art and the public.

Vermeer, the subject of many of Deem's recreations, serves as an example of a reintroduction of art in the public sphere. Martin Pops describes Vermeer's influence on the phenomena of traditional art and the public sphere by saying "...Vermeer has not merely despite himself become famous; he has been assumed into the Pantheon of Pop," (Pops 5) implying that an influential figure from the seventeenth century has made his way into contemporary art through famous artists like Deem. Pops goes onto describe the concept of pop as "the sense that *The Painter in His Studio* has become a familiar and serviceable icon for purposes of parody and irony...Vermeer has become part of the useable truth for such contemporary American artists," (Pops 5). The image shows a figure in the traditional pose reflecting Vermeer's original work.



However, Deem 'Americanized' the image with the United States map in the background along with the muse wearing the appropriate attire that is reminiscent of Lady Liberty. This image appeals to the public with its bright colors and iconography. In conjunction with the previous theme of challenging the art world as we know it, Deem utilizes our memory of the works of Vermeer in order to pay homage to the artist and add his own point of view on art and its history. By using Vermeer as an absence, Deem fills the void with the representation of Vermeer and content of other art historical images. Thus, proving that his work has its own meaning separate than that of Vermeer and his original works. It also shows that Deem wishes to start a conversation about the contemporary art world and its politics.

Another interesting aspect of the image, which reflects the rest of the collection in the exhibit, is its parallel to the public and private spheres of authority. Habermas's article on the public sphere addresses the public and private realms. He describes the public sphere as the authority, maintaining relationships with commerce and state activities. Private individuals are those who develop opposition to the public sphere, hold no office and are against the restrictions of the public authority (Habermas 77). The image on the right, is the closest representation to the original work by Vermeer. The image on the left is the re-creation with vibrant colors replacing those subtle tones from the right handed image.

Deem is an unusual artist because of his ability to copy famous, well-known paintings of established artists, and then shifts the details so it holds a different representation. This image represents the public sphere because the right-hand version depicts the original image. It represents the common, societal norm, the most accepted form of art. The image also represents the private sphere because the left-hand version breaks away from the original so it is no longer a copy, but another authentic work of art. In a sense, one image is considered the acceptable form

of art (the public sphere), whereas the other image represents the unconventional private sphere.

Deem reintroduces the acceptable form of art in his own version with changes to the details. He recreates the work of the old masters but breaks out of the norm of their techniques to develop his own. This is important to museum critical theory because how the public views art historical content is a direct reflection of how museums relate to their targeted demographics and adapt to the changing environment of museum politics. George Deem's overall critical approach to the public outlook on the art world influences his recreations as well as the meaning behind such works. When examining George Deem, it is safe to conclude that he is one of many artists with a postmodern approach to the art world. Many artists before him have greatly influenced artists of his generation. There is a constant discussion surrounding Deem and his intentions with the recreations of famous artworks. An argument can be made for both sides according to Walter Benjamin and other critics like Molesworth. I believe that although Deem's most famous works of art are in fact reproductions, contemporary artists are constantly inspired by artistic figures before them. Deem was heavily influenced by Vermeer. In the modern age the presence of classic techniques and famous classic figures are evident every day. Therefore, Deem's work can contain the highest level of authenticity but still hold a level of reproduction. Deem's exhibit is a collection of images that represent the controversial topics of public acceptance, the debate around artistic reproduction and the overall spectacle he works into his own technique. The multi-faceted aura surrounding "Quotations: The Art of George Deem," is only a portion of what George Deem can offer the public in regards to our view of the world. His work challenges the public intellectually as he glorifies the traditions of the old masters and yet criticizes the societal standard of the beauty of art.

Richard Prince, discussed below, often appropriated photography, primarily advertising images. His unaltered images were thrust into the context of the art gallery, exactly duplicated, exemplifying the appropriation by art institutions of earlier commercial photography, (Crimp 126) a medium easily accessible and most habitually imitated. This is important because not only is George Deem highly accepted in the museum setting, artists like Richard Prince are also highly regarded in spite of his use of controversial imagery from the public domain.

The museum itself functions as an archive, storing the information about artists, to utilize for further research. It is important to note that this exhibition introduced me to this particular artist and it then serves as an archive for later reference. Archives remind us of who or what came before. George Deem as well as the museum archive the information brought on by the old masters to remind us of the beauty of their artwork. “They present us with the opportunity to engage with those pasts in the present and for the future...” (Butler 242). Deem archives these works of art displaying his unique set of skills as an artist. At the same time, the museum archives the work of George Deem for audiences to enjoy time and again.

## The Downside of Appropriation

Although appropriation gained widespread acceptance in the 1960's, the movement has not been without controversy. This chapter focuses on examples of the kind of backlash that can surround appropriation and the consequences seen by those whose work or images are taken or used as inspiration. Different images in a variety of media can be made to serve different purposes for the artists who rework and portray them with new intentions. These purposes, in certain situations, newly problematize the question of who really sets the rules of appropriation.

The direction appropriation pursues today can lead to controversy over the interpretation of copyright laws and their relationship to artwork recreated by contemporary artists. While George Deem revives and reinterprets the style of the old masters, artists like Richard Prince have faced backlash in their reworking of the images of their own contemporaries. The famous *Cariou vs Prince* lawsuit points out the risks of appropriating without permission and raises the question of when reworking is appropriate and when it becomes illegal. Where does this confusion originate? According to Julia Halperin, "The problem stems from widespread confusion about fair use, an ambiguous worded provision in U.S. law that allows individuals to use copyright materials without permission under certain circumstances," (Halperin 9). These circumstances serve to provide commentary, parody, or transformative qualities.

Transformation refers to providing an interpretation that is different from the original artwork where it ultimately translates as an entirely different and therefore new work of art. As long as the original artwork is transformed to give the new work authentic meaning through parodies and commentaries, it would then enhance the original work. This will avoid copyright infringement altogether.

Transformation then leads to fair use under copyright law. In sum, “Fair use is an internationally recognized copyright defense, which has been developed in the United States by the Supreme Court to embrace the artistic practice of appropriation of other artists’ images, but only if such borrowing transforms the borrowed image into a substantially new image or composition,” (Lydiate 1). How we can distinguish what is considered transformative and what violates the statute of fair use? Richard Prince’s case demonstrates the continuing challenge the art world faces with the blurred lines of appropriated art.

Richard Prince, a well-known appropriation artist created his *Canal Zone Series*, which incorporated dozens of reworked images from photographer Patrick Cariou’s ethnographic collection from his time with a community in Jamaica published in the book, *Yes, Rasta*. The lawsuit stated that Prince and his art dealer, Gagosian Gallery, used his images unfairly and without permission under the Copyright Act. The stipulations under the Copyright Act are as follows:

(1)The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or nonprofit, educational purposes; (2) The nature of the copyrighted work; (3) The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; (4) The effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work (Yokell 10).

Therefore, Cariou’s argument encompasses the portion used in relation to his original work and the effect it had on the market value of that particular work. Because the exhibition of Prince’s work paralleled that of Cariou’s, his show was ultimately shut down as a conflict of interest. This also parallels the statutes regarding commercial uses; Prince’s intentions with his artwork in relation to Cariou’s photographs reflect different outcomes in its commercial value or marketing plan. Another key legal and philosophical issue that comes into play when referring to the

similarities and the use of transformation is the authenticity of the original work as opposed to that of the appropriated.

During the initial verdict, which ruled in favor of Cariou, the court determined that, “Aside from finding minimal transformation... the defendant’s highly commercial purpose, as well as their bad faith in knowingly refusing to seek permission to use Yes Rasta photographs, both before and after receipt of Cariou’s cease and desist notice,” (Yokell 11). In other words, Prince violated the copyright statute that relates to the commercial purposes and its effect on the market value of the original work. Cariou ultimately shut down his exhibition in juxtaposition with that of Prince’s, therefore legitimizing his claim for a lawsuit. According to Rachel Corbett’s article:

A second point of the appeal, Schiller said, is Cariou’s claim that he lost an exhibition -- and thereby suffered commercial damages -- as a direct result of Prince’s appropriation. According to testimony, **Calypso** boutique owner **Christiane Celle**, who was in the process of opening an art gallery in New York, was in negotiations with Cariou to exhibit the Rasta works. But, when Gagosian exhibited the “Canal Zone” show in 2008, Celle changed her mind. In her deposition, she said she didn’t want to look “like I’m trying to take advantage of the success of Richard Prince.” (Corbett).

On the other hand, the court’s original judgement contradicts the idea of fair use as previously stated by Julia Halperin. This is because the permission from the artist for the use of the original work is not necessary as long as it remains within specific guidelines. During the trial, Gagosian’s lawyers asserted that “Prince’s incorporation of the photographs is allowable under fair use, which permits the limited reproduction of copyright material for creative purposes,” (Goldstein 5). Therefore, Prince’s Canal Zone Series is arguably legitimate and within the legal guidelines.

Furthermore, in terms of the effect on his market value, Prince argues that his work, “...poses no harm to the value of such photographs and any market value relating to the

photographs...have been enhanced rather than decreased,” (Goldstein 5). There is truth in this statement since this lawsuit has moved the controversy over appropriation and copyright laws to the forefront of the postmodern world. There is little doubt that Cariou’s work, both his book and his photographs, received far more attention due to Prince’s appropriation and subsequent

When comparing the images, it is clear that each individual had a legitimate foundation for their argument. Cariou, having spent a significant amount of time in the mountains of Jamaica, embodies multiple aspects of Jamaican life and the Rastafarian community in this image of a man on muleback. The background in the photograph speaks to the environment, weather, and overall setting for the photography series, and the Rastafarians shown in this and other images eloquently express some of the characteristics of the movement and the lives of its followers:

"With bold black-and-white portraits and landscapes, Cariou indelibly captured the strict, separatist, jungle-dwelling, fruit-of-the-land lifestyle—popularized by reggae legends Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Burning Spear—in images never before seen, until now. In Yes Rasta—the phrase spoken by true Rastafari when greeting each other—Cariou’s direct, classical photographs reveal men whose style and attitude are as distinctive as their dreadlocks. Men who have left the modern world of Babylon in pursuit of their own independence. Men whose lives are intertwined with the tropical landscape, and whose rituals, symbols, philosophies, religion, medicine, agriculture, family structure, and remarkable strength make the definitive statement of self-reliance." (Cariou 2000)

The separatism and rural life of some Rastafarians are indicated by the isolation of the figure, the small mule hinting at farm or field work, and the focus on the male figure's dreadlocks, isolated against the sky

On the other hand, the pose of the individual on the mule recalls several famous portraits throughout history. Sitting on the back of the animal with a direct gaze at the artist, the image is reminiscent of *King Louis XIV* by Rigaud, and *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, by David. Although,

the photograph is simplistic in its content, the image recalls several famous works of strong leaders throughout the centuries, therefore it encompasses the strength of the culture through the eyes of the individual on either side of the lens. It also questions the role of appropriation since the photographer transformed the technique of portraiture to give it a new meaning in the form of photography. Like all photographs, Cariou's rely on the meanings of iconographic tropes to create new meanings. In a sense, Cariou can be considered an appropriation artist as well.

Moreover, Prince's use of imagery in his *Back to the Garden*, differs from that of Cariou in a number of ways. The mediums used; collage, inkjet and acrylic, work to build the authenticity of the image because they provide different textures, colors, and shapes. The additional images of the female figures portray a different meaning because it is no longer a relationship between two people, the photographer and the subject, but it is now a relationship between the photographer and multiple subjects. The female figures share the space with the original male figure, creating several focal points that take away the emphasis of the male as the sole representative of the culture surrounding the original photograph series. It is no longer about an introduction into another culture but an observation of human nature and behavior. The removal of the eyes symbolizes the removal of the emotional connection with the subject, leaving the viewer to guess the relationship between the different images. It ultimately provides the artist with more flexibility for self-expression. Without the emotional connection to the subject, the actual meaning of the image is open to interpretation. This is a clear example of appropriation due to Prince's transformation of an ethnographic project to an abstract form of art. However, for the sake of the argument of the impact on the market value, does the newly synthesized artwork of Richard Prince truly enhance the value of Cariou's Yes Rasta photo series? Prince had never taken any photography courses but came to his appropriation practice



through closely studying photographed figures in newspapers and magazines. Evaluating his work in part depends on knowing whether the artist understands the craft well enough to appropriately enhance the original rather than decrease its value. (Conner 1).

During an interview with Peter Hally, Prince discussed his skill with reworking photography. Being among the first to ‘rephotograph an image, Prince explains, “Rephotography, (copying photographic images) was always a technique to make the image again and to make it look as natural looking as it did when it first appeared...It never attempted to produce a copy...a resemblance yes, but never a copy,” (Prince 84). It thus appears that Prince’s attempts to transform the images he derives inspiration from are in fact for the purpose of enhancing them and not just reproducing them in their original form. His intentions to produce a resemblance rather than an actual copy is evident in the case of his use of Cariou’s photographs. The fair use act then applies because the original artist’s permission would not be needed.

Cariou and Prince have become household names along with the discussion revolving around authenticity. However, this lawsuit is not the first to come about regarding fair use in contemporary art. The 1992 lawsuit, *Roger v. Koons*, further outlines the dangers of artistic appropriation and its debated legalities. The argument against Jeff Koons, another well-known appropriation artist, was that his use of the copyrighted photograph, *Puppies*, was not transformative since it was neither a parody nor a commentary on the original work and therefore did not meet the guidelines of fair use and protection (Yokell 11). This is important because although this is not the only lawsuit brought against Koons, it contributed to the legal precedents toward appropriation and postmodernism. He admitted to copying the photograph. However, “...Koons lost, both in the Southern District of New York and on appeal to the Second Circuit. In

both proceedings, Koons put forward an affirmative defense of fair use, but both courts gave his argument short shrift,” (Ames 1474). His fair use defense detailed that his sculpture was a parody of the work. Since the Prince lawsuit is the most recent event regarding copyright legalities, other artists like Koons have laid the foundation for future artists and their relationship with the public in regards to contemporary art and the fair use act today.

When comparing the two images it is difficult to determine the use of transformation under the fair use statute. The photograph by Art Rogers displays in black and white a smiling couple and perfectly captures the emotion of the two individuals and their intimate relationship with the animals they are holding. The open background behind the fence they are sitting in front of indicates they are outside. The simplicity of the photograph, the lack of color, eliminates the distraction of the viewer from what is happening in the image. The two individuals are very happy. They are obviously enjoying their time with the puppies. There are several dogs in the image, suggesting they have even more animals since the image has a rural setting. This is a warm family photo, which is logical for its purpose as a greeting card image.

There are several contrasts in Koons’s appropriated work of art *A String of Puppies*. There is much more color and accessories such as the flowers, and the brightly colored orange and pink shirts the two individuals are wearing. Because this is not an image taken from real life as is the photograph, the emotions of the couple are skewed and offer a different meaning from the original work of art. The viewer is immediately drawn to the parodic colors of the dogs. The background is different from the original as it is muted and gives no indication of a familial setting. This appropriated artwork is in the form of a sculpture. The intimate outdoor background naturally is not included. Also, since these figures are not taken from real life, there is a lack of emotion from the content, thus transforming the overall work of art to a colorful, more

expressive form. In my opinion, this sculpture is very transformative and offers a meaning that is different from the original. In a sense, Koons has created a new image as it provides a dialogue among the viewers for what it means as a form of expressing and reworking the original piece.

How do these lawsuits and the legal notions surrounding fair use, copyright acts and appropriation effect the art world today? George Deem, considered by many as the forefather of appropriation, reworked original art from masters from centuries before our time. They will never come forward with claims of copyright infringements and violation of the fair use act. The current U.S. federal copyright laws were enacted in 1976, when George Deem was already well established in his craft. “It then became the court system’s task to find a just solution within a legal framework that had already been overtaken by changes in art practice and forms,” (Lydiate 1). Before 1976, the laws regarding copyright infringement were less enforceable. In fact, copyright terms were 28 years and could be renewed for another 28 if it seemed worthwhile (McLaren 38). Today’s standards for copyright terms are subject to legal enforcement. After 1976, Congress no longer wished for copyright protection to be established for a fixed term. The new agreed-upon term for copyright protection would be the life of the author with an additional 50 years, (McLaren 38). This, in a sense, directly contradicts the concept of fair use in which artists are allowed to copy the work of other artists with certain limitations. This is because the laws seem to forbid any copying whatsoever. Richard Prince’s concept of creating a resemblance rather than an exact copy is off limits. It is no wonder that we ask how the court system can justify limiting an established artistic practice. The warning against appropriation in the eyes of the law are further evident in the relationship between the artists and their dealers and representatives.

Art journalist Julie Halperin reported that, “The CAA (College Art Association) surveyed more than 2000 art professionals of whom almost 10% say they have experienced challenges in their use of third party imagery,” (Halperin 9). The circumstances surrounding art law forces these art world professionals to rethink the content of the artwork they choose to accept in their professional settings. One such professional, Angelo Arbizo, the director of Eleven Rivington Gallery in New York, insists, “A discussion about fair use has to come at the beginning of the conversation,” when reviewing artistic practices, “I have looked at certain artworks and thought, ‘Has this been altered enough or would someone have a case?’” (Halperin 9). This kind of thinking could potentially inhibit the creativity of the postmodern artistic community in which appropriation is a signature technique. It limits the creative abilities of young talent due to the fear of legal repercussions. They may become subjected to the opinion of others who deem their work as minimally transformative. Thus, future generations of artists who seek inspiration from previous artists or even their own contemporaries face marginalization in the eyes of U.S. federal law.

What does this mean for the future of appropriation? The line between art and law often blurs in regard to judging fair use as opposed to legal violations. This also goes for the US Court of Appeals for the second circuit’s decision to almost entirely exonerate Richard Prince of any wrongdoing in his *Canal Zone Series*. This decision remains controversial: “For many copyright lawyers, the court’s decision might seem at odds with one of the central tenets of copyright law: that it is not the job of the courts to get embroiled in question of judging aesthetic value,” (McLean 63). In other words, what is considered aesthetically appropriate often clashes with the political and legal ideas about artistic creativity and freedom.

The controversies surrounding copyright laws and liability may not concern art collectors or may even have the opposite effect. In fact, “Adam Lindemann bought a painting from Richard Prince’s ‘Canal Zone Series, It’s all over now, created in November 2008 for \$1.1m only after Cariou sued for copyright infringement,” (Halperin 9). One can only speculate on the value of these images and how they would have been affected had there been no publicity from the copyright lawsuit. Would Richard Prince appropriation have enhanced the value of Cariou’s work without the attention of the public and the political backlash from the judicial system? It is a continual back and forth between the repercussions for appropriating artwork without permission and the potential increase in market value for such practices. However, as noted above, U.S. federal laws focusing on copyrighting make it that much more difficult to differentiate what is a legitimate case as opposed to what is fair use.

Eric Doering, another well-known appropriations artist explains his concerns by saying, “It is not really clear what you’re allowed to do...If Duchamp can turn a urinal on its side and call it a work of art (See figure 1: Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* 1917), how much do we really need to do to transform something?” (Halperin 9). Original items such as everyday appliances can be used for artistic purposes and obtain aesthetic value depending on the perception of those viewing them and those creating them.

Duchamp, who uses the signature R. Mutt, exemplifies the concern of art professionals over the aesthetic value and authenticity of appropriated art through his work, *Fountain*. The disregard for his work also symbolizes the debate over authenticity. The claim against such disregard stated that, “Mr. Mutt’s fountain was not immoral...It is a fixture that you see every day in plumber’s show windows...” “He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view...creating a new thought

for that object,” (Anon 26). This discrepancy lead to a slew of controversies that resulted in a large gap between the artists’ creative intentions the power of authority over such representation.

How can the political aspect of postmodernism work to rectify this situation? Since the Second Circuit Court ruled in favor of Prince, the litigation has prompted individuals to reflect on the issue of judging aesthetic value as authentic. A consensus has developed in the art world that it should not fall into the hands of the courts to decide what is considered authentic artwork. There needs to be better clarification on how to determine what is legally appropriate. In fact, “Many believe that artists and speakers alike deserve a more bright line policy, while the task of determining when the line is crossed has become even more difficult with appropriation art and the nuances of transformation,” (Yokell 12). This is a clear illustration of the attempt legal and political arbiters to exert their authority over what is deemed ‘art.’ Individuals and corporate bodies who do not truly contemplate the meaning of contemporary art place themselves in the position of judging what is and what is not considered legally appropriate. It should not be the place of the law to determine the violations and accomplishments of professionals in the art world.

As social media and other internet resources provide greater access to imagery, artistic dialogue spreads, and so does the risk for copyright infringement. Lawsuits like those against Richard Prince set the precedence for what is appropriately labeled as artistic appropriation or a violation of copyright laws. Although he worked with old master images that were never copyrighted, George Deem is the pioneer of appropriation in the postmodern world. He remains an inspiring example of the importance for artists to have the freedom to transform existing masterpieces into new, meaningful works of art.

## Conclusion

To hear Marcel Duchamp describe his technique in his own words speaks to a theme surrounding a different method of visual appreciation. In comparison to George Deem's visual reworking, Duchamp's use of identifiable objects rather than images seeks to create the same sense of recognition but with a different form of aesthetic value. In a 1961 interview, he revealed how his ideals are directly related to appropriation. "It was around this time that the word 'Readymade' came to mind to designate this form of manifestation. A point which I want very much to establish is that the choice of these 'readymades' was never dictated by aesthetic delectation. This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste," (Duchamp 40). Why is this important in this period of time? The appreciation for traditional historical art never ceases. However, as appropriation continues its prevalence in the contemporary art community it has the potential to create a new appreciation apart from traditional art, if it has not already done so given the popular and critical reception of George Deem's reinterpretation of the entire history of art. As for Duchamp, he is also an essential figure to the appropriation movement because he provides a new form of aesthetic value for ordinary objects previously deemed to have no relation to art or art history.

Duchamp and his artwork are different example used in appropriation art. Deem, Duchamp and Prince are very compelling characters in the world of contemporary art. However, Prince and Deem share a similar ideals in their imagery apart from Duchamp. However, Duchamp provides a provocative aspect for appropriation that ties the theme together in the sense that all art in the appropriation movement is in the eye of the beholder and can hold the meaning of creating art about art and not necessarily representation. Meanwhile, Duchamp's comments regarding indifference toward the original aesthetic value relate to the transformative qualities he uses to enhance the beauty of the original, much like the intentions of Deem and Prince to begin with.

How do Duchamp's intentions along with those of Prince and George Deem speak to the overall strategy of appropriation? It is evident that artistic appropriation does not consist of a strategy that

involves making a copy of an image line by line, but rather accentuates it, enhances it, lays a new foundation for what is considered fine art. Appropriation changes the way we view and appreciate art in museums, galleries and even in the classroom. Douglas Crimp suggests, “The Strategy of appropriation no longer attests to a particular stance toward the conditions of contemporary culture. To say this is both to suggest that appropriation did at first seem to entail a critical position and to admit that such a reading was altogether too simple,” (Crimp 189). It may also suggest that contemporary art and culture is often subject to multiple facets involving artistic and cultural analysis. In other words, appropriation, holding an initially simplistic definition of copying several works of art and thought, transgresses into a more critical examination of the direction our society is headed in regards to fine art. This means that appropriation as an acceptable art form will assimilate into museums and galleries, and eventually embrace its relationship with the public in the same fashion as historical art.

The misconception often surrounding appropriation results in events such as Prince’s copyright lawsuit or the disregard for displays like that of “Richard Mutt”. Duchamp’s readymade objects continue to purposely misconstrue the boundaries surrounding contemporary art and its aesthetic value. “The assumption was that appropriation art was a key component of nothing less than the anti-aesthetic, art after modernism, postmodernism- all titles of highly influential anthologies from the mid-1980’s had their starting point of view that a once transgressive modernism had become thoroughly institutionalized by the 1970’s and that an alternative had to be formulated urgently,” (Evans 14). The assumption comes from work produced by Duchamp as “Richard Mutt.” However, critics fail to realize, his art parodys and critiques the world through his interpretation, which is a form of art in itself. Also, Deem’s



famous Vermeer recreations, further contest the position that appropriation art is a representation and reinforces its aesthetic value.

The true beauty in appropriation art lies in the provocative sense that the viewer glimpses a work of art, ponders the transformation and develops an appreciation for the new image apart from the original. This event this moment in which the viewer appreciates the intentions of the artist, their interpretation of the world around them, and even come to question the normal functions of society as determined by authority, is the key of seeing the value of art about art. The ability of appropriation art to move the viewer into interpreting the image as one that questions the traditional standards of society is what allows appropriation art and artists like George Deem to interrogate Debord's spectacle, to revise art history, to play a role in postmodernism, and present a new analysis of representation.

Deem brought the appropriation movement to the forefront with his homages to the great historical artists. Prince then makes appropriation art infamous with one of the most controversial copyright cases of our time. It is important to examine this movement in order to gain an understanding of the work that came before our time. History often lives on through art and with artists' abilities to critique and rebuild past art. They provide us the opportunity to reexamine history and ultimately allows us to re-evaluate traditional ideals throughout history.

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Fig, 1 George Deem *School of Caravaggio* 1984 Oil on Canvas.

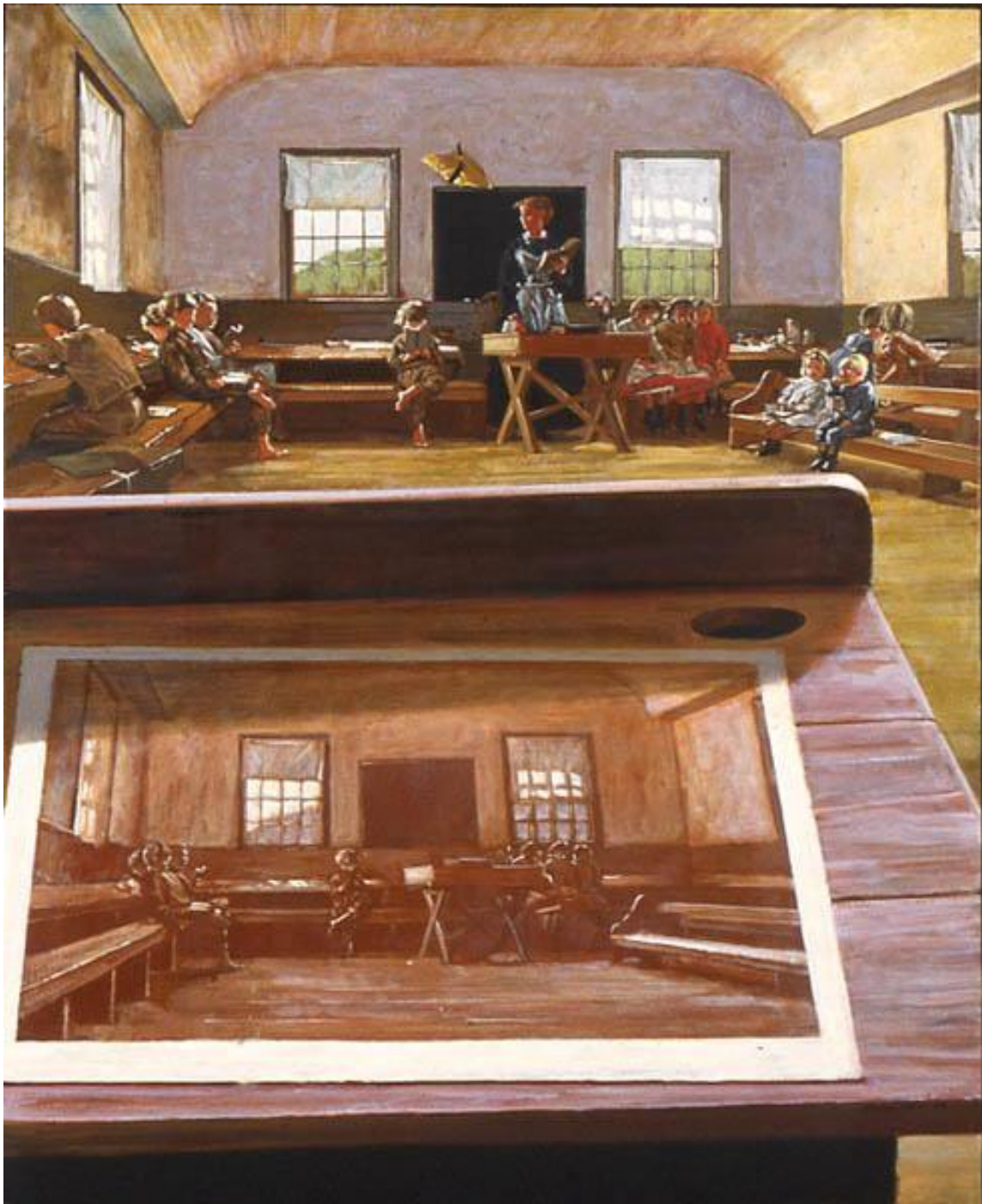


Fig. 2 George Deem *School of Winslow Homer* 1986 Oil on Canvas





Fig. 3 George Deem *Seven Vermeer Corners* 1991 Oil on Canvas



Fig. 4 George Deem *Vermer's Easel* 1999 Oil on Canvas



Fig. 5 George Deem *Vermeer's Artist in his Studio* 1979 Oil on Canvas



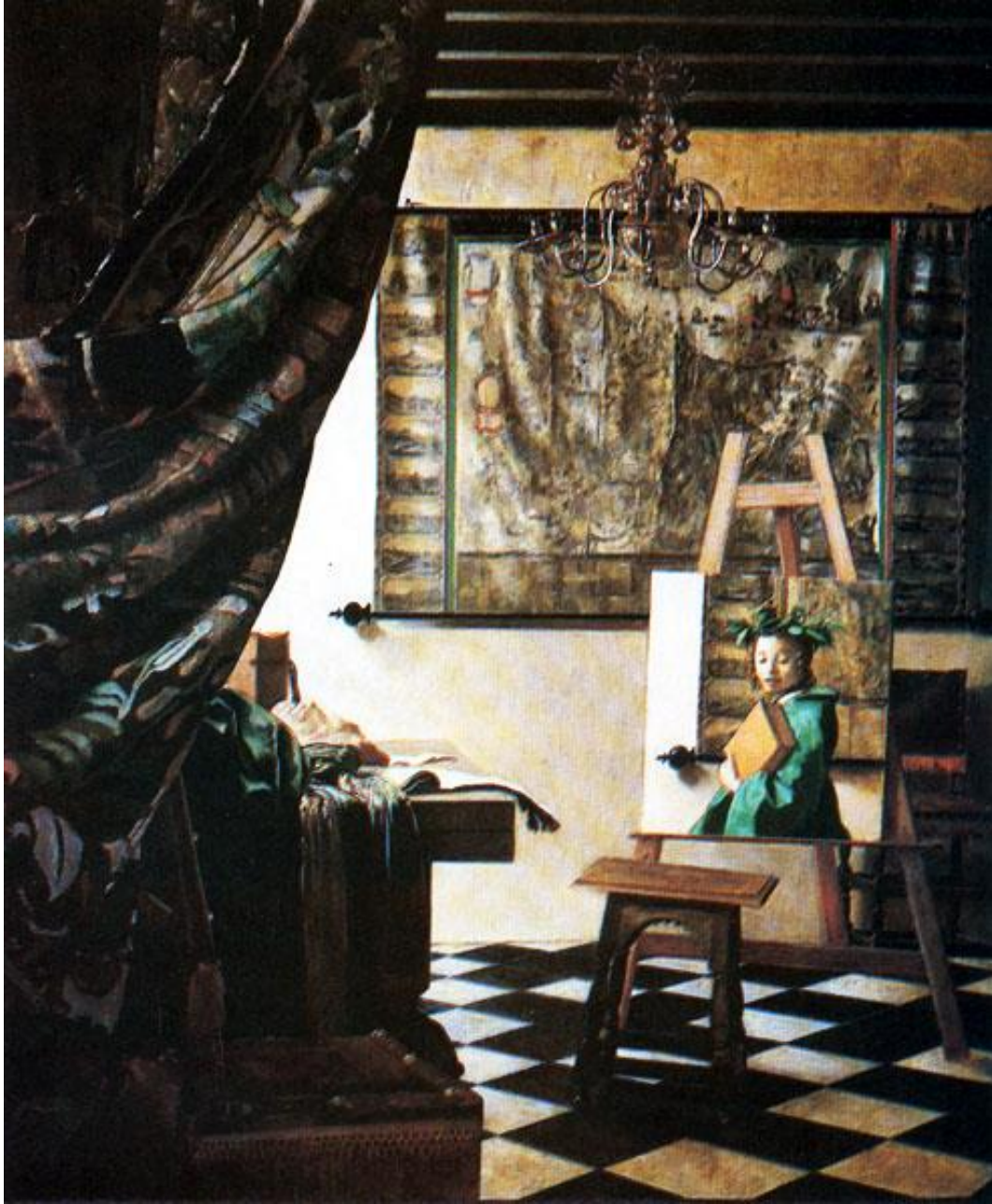


Fig. 6 George Deem *Easel Painting (Vermeer)* 1976 Oil of Canvas

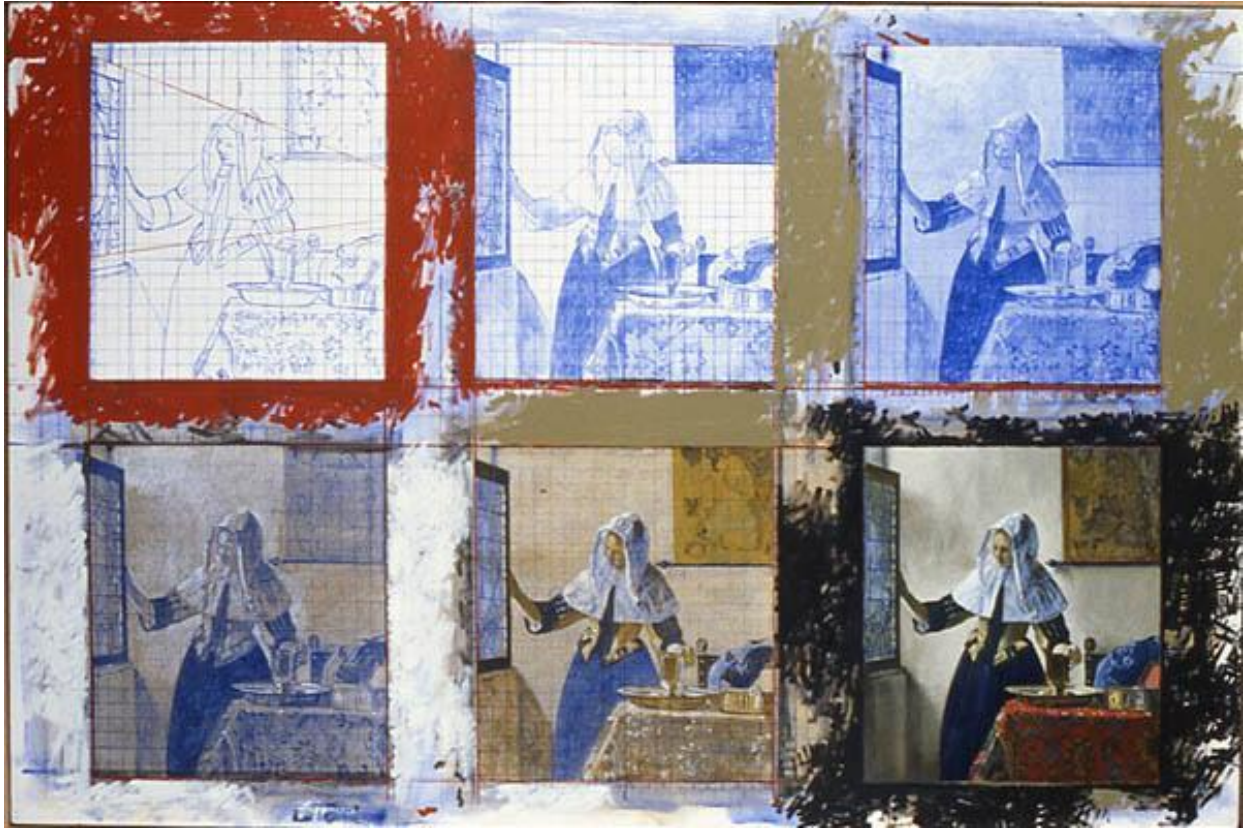


Fig. 7 George Deem *How to Paint a Vermeer* 1981 Oil on Canvas



Fig. 8 John Singer Sargent *Madam X*. 1884 Oil on canvas





Fig. 9 Michael These *Madame X Desk Blotter Collage*



Fig. 10 George Deem *Studio of Jacques Louis David* 1996 Oil on Canvas





Fig. 11 George Deem *Painting with a Mirror (Millet)* 1964 Oil on Canvas with Mirror



Fig. 12 Patrick Cariou ethnographic collection *Yes, Rasta 2000* Photograph, pp 83-84.



Fig. 13 Jacques-Louis David *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* 1801 Oil on Canvas



Fig. 14 Hyacinthe Rigaud *Louis XIV* 1701. Oil on Canvas





Fig. 15 Richard Prince *Canal Zone Series 'Back to the Garden'* 2008 Collage.



Fig. 16 Art Rogers *Puppies* 1985. Photography



Fig 17. Jeff Koons *String of Puppies* 1988. Sculpture



Fig. 18 Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* 1917. Sculpture