

TYLER MERCER ON DAN FISCHER

A Portrait of the Artist as an Artist

As Roland Barthes once noted: "The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit in his art." In front of the camera lens, a subject is deflected and deconstructed for reconstruction by both artist and viewer. It is precisely at this point of intersection—where each meaning distorts the other—where Dan Fischer's drawings begin.

Fischer's graphite drawings are highly detailed images of distinguished artists from the mid-20th century to the past decade. The work has been called "Xerox Realism," after his process of drawing Xeroxed photographs of artists' works, artists at work, portraits of artists, and artists personifying characters in their work. Fischer's pseudo-performative practice begins here, with the Xerox. He collects and hoards them—then ritualistically consumes the godheads of contemporary art. Perhaps Fischer is a kind of endocannibal, like the Wari of the Amazon: anthropagizing the elders of his tribe in order to absorb their wisdom. Fischer digests Cindy Sherman becoming a pinup idol, Matthew Barney as the Loughton Candidate, Chris Burden on his Volkswagen cross. But the system isn't closed. The drawings remain as a manifestation, a literalization of the action.

Here the performer performs performers performing. The

coolness of reproduction becomes a slow and physical experience—a methodical cud-chewing where a copy of a reproduction of the documentation of an "original" action is reiterated, inflected with Fischer's own sensibility.

"Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object," continued Barthes. Fischer turns the subject-to-object process into a Möbius strip of referentiality in his meticulous drawings. Realism disintegrates into abstraction, appropriation becomes another layer of meaning, and subject melts into object only to return as redefined subject. ◇



Left: Dan Fischer, *Cindy Sherman, 2003*; graphite on paper. Right: Dan Fischer, *Bruce Nauman, 2004*; graphite on paper.