

Mitchell Syrop*It is better to shine than to reflect*September 20th – October 25th, 2014

Midway Contemporary Art is pleased to present a new exhibition of work by Mitchell Syrop following his previous Midway exhibition – *Hidden*. Whereas *Hidden* focused on his more recent sculptural work, this exhibition, *It is better to shine than to reflect*, brings together a new installation of his high school yearbook series from the 1970s with his photographic work from the early 1980s that was influenced by the advertising strategies and mechanisms of that period.

Syrop began combining text and image in the mid-1970s following his move from New York to Los Angeles. His interest in public advertising developed as a young student in New York, and became an explicit focus in his work once he started graduate school at CalArts where he gained access to film and image reproduction technology. The availability of such technology, combined with the scale and breadth of LA's advertising and television industries, was of particular importance to Syrop. In 1976 he created a short film, *Watch It, Think It*, that was 6 seconds long and was eventually edited for commercial broadcast on a local television station. The short sequence portrays a woman smiling and drinking from a glass of water within rapidly shifting graphic transitions. A voiceover repeats, "Watch it... Think It... Watch it... Think it". Like some of the other works on view, the ambiguous nature of this pseudo commercial allows for numerous readings. Disconnected from any product, this work links itself to presentational modes at use in advertising.

In the early 1980s, Syrop continued using the language of advertising but began working more extensively with photography. He selected images from trade magazines, advertisements, and news sources. Often interspersed with photos that he himself had taken, Syrop had a particular interest in combining – in an indexical manner – the most generic style of images with charged and reductive clichés, advertising slogans, and biblical references. The psychologically subjective nature of this work lacked the coolness of critique found in other work at the time.

A new iteration of Syrop's ongoing yearbook series is installed in the adjacent gallery. He began this collection in 1974 as an undergraduate art student in New York, picked it up again in the early 1990s, and continues to add to the archive of images today. Photographing and scanning portraits from high school yearbooks, he then enlarges and reprints new images to be included in groupings that range from three images to much larger installations such as those on view at Midway. Using grids of aluminum and monofilament as structures to

arrange these images, the various constellations of faces have been reconfigured over the years in each subsequent installation. These works can be accessed vertically, horizontally, diagonally, or taken in in their entirety. Through these photographic arrangements, fluid patterns that are both visual and psycho-social emerge and dissolve. In addition, time has accentuated these images' distance from their original sources and use. The work leaves us with a sense of discomfort about the unstable nature of that displacement and our relationship to it.

Mitchell Syrop has exhibited widely over the years, including solo exhibitions at Thomas Solomon Gallery, Los Angeles; Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Los Angeles; The Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica; Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galeria Oliva Arauna, Madrid. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions including: "Good Morning Midnight," Casey Kaplan Gallery, NYC; "Index: Conceptualism in California from the Permanent Collection," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; "Commodity Image," International Center for Photography, New York, and Kunsthall Rotterdam; "A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the 2013 Orange County Museum's California-Pacific Triennial. His work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.