

THEORY OF EVERYTHING

An important observation by the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget suggests the difficulties of classification. Any grouping based on commonalities inevitably leads to the recognition of further distinctions between members of the group. My recent installation, "Theory of Everything" consists of a series of interrelated works that address how and what we learn, ostensibly in the creation of group identity, and how individuals situate themselves in society with regard to others. Each piece in the installation features one main thing (a whole) that is often made from smaller parts found elsewhere within the installation. Using pattern and categorization, the different parts of the installation focus on specific aspects of my identity while breaking them down through more and more minute distinctions. Images of children dominate the installation, and there are many references to educational materials and methods, as well as my own role as a teacher. Another important aspect of the show includes how popular and mass media uses of photography contribute to our "education" about how to differentiate people and things from each other.

It is our relationships with others that help ease the essential human condition, our isolation. For several years I collected photographs of crowds from newspapers. These photographs were used to illustrate specific groups of people, often in situations where they were attempting to exercise power beyond their capability as individuals. In the past I attempted to categorize these images, but in this show I separated the individuals from each other using a standard compositional technique of photography, cropping and centering. I then organized them according to various schema, such as beauty, size, gender, age, religion, origin. In fact, the distinguishing criteria for each group was chosen based upon the usage or intent of the original photograph. Additionally, my choice of these particular groups illustrates basic aspects of myself: male, american, democrat, russian, jewish, artist, etc. Through selection, arrangement and juxtaposition, I seek the point where similarity ends and difference begins. What does or doesn't make me a part of any particular group? What are my characteristics and what degree of importance do they have? Which aspects are "essential" and which are not?

The overwhelming quality of the installation mirrors our media-saturated and consumer driven society. The United States has long consumed more than its fair share of the world's resources. This excess is clear from our waste, which has been a frequent choice of subject matter for me over the years. A major component of this installation is trash, objects gleaned from the gutter wherever I go. Photography in the digital age is another sign of excess, the endless postings on social networking sites, the terabytes of data stored on servers, hard drives and memory cards. Our excesses are reiterated by the installation which encircles the viewer, bombarding them with information.

Circles are another important part of this work. I've been using the circle as shape and circularity as concept for quite a few years. The circle is used here as a formal conceit; most obviously to isolate the heads of the boys from their background and as the common thread amongst the many small objects on display. Other more subtle uses include altering the dot screen from the half-tone printing process and looping animations. The circle is a sphere or a planet formed by gravity as well as an orbit, either around the sun or the nucleus of an atom (from the Greek work *átomos*, which means uncuttable, or indivisible, the most basic unit of any thing). The title of the show refers to scientific efforts at reconciling the mutual incompatibility of physical laws for the macro and the micro worlds (the theory of general relativity versus quantum physics). Initially, the term was used with an ironic connotation (in reference to various overgeneralized scientific theories) and my use of it here is both earnest and tongue in cheek. While I often attempt to link disparate ideas through chains of association, I also embrace the difficulty of doing so successfully.