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Claire Fontaine

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"WORKING TOGETHER" OPENED during the pinnacle of the global Occupy Wall Street movement, and it stayed up through police crackdowns in Oakland and New York. Such a topical background lends extra resonance to this exhibition of 2011 pieces by Claire Fontaine—an artist duo working under a fictional pseudonym—which takes brutal aim at both financial and art world excesses with sculptures, readymades, paintings, and videos that are simple yet biting.

Richard Prince is conscripted as a punching bag, a fitting choice considering the art star fumbled through and lost a court case for appropriating the Rasta photographs of Patrick Cariou in 2011. Following the basic format of Prince's "joke paintings," Claire Fontaine silk-screens snippets of a Q&A between Prince and the fashion designer Marc Jacobs that appeared in an issue of British *Harper's Bazaar*. The topic is their collaboration on a project for Louis Vuitton. In *The Most Subversive Thing*, Jacobs earnestly compares the commission to Marcel Duchamp's defacing of the Mona Lisa; another piece, *I didn't really know what I was doing but that's how I work*, takes its title from Prince's honest appraisal of his own creative method. The text paintings are funny, of course, in the way that a verba-

tim transcript of a conversation between two self-congratulatory celebrities can be funny. They play on the multilayered nature of appropriation—lifting the words of the most famous appropriation artist and, in a gallery context, using an aesthetic style appropriated from that same artist. The majority of these "quote paintings" are hung inside another piece, *Untitled (Jungle Gym)*, which is composed of black construction scaffolding that reaches to the ceiling and is strung with Christmas lights on one end. In the same room, a series of 55-gallon trash bags, loaded with empty cans, hangs from the ceiling on strings; it seems appropriate to bump into them, to set them swinging. The hanging recyclables mirror another piece in the show: a readymade of the beloved corporate-office toy the Newton's cradle, in which a line of silver balls bangs back and forth endlessly. This one is in the shape of a tiny plastic tennis court and is embossed with the name Lehman Brothers.

There's another readymade in the next room: an electric shoe-shining machine, similar to those found in hotel lobbies, installed at roughly crotch height and entitled *Fluffer*. In some ways it's a quintessential Claire Fontaine piece, with the wordplay ("fluffer" is the porn-industry term for an assistant who gets male stars to stand at attention before a scene) and the complex web of high- and low-brow associations that the simple setup implies (the class dynamic of shoe shining; the nature of

mechanization; the pain implicit in getting one's balls caught in a machine).

Groin injuries are also a recurrent theme in one of the videos from the duo, *Situations*, in which a Ukrainian ex-bouncer teaches ways to defend oneself. For 30-plus minutes, we're treated to a mind-numbing array of "situations" that can arise in a hypothetical world where violence is the most common form of social exchange: Dude breaks a bottle on your head; dude holds a knife to your throat; dude insults your wife for being fat, so you smash his kneecap. The sheer volume of antagonistic possibilities leaves the viewer vacillating between laughter and shock.

Language is key throughout "Working Together." The show title itself could refer to a number of things: the pomposity of the Prince-Jacobs collaboration; the way in which political parties and financial institutions interact with populaces to ensure a

so-called better future; the possibilities of radical action. The latter is suggested by *Gather in multiple groups*, a text-based work rendering advice to protesters in silkscreened letters: "Form into clusters...Define your boundaries and defend them. Be mobile." Perhaps without the current backdrop of global financial unrest, the Arab world uprisings, and the Occupy movement, such words would read nostalgically: black bloc protesters breaking windows in Seattle, or the "*Sous les pavés, la plage*" of Paris in May 1968. Instead, Claire Fontaine has found its rallying call, and there's nothing backward-looking about it. And despite the pair's public statements and interviews, which tend to be rote, stiff, and colorless, "Working Together" proves that its radical politics isn't all drab polemics. They seem to have remembered an important point: The revolution will not be humorless. —SI

Claire Fontaine
Untitled (Redemptions),
2011. Recycled
cans, 55-gallon
clear bags, and
disco ball motor.

