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Exhibition in the spotlight: David Kennedy Cutler's "Force Quit"

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David Kennedy Cutler – "Force Quit" (curator: Kristen Chappa)

ARS Projektiruum, Tallinn

Through October 30, 2016

Through October 30, Art in General, in partnership with the Center for Contemporary Arts in Tallinn, presents two solo exhibitions of newly commissioned work by Brooklyn-based artist David Kennedy Cutler, and New York-based artist Juntae TeeJay Hwang. Both artists investigate issues of identity from personal perspectives and larger cultural trends, as mediated by contemporary digital culture.



David Kennedy Cutler's "Force Quit", at ARS Projektiruum, Tallinn, 2016. Performance stills. Courtesy the artist, Art in General, and Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. Photo: Kristen Chappa

At the opening of the exhibition, one of the artists – David Kennedy Cutler, executed a performance in which he and a dummy were both clothed in skin suits. Cutler repeatedly tried to get the dummy to stand throughout the space, but it refused to cooperate. So he put it inside a case, and sealed it up like a preserved sculpture. Then he zipped out of his skin

suit, and left it on the floor, mirroring the dummy in the case. Cutler was wearing the same outfit underneath the suit, and then he left the opening and did not come back...

This performance was so intriguing to Arterritory.com that we wanted to speak to the artist and find out what was really “under his skin”.

In the Force Quit show, your installation and performance investigate two motifs – the body and the tool – as instruments of labor, and as forms through which to consider the capabilities of the self. In relation to this, Arterritory.com would like to ask if you agree with the statement that an artist just knows what she or he has to do – that the artist is just a medium between the world and something loftier, and his or her hands are just a tool...?

In Force Quit, I think what I'm more interested in is an “artist” as a stand-in for the individual in the 21st century. This hypothetical individual is under immense pressure to replicate their labor and image in order to compete, in order to be recognized as an individual. But the endless process of production (through labor) and the endless proliferation of representations of the self (through digital culture) create a predicament of losing definition of the self.



David Kennedy Cutler – “Force Quit”. Courtesy the artist, Art in General, and Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. Photo: Mari-Leen Kiipli

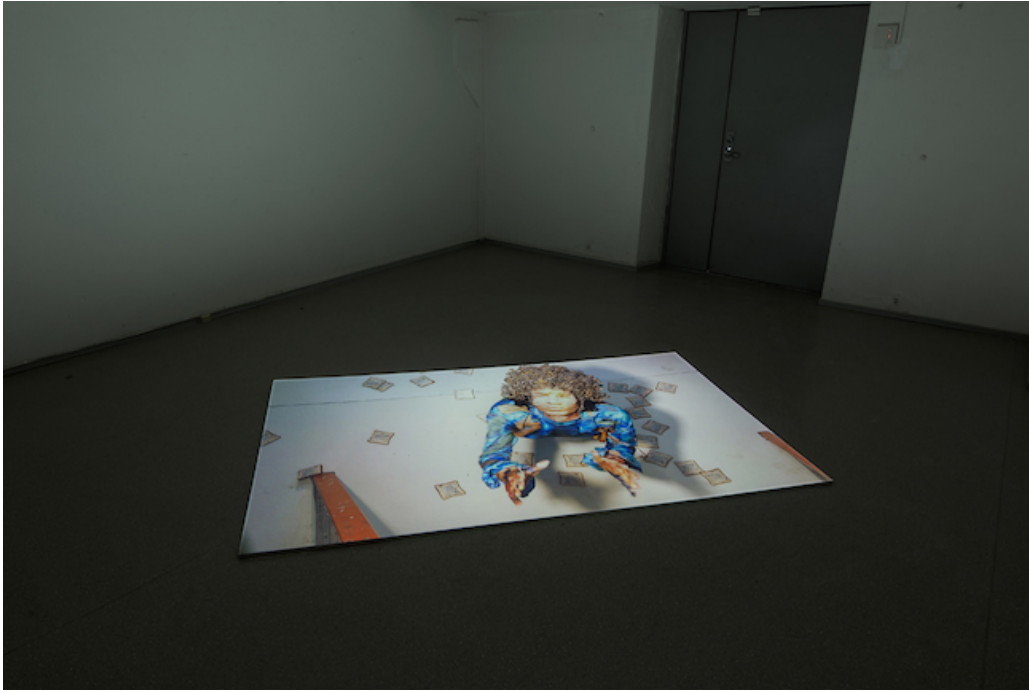
Art education and societal expectations had taught me that artists were vehicles of lofty ambitions, but I had a revelation that the most immediate and automatic things in my life could describe my culture, my time on this earth, better than I could. The food that I eat, the clothes I wear, the tools I use, and the daily use of them, were all describing cultural conditions better than I could. This also served as a metaphor for how, under the hegemony of digital culture, I was becoming more introverted: looking in instead of out; looking down instead of up.



David Kennedy Cutler – “Force Quit”. Courtesy the artist, Art in General, and Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. Photo: Mari-Leen Kiipli

In your video and performance, you attempt laborious and futile tasks in a skin suit that mimics the mediated removal of your sculptural objects, serving as a type of tangible avatar. The doubling costume also transforms you into a caricature of yourself as the artist. Could you please elaborate more on this idea of “caricature of yourself as the artist”?

The character I have created is a more idealized version of myself. He is the image of myself instead of myself. Through image replication, he allows me to replicate, to become more than what I am. Through repetitive and futile tasks, this character is able to describe how we digest and navigate the world. The character becomes the “artwork”, and then I am no longer responsible for crafting artificial boundaries (or artworks) to idealize myself. If I become the artwork, and all the work I do and the things I possess become the artwork, then I no longer have to define myself. In a world where people are learning to prefer images of things instead of actual things, I am becoming an image.



David Kennedy Cutler. *Catching Bread*, 2016. Video still. Courtesy the artist, Art in General, and Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. Photo: Mari-Leen Kiipli

What would be three keywords that define your work in general?

As you may have gathered from my previous responses, through this work I'm looking to evade definitions, or at least let them be mediated. Would it be too much trouble to come up with the three keywords that you think of, instead?



David Kennedy Cutler. *Second Self*, 2015-2016. Courtesy the artist, Art in General, and Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. Photo: Mari-Leen Kiipli