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## Ike Ude: Celluloid Frames • Wessel O'Connor New York, New York

"Burn Hollywood, Burn!" was the theme on the scene at "Celluloid Frames," Ike Ude's first solo exhibition at Wessel O'Connor Gallery in New York City. In the main room, seven large computer-generated movie posters made by Ude were placed onto walls covered from floor to ceiling with repeated copies of the Sunday New York Times movie section. This all-over display focused itself as a critique of the movie poster as fantasy for sale to the general public. In the second room, Ude put on view samples of his ongoing cover girl series, and ran a video about Africa as it is seen, stereotypically, through Western eyes. This video included footage of big-game hunting in the African bush and featured in its lead "an eclipsed black male as walking penis." Ultimately, we see Ude taking charge of these constructed fantasies as this exhibition's director of productions.

Ude is an artist who makes work that draws on the psychological and social sphere of public consciousness. His program is clear and consists of the following: 1) The empowerment of self ; 2) the ability to express oneself as an individual; 3) for that expression to be accepted as valid. To exist otherwise is to be subjected to a "rude" state of affairs where inequalities and unfairness persist.

"Celluloid Frames" had two halves and two different minds at work. One half of the show dealt directly with the movie poster as public advertisement/spectacle of a specific product/fantasy. The other half looked into what Ude calls the "regarded self." The posters in this exhibition looked like any poster one would encounter in a city subway, on a street corner, or in a movie theater, but on closer inspection, satire showed itself as an important device used to critique the movie poster. In these works, Ude changed movie titles, rewrote credits and centered the camera's focus completely on "the Other."

Certainly, Ude does not wait for justice to be delivered one day by the proper authorities. He takes it upon himself to subvert the content within these images and gain the upper hand, or at least equal ground. For instance, in the poster man in polyester suit, a direct and unmistakable reference is made toward Robert Mapplethorpe's infamous photograph of the same name. In the Mapplethorpe original, the black male is presented as a domesticated being made beastly through the rude display of his "monstrous" penis, which hangs outside the confines of that universal uniform—the suit. This binding suit the half-stripped man happens to be dressed in is made of polyester, a retro-(de)grade synthetic material that connotes "bad taste" and a bad fashion sensibility. And by cutting off the man's head in the framing of the picture, Mapplethorpe has succeeded in turning him into an object that not only embodies loathsome fear, even more so, he becomes laced with an erotic charge for the targeted viewer/voyeur who anxiously awaits to consume with their gaze. This act committed by Mapplethorpe is in itself the action of Othering, of objectifying, and of making someone into an outsider. By altering the movie credits, Ude is able to make a switch in the role that power assumes here. Robert Mapplethorpe the producer now becomes Robert Mapplethorpe the actor to star in the new aRUDE feature. Mapplethorpe gets help from the likes of "Newth Gengrich" as production designer and "Jessey Elms" as the director of photography. If one should take offense at what Ude is doing with his "polyester" poster, one must seriously consider how the Mapplethorpe original could ever exist in the first place.

In the bronco chase, Ude tackles the complicated subject of the O. J. Simpson murder trial, and specifically, the chase that ensued on the Los Angeles freeways with what seemed like the entire Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Again Ude's sense of humor springs free through the movie poster's listed credits. In them we find out that this film is "based on DNA Evidence." The aRUDE feature stars O.J., Mark Furman, and co-stars Johnnie Cochran, Robert Shapiro, Marcia Clark and Finito Ito(sic). Executive producers are ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, CNN, etc. Mark Furman is given "Bloody Gloves" credit. The LAPD as directors of photography are also given screenplay credit, and the design is by Stereo-Type. Ude unleashes more debasing, astringent wit onto two other well-deserving subjects. First, his poster europa, europa (conrad) is titled after the film Congo, a recent movie about apes gone mad. This poster also derives content from the Joseph Conrad novel Heart of Darkness. Conrad's book tells the story of a Caucasian's harrowing journey into the black depths of Africa, a journey which is supposed to act as a metaphor for the dark depths within man. Ude tries to amend history here by making Europe, rather than Africa, the setting for this nightmare. And in the poster norma jean, Marilyn Monroe, the Blond Goddess of the silver screen depicted here in blackface and black body, holds down her billowing dress in the pose that made her irresistible to millions. The poster's credits tell us that the screenplay is by Blond Ambition, based on the Aryan Ideal; that Leni Riefenstahl is the director of photography, with music by the Third Reich Philharmonic; that production design is by Peroxide Magic; and the entire project is masterfully directed by no one other than the Fuhrer(sic). In the second part of this exhibition, Ude turns his attention inward toward the "self." These posters include the regarded self, the rebel genius, and things fall apart. In the first two, Ude talks of self-love and self-respect; in the last, he speaks of the self in doubt. things fall apart, a poster named after the important novel by Chinua Achebe, is the most poignant and interesting of the three when considering events such as the Los Angeles riots, the O.J. Simpson trial, and the complete government dismantling of social welfare programs in the United States. This beautiful poster speaks with stark clarity of America's true paradoxical problem—race. things fall apart does not present itself with an answer to the question of race; rather, it boldly addresses the existence of our race problem head on without a coward's blink. This kind of directness is necessary to bring attention to this American illness. If we can openly confront our problem, then maybe a real dialogue can happen where change is an actual possibility.

Ude is not the only artist speaking out on these issues. There are many others like him who continue to fight for absolute equality. But when Vogue can laud the "fortunate" demise of "Afro-style hair" as they did in their January 1996 issue, and if the Republican Party, with continued national support, can terminate many valuable social programs through their "Contract on America," one wonders if there will ever be an end to the cultural and social injustices that exist in this country. Maybe it is time to change the script. Ike Ude certainly is doing just that.

O. Donald Oditia  
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