

5

Super-Models

14

Super-
Models

23

Supermodels

31

Super
Models

38

Super Models

Price Points

Interview with Seth Price

Nov 21, 2011

Seth Price is an artist who makes work that plays with global capitalism, exchange networks, and the economies of information that generate our contemporary image culture. His work often deliberately echoes commercial production and distribution methods, and his practice often overlaps with that of a designer. In structuring his own studio he comes up against many of the same limitations as well. Growth facilitates a greater output but requires more money and a larger operation. Price strives to maintain self-governance even as he directly engages the world of mass production.

Interview conducted by Harry via email.

HG

We are interested in the flattening of text, images, articles, interviews, and other works on your website, *Distributed History*. Do you consider all of these instances part of your work? Is an interview equivalent to a wall piece?

SP

On the web it is. In an exhibition the interview would be sitting on the desk, and people would just zip by it to get to the wall pieces. In a book the interview would be primary with the wall piece riding shotgun as an illustration.

HG

You work in a number of media and distribution platforms (music, wall pieces, books, PDF, video), and this aspect of your practice seems to be crucially intertwined with the content and ideas embedded in the work. Can you talk a little about how the two—form and content—relate to each other?

Price Points

SP

I really can't talk about that. Maybe if you had a specific angle.

HG

Some of your work, like *Dispersion* [25], takes multiple formats and exists in a number of edits, with the text changing from piece to piece. Is it important for the work to be in flux? How then, do you relate the more static pieces like the vacuum forms [26]?

SP

Reworking a text is, in a way, the more crude and literal way of pointing out this kind of flux. The more you produce, the more each piece reaches back and changes the ones that came before. Some work is serial not in space but in time.

HG

So, it was hard to get in touch with you. Is the element of privacy related to your practice, or is this a personal choice?

SP

I shut down my public e-mail account and killed the Facebook account. I like to respond to all the e-mails I get, even if it is only to decline an invitation, and that was starting to take up too much time. I don't have anyone else answering my e-mail for me, so I decided to get rid of the whole problem. Anything business-related goes through the gallery. It's a buffer. I don't get any mass e-mailed invites, all that. I was thinking it would even be nice to correspond by fax only. It might force some hand-written correspondence. You could make a nice book, just save the stack and bind it.

HG

What is the structure of your studio? Do you currently have an assistant? Multiple assistants? Has this changed over time?

SP

I do almost everything myself, although not because I don't need help. For years it didn't occur to me to get help, and I had no money for it anyway. But I hired an assistant last month, so things are changing. I took a new studio this summer, hired this guy to help me out. "Take it to the next level," as I have been urged to do. There was one other time around 2008 when I had an assistant, two in a row actually, one after the other. They were working part-time, usually a day or two a week. The first left after several months because he needed full-time employment, and the second left after six months because her art career took off. And then I never found a replacement. I let the matter slide, to the irritation of my galleries. It puts more on them. I'll take months to send back a signed certificate because I can't bring myself to go to the post office. But I hate to be a manager, and I need solitude in the studio. Mostly I'm leery of turning into a real operation: high rent,

multiple employees, payroll and insurance and bookkeeping, a machine you have to feed, which would mean pressure and responsibility and the need to make more art, or bigger art, more money anyway. I'd rather have minimal overhead, minimal responsibility, minimal expectation. I don't want to get yoked to a structure. I mean, I am already.... Of course! But I simply like not having to wake up at a particular time and report to work. I left that behind when I quit my job in 2005. How could a person have the space to be bored and restless when there's a room full of employees looking at you when you walk in the door? And over all this hovers something else: I always thought or feared that one day I might wake up and have no ideas or maybe just decide to do something different.

HG

What is your relationship with galleries and dealers, and how do your more ephemeral projects play into it?

SP

I like to keep the relationship friendly but without much interaction. I guess I like to conserve my energy. It can be a whole world if you want. There are a lot of fun things you can fall into if you allow yourself to get coaxed, but I don't like to go to museum benefit dinners or to make art specifically for fairs, and then go down to the fairs, or to do special talks, meet with collectors, stuff like that. The main thing is not to rely on the gallery. Ideally the gallery wouldn't have too much of my work, and I wouldn't wholly depend on them for the archiving of press materials or artwork documentation. I consider myself to be an independent entity, they're like this business interest that does what they do, and we have a mutually beneficial relationship at the moment, but we're totally separate animals who could do without each other. That's the ideal.

As far as my ephemeral projects, you mean music and texts, books, things like that? Some dealers are more interested than others, but it pretty much falls outside of their purview. I think they like things to have around and show people, but it can be hard to square the things they sell with the ephemera. Most collectors aren't interested, I've found, and dealers are busy, and they have to conserve their own energy, so the ephemera understandably gets short shrift. Although some of the collectors I have met are totally into the ephemera. Meeting cool collectors has been an eye opener. It's easier, in a way, to talk to them because strictly speaking we don't have a business relationship, as it all went through a middleman. We're more like two enthusiasts who are able to talk about common interests. Whereas the dealers.... It's a circumscribed relationship. You can be really friendly and have great conversations and meaningful moments, but you're also in business together, so you don't want to confuse things.

HG

Going back to the music element, what appeals to you about working in sound? What is the difference between 8-4 9-5 10-6 11-7 mix and *Seth Price Fashion*? These are often packaged as CDs with physical/visual elements, but they are

usually also available as downloads in forums like UBU Web for instance. Can you speak to the differences between these two distribution mechanisms? Often, too there is a written essay component to these releases. What is the relationship between the visual, aural, and written elements these pieces?

SP

The 8-4 piece was part of *Title Variable* [27], which was a project I started in 2001 with music compilations and accompanying essays, trying to spread the "piece" out as much as possible so there's no single image, and it becomes hard to explain what it even is. But it doesn't seem like such an interesting issue anymore; everyone makes mixes online now and digs up obscure music and blogs about them and shares them, so the project has a different valence now. *Seth Price Fashion* was the soundtrack to the Tim Hamilton show, that's all [28, 29].

As for the differences in distribution, I used to say that it was good to have work in different economic strata. You make some things that are free and other things that are available in the common market at standard market prices, like an album, and then other things that are available on the art market for art prices. Inevitably the art pieces are judged to be funding the "ephemera," as you call it. But in fact ephemera is more robust because you can always scratch together these things. There's always a way to produce a text or a record, whereas the circulation and practical life of the art pieces depends almost entirely on my having currency as an artist in the market, and that waxes and wanes. I was making essays when they were all I could afford to make, and that won't ever go away as an option.

Stats: Seth Price

How is your business defined by the government (e.g. 1040, 990, etc.)?

Not sure. I just incorporated as an LLC to sign my new lease.

How do you define your primary industry on your tax forms (e.g. Specialized design service, Promoters of performing arts, etc.)?

Art, I think. Not sure.

How many full-time employees work with you?

None.

How many subcontractors do you employ?

I work with many people on a temporary basis.

How many interns do you have?

Never had one.

How many administrative employees do you have?

None.

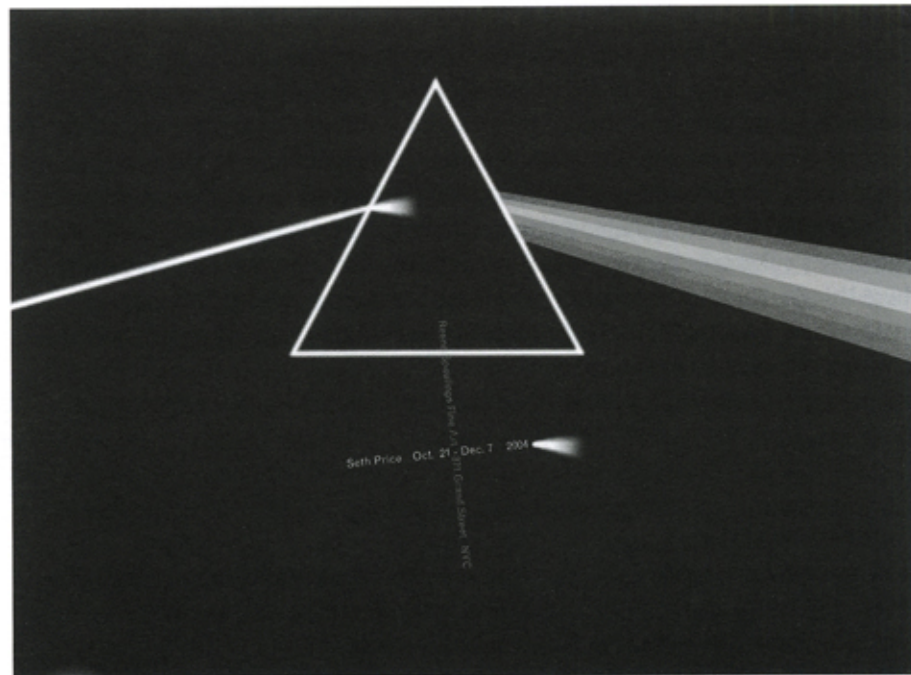
Seth Price

What is your yearly operating budget?

Not sure, varies.

*What is the size of your studio
(in square feet)?*

1,200 or so.



Appendix