



Excerpt from catalogue essay:

...A quite different incorporation of text as a comedic gesture in the work of art is found in the joke-oriented works of Richard Prince and Laura Nova. Prince’s ongoing series of *White Paintings* feature a layering of of silk-screened fragments of cartoons appropriated from *The New Yorker* or other magazines and classic stand-up jokes. The jokes serve as either inappropriate captions or non sequiturs for the actions portrayed in the cartoons, thus altering the understanding of both elements. *Good New, Bad News*, 1989, bears a joke about a doctor giving bad news – the doctor’s latest sexual conquest – which has nothing to do with the patient’s condition but literally satisfies the terms of the hackneyed set-up. As in his other *White Paintings*, Prince repeats and fragments the joke, displacing its comedic emphasis, thus diminishing the effect of the punch line and serving to render problematic the joke’s characteristic use-value as a softly misogynistic form of bonding between straight men.

Nova’s multimedia installation *On the Spot*, 2001, is a makeshift stand-up comedy stage complete with curtain backdrop, microphone, and a teleprompter that delivers jokes to viewers who choose to participate. Allowing time for the joke to be told, a rim shot (the cliché drum and cymbal riff that punctuates a stand-up joke, signaling the audience to, hopefully, laugh) goes off steadily while the participant’s performance is transmitted via live-feed camera to a monitor resting at his or her feet. This last element serves as a displacing device much akin to the use of live-feed cameras and monitors in the installations of Bruce Nauman from the late-1960s/early-1970s. The constant distractions of this element and the continuous rim shot noise turn an initially humorous gallery experience into something more aggravating and unsettling.

Punch Line [or Conclusion]

The enduring role of the humorous or comedic in art comes as little surprise given the eternal need for humankind (and the art world) to take a critical step back from itself and seize psychological control over our shortcomings and failures. By inverting our day-to-day routine, the exigencies and imperatives that dictate our actions are put into a broader perspective and revealed to be more complex, more human, and sometimes funnier than we allow, or as is attributed to Buster Keaton, “Life is a tragedy in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot.” Demonstrated by artist in *Situation Comedy*, the self-acknowledgment of our inner tramps, fools, and blunderers is both a disarming and liberating exercise. Particularly in our era of accelerated communication, when every word is parsed and interpreted often against intentions, it is crucial that the absurdity of life’s conditions be verbalized and visualized through the wide-angle lens of humor. While comedy is often incorrectly viewed as a diversion from a more meaningful meditation on the state of things, voiced by the typically overused criticism that an artist or their work is a “one-liner” (the criticism is itself a on-liner), the artists and the works that comprise *Situation Comedy* hopefully prove that the opposite is true. By engaging us through the comedic situation, these artists address aspects of ourselves and the world around us that lie beneath the surface and which may cut to the quick, leading us into deeper reflections on various facets of the human condition that move far beyond the “one-liner”. Given the ruthlessly immediate and complex changes that shape our reality, there is an increasing need for comedic expressions created not only for entertainment but to refocus attention onto the unsettling contingencies and increased complexities of contemporary existence. -Dominic Molon and Michael Rooks