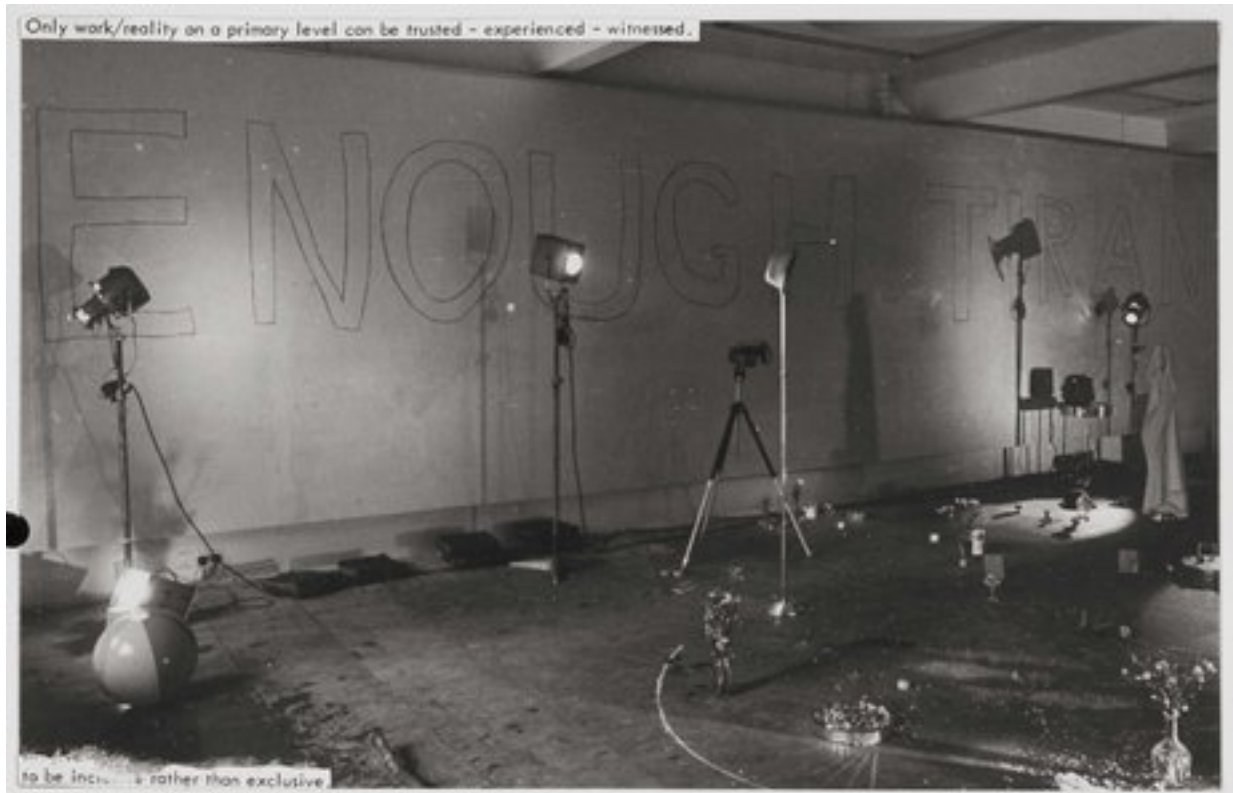


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## REPORT: THE ARTIST REMAKE

Isla Leaver-Yap assesses the conditions for artists who remake their own work



'Who', asks artist Marc Camille Chaimowicz, 'would want to revisit all of their earlier work?'. This question, which is proposed and pondered although not definitively answered, recently appeared in Chaimowicz's personal account of remaking his groundbreaking 1972 installation 'Celebration? Realife' for his 2009 show at Artists Space, New York. What is compelling about Chaimowicz's discussion of the remake, and so intriguing about artists who choose to remake their own art works, is the literalness employed in reflecting on one's own practice.

The consideration of the remake is something that initially seems slippery, and which finds itself unhelpfully sprawling into categories of retrospectives, reimaginings, reappropriations and replicas. Even when attempting to designate clear parameters for the criteria of a remake – work remade by the original artist rather than any other party; work not remade as a consequence of damage or editing of an original; work purposefully authored as a remake even if the

remake exists 'in the spirit' of the original – the conditions for the remake circumscribes questions of reuse, authority and agency.

To turn first to Chaimowicz's work in question, then: 'Enough Tyranny Recalled, 1972-2009' was a title specifically conceived for the Artist Space remake of 'Celebration? Realife'. Encapsulating seductive elements of disco, drugs and social exchange, the original work provided an expansive suggestion of what installation art could be, and rejected the then-monochromatic seriousness of postminimalism. An immersive environment, Chaimowicz's work was set against the ambient backdrop of Velvet Underground records, the gallery space filled with glitter balls and dozens of floor-based items including roses, sequins and fairy lights. The curatorial interest in remaking this work was clear: the date of 'Celebration? Realife' neatly coincided with the founding of Artists Space. And seen now, Chaimowicz's radical interpretation of the vocabulary of installation remains vital, potent and clearly resonates in a host of younger practices, such as those of artists Cathy Wilkes, Nairy Baghramian, Giles Bailey and Haegue Yang, to name but a few.

More specifically, however, Chaimowicz's remake is a nostalgic personal reflection that enables the 'return' of early work elements into the relevance of the artist's current practice. And while this is by no means the first time that Chaimowicz has remade 'Celebration? Realife', it is nonetheless significant that the timing of his Artists Space show immediately preceded the presentation of a substantial amount of new work at Vienna's Secession. The relationship between these two shows opened up a path between past and present, like a carefully placed trigger primed to spark dialogue about the conception of an artist's practice, rather than simply a discussion on the discrete occurrence of objects over time. Certainly, when remarking on his intention behind the remade installation and its quality of then- and now-ness, Chaimowicz stated that 'the future will, in all probability, fold itself into the past to better accommodate itself in the present'.

The remake's ability to straddle radically different periods is perhaps one its most attractive properties one that allows an artistic acknowledgement of the passing of time through a career, while also embracing the fluctuating nature of artistic intentionality that occurs over the elapsed period. Such an appeal is evident in Joan Jonas' 'Good Night Good Morning', a video originally made in 1976 and recently remade in 2009. The original 11-minute film, shot in portrait and depicting the artist repetitiously saying 'good night' or 'good morning' at respective times of day, was a diaristic ritual that collapsed the idea of real-time video and immediacy. Her latest remake, which has accumulated material since its initial showing in 2006, displays the artist visibly aged, with her salutations

more relaxed in comparison to the systematic seriousness of the original. With a hint of gentle self-parody, Jonas appears to reflect on her change and, in doing so, illuminates how the revivalist character of the remake allows the artist to slip into the role of audience while also acquiring critical distance from one's work. Although less evident in the aforementioned works of Chaimowicz and Jonas, the remake is also able to create a contemporary political charge that may not be found in the original. In 1975, for example, Carl Andre refused permission for the Whitney's display of '29th Copper Cardinal', made in the same year – a work in the museum's collection. When Andre's request to remove the work and buy it back for its original value plus 10% was ignored by the gallery, the artist declared the work a 'corpse', and remade a work by the same name to be exhibited on his own terms in a space off West Broadway, Manhattan. Although Andre's move was extreme, his dramatic action underscores the potential of the remake to inject the authority and vitality of the artist into both past and present forms of work. It undermines the valorization of the uncontextualised autonomous object and asserts an uncommon level of artistic control. Other forms of political commentary on the historicisation of the remake are also remarkable. Ed Ruscha's 2009 Hayward exhibition, for instance, grouped both the artist's original 'Blue Collar' 1992 painting series alongside 'Course of Empire', a series of paintings that reassessed the sites of the 'Blue Collar' paintings as they existed in 2005. Similarly, James Benning took his 1977 film 'One Way Boogie Woogie' as the basis for a shot-for-shot remake in 'One Way Boogie Woogie/27 Years Later', 2005. Comprising of 60 one-minute static shots of areas around Milwaukee's industrial valley, the remake used the same soundtrack as the original, rupturing the clean line between past and present, while also informing Benning's shrewd statement that 'place is a function of time'.

Remaking a work relies on the intention and inclination of the artist – that much is clear. But there are nonetheless a number of conditions that make this choice possible. I would characterise these conditions as follows: that the artist has produced a body of work over a significant period of time, otherwise the remake would simply be an unreflected repetition; that the artist has maintained a successful or, at the very least, a viable and visible career in that time, one which shows development rather than reiteration; and that the original work chosen to be remade still holds relevance to the current state of the artist's practice not only for the artist, but also for the curator and, by extension, the perceived audience. Thus the process of the remake is something available to the limited few. And even with these aforementioned factors, there is of course the narrowing effect of the art market to consider – an entity with an insatiable appetite for the 'new', both in terms of an interest in 'young' artistic practices as well as the constant production of new work by artists at all levels of their career.

I discussed these criteria with an artist friend who might indeed fall into the category of 'emerging practice'. Her response, self-admittedly cynical, was that she viewed my positive understanding of the remake as a mere engagement with 'reproduction', and an artist's knee-jerk reaction to market demand for seminal work reduced to the repeatable edition or, even more dubious, the 'version'. We were agreed about the problematic ability of the remake to fall into the gesture of self-historicisation. But somehow, her argument against the validity of remake seems to me ultimately fatalistic. The remake admits, with a certain sense of inevitability perhaps, that some art works have the ability to shape the character of an entire practice. These works, the ones that 'follow' the artist around, are not always seminal in the eyes of the artist. But some works – the ones artists deem worthy of remaking – are emblematic of an unresolved or open-ended quality that maintains a relevance or urgency to the present moment. At the heart of the remake then, is the rather human acknowledgement that one's previous work may possess a sensibility that is unavailable to one's current forms of making. And for that reason alone, the original must be remade.