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"Hybrid States (The migration of Content and Context in Ryan McGinness' Art" By Carlo McCormick

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In a gallery, in a store, on the page, or on a wall, or for that matter upon pretty much any item of manufacture one can imagine, it is not so much a question of any single site Ryan McGinness may occupy as an artist but the sight lines between all his myriad contexts. If we have to situate his art, it would be somewhere in-between: neither here nor there but perversely and pervasively everywhere. Operating on the mutual understanding that the multiplication of images and emblems has both diminished meaning and accelerated understanding, Ryan McGinness articulates the multilateral as the compensation of difference. That is, for all that we may gather from an "installationview," as an extended oeuvre what we're really talking about is an instillation purview. A matter of semantics perhaps, but pictographically this kind of parsing is just what Ryan's art relishes. It is more about instillation than the mere placement of an installation, as McGinness likes to introduce—or implant—his ideas and methodologies gradually. Indeed, if no single view is satisfactory, we need a purview that encompasses not merely a range and scope, but the manifold degrees to which he addresses function, power, comprehension, and experience.

At the nexus of fulfillment and desire, McGinness's super-saturate pictograms speak directly to the systematic efficacy and incipient self-nullification of our communications age. His art is surely seductive, but it is likewise remarkably self-referential to the manipulative means by which we are taught to want. This is design in the most fundamental sense of the term, but it is design without designation. On first impression of McGinness's early work, I can quite distinctly recall the reaction that this was just bad clip art. For those of us not too savvy, a younger generation was coming up with a very articulate map of how signs functioned—born, it seems now in retrospect, as if the anatomy of cultural consciousness had grown an extra vertebrae—in ways that were applicable to both fine art and commerce. No matter how many bridges had already been built and crossed, that drive to now marry this sacrosanct separation between church and state was unfathomable still. Of course, the formative work represented in *Flatnessisgod* holds up quite well over time, its prescience an exponential measure of its continued relevance. What is proffered in these pages, however, is the unmistakable evidence of just how much more sophisticated McGinness has become in his visual strategies.

A simultaneous confluence and diversification of methodologies, the art of Ryan McGinness is predicated on its utility. Toward that modernist equation of form following function, McGinness inserts a more radical quotient where form and function are in subservient correspondence to an imperative of adaptability. Hybridity is everywhere in the process and effect of McGinness's art, be it form, venue, or the dynamics of representation. We might easily call this democratic work by sheer virtue of its accessibility and affordability, but it is more than that—the inclusivity and malleability McGinness embraces in his studio/laboratory, crossbreeding product, design, and fine art, is a direct affront to the autocracy of any individuated domain. McGinness has a wonderful way of coloring outside the lines with an intellectual precision and engineered exactitude. The results are meant to be confusing—a maze of signs that perpetually cannibalize themselves and lead us to infotainment cul-de-sacs as if they were grand vistas—but unlike so many who

speak to this contemporary confusion, McGinness is eminently cognizant every step of the way. Where others are so easily subsumed by the maelstrom of mass communication, this great communicator finds the repose by which to enjoy the overlay. Whether he's working with merchandizing, paintings, or even directly on dollar bills, McGinness makes opaque the aesthetics of commerce. For him, anything that can be bought or sold, that is an object of desire, or more discretely the immaterial wrapper by which we package the expectation of desire, is of a singular currency. This multi-denominational currency is the flow that carries the entire oeuvre, the electricity that illuminates our waking dreams.

Just as we can now see exactly what types of expressions were emblematic of the culture wars, it is probable that the work of Ryan McGinness will be quite legible in due course as the kind of art pushing against the embattled boundaries of our current fight over artist properties. Authorship and ownership are hypothetical values that he has little interest in making concrete, but would rather contort into convoluted riddles of identity. His art is his signature, his signature his art, both bearing a distinct trademark yet born of our latent file-sharing tendencies toward a new public domain paradigm. Yes, it's ultimately about property, but it only arrives at its estate as a matter of trespass. Everything is for sale except the artist himself, and it all comes with an unmistakably perilous caveat emptor. This is truly art in the age of pluralism, meanings assembled in the cross-firing synapses of mass mediation. There is an internal logic, a psychology that invokes the self without accessing it, and a quantifiably conceptual bent to his work as a multifaceted project that gives it all a dimensionality and depth, but it is all rendered as pure surface. Surface for McGinness is not merely the tasty icing by which he makes confection of our chaos; it is the veritable skin of content—the definition of whatever vessel or vehicle it may coat. He plays with the allusion (not illusion) of space as a tapestry of interconnectivity laid out in the digital bytes and oceans of billboards we have come to read as architectures of the real world.

McGinness adopts the didactics of representation as the elements of style, disseminating his dissembled narratives like a meme that can attach itself to anything. And what makes anything more of a painting than, say, a sneaker? They are both products of non-hierarchical distinction in Ryan's eye. Wherever we see the undeniable impressions of the artist's hand, they are registered like the traces of a touch that is as much reproduced as rendered. Figuration becomes the abstract cipher by which we can read the nullification of meaning as an autonomous zone. Abstraction itself is just another way in which we see how meaning piles up as an accumulation of signs in the voidof authenticity. What we see is what we read, and what we read is how the universality of commonalty (does not every expression register an emotion?) has collapsed whatever fictional delusions we may still have to hold subjective understanding apart from objective truth. The picture is an advertisement for itself.