

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

ARTFORUM



Jonathan Horowitz, *590 Dots*, 2014, acrylic on canvas. Installation view.

Jonathan Horowitz

356 S. MISSION RD.

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—Andrew Berardini

The dot is a black hole and a simple mark, an infinite void and an eternal asshole, a pregnant period or simply a circle. This figure, which featured centrally in Jonathan Horowitz's project, was first mentioned by omission—a classified listing in *Night Papers'* Sex Issue that read simply, "SEEKING PARTICIPANTS for JONATHAN HOROWITZ PAINTING PROJECT . . . 30–60 mins, \$20 PAID." An odd and intriguing opportunity at first glance: Your everyday hustler might spot an easy mark and a quick Jackson, while the savvy economist might wonder about the exchange value for that labor. Animal-rights activist, video maker, recentish painter, and commissioner of copies in the service of art, of which this endeavor marked the latest such operation, Horowitz offered to pay any participant willing to contribute a painting of a black dot.

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Five hundred and ninety temp assistants painted five hundred and ninety of these dots centered on eighteen-by-eighteen-inch white canvases, each dot about eleven inches in diameter. Those who visited the exhibition on opening day found a long, empty wall, a stack of blank canvases, and containers of black paint, with the project set to culminate midway through the exhibition's run once that high, not-quite-round number was reached. Every visit to 356 S. Mission Rd. prior to completion saw a curious pack of provisional painters daubing and brushing their own black acrylic shape with quiet concentration, designing with care their version of a perfect circle. The bare monochrome palette helped reduce extraneous or implied associations, although of course a few weird slippages occurred. The artist instructed his day laborers to act like machines—a project built to fail. Each circle in this holey assembly, despite instructions (and presumably the best intentions of all involved), is singular.

Horowitz has played this game before, both with dots and without them. He began by attempting perfect replicas of Roy Lichtenstein's *Mirror #1*, 1969, initially making the copies himself and later asking a gang of painters to produce them. First utilized by Lichtenstein to mimic mechanical printing, Benday dots would become the Pop artist's signature device, and his mirror beckons to a reflection beyond that which it depicts—a meditation on vanity, appearance, and portraiture. Horowitz's series "Self-Portrait in 'Mirror #1'," 2012, transforms the motif into a commentary on perfection and our failure to achieve it—on how even in the simple reproduction of a Lichtenstein (its first iteration already made to look printed), we are singly reflected in the subtle differences. Horowitz instructed the Lichtenstein counterfeiter not to use any tools besides a brush and paint (no tape, rulers, or stencils were allowed). At 356 Mission, Horowitz zoomed in not on any particular image but, rather, on one tiny component of the mechanistic process—the dot alone. He obviates the expertise seemingly needed to make a faithful copy and reduces the process to its most fundamental, to the kind of thing just about anybody could do (except, of course, they can't).

Other artists have messed around with imperfection and the act and labor of copying. In one memorable example, Merlin Carpenter cut a deal to exchange one of his rather generic abstract paintings from 1990 for twenty duplicates, which were handmade by the recipient and subsequently exhibited in 2011 at Overduin & Kite. Horowitz, however, begins here with the (well-known) human inability to replicate the mechanical process of duplication and, with utter ingenuousness, invites everyone to give it a shot. In the simplest terms, our individuality emerges from our beautiful inability to make our bodies into machines. As a consequence, the five hundred and ninety handpainted dots subtly shift and change from canvas to canvas, only adding to the optical pulse of this field of paintings that are almost exactly the same but utterly unique.