

Mark Flood, *Billy*, 1983, collage, 34 x 22".

of '80s self-help preachers, fitness gurus, and health-food nuts. What's the point of these things? Be successful, live longer and better, enjoy success, be rich. And fuck a lot, or pretend you do, paging through the skin rags, wanking to the now hysterically period VHS porn. Flood's deft manipulation of these smiling scrotums wins my vote. I want to bring back the hateful years: "For this I have *filthy* words at my disposal," writes Bataille, "words that sharpen the feeling I have of touching on the *intolerable* secret of being."

—David Rimaneli

Paul Pfeiffer

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

To Johan Huizinga, author of the classic 1938 study *Homo Ludens*, it is the healthy, energetic civilization that is able to constantly engender new forms of play, whereas in decadent societies, highly organized systems of recreation and amusement become mere formal games. With its concise group of works, all from 2012, Paul Pfeiffer's exhibition "Playroom" explored the spectrum of modernity's forms of play, from "free," fun and pleasurable activities to codified competitions in which profit or passive entertainment seem to be the motivating impetus.

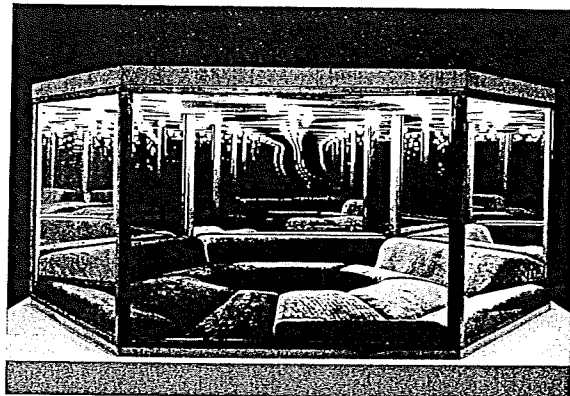
The most mesmerizing of these works is *100 Point Game*, a digitally altered video transferred to a 16-mm film loop. In its four and a half minutes, *100 Point Game* follows the arc of fifty "nothing but net" jump shots in professional basketball games. Yet Pfeiffer has digitally removed each basketball so that the camera seems to pan and follow an absence that suddenly, dramatically, and spectrally flutters through the meshwork of the net. Getting the basket, scoring the point, winning the game: We as spectators cathect so much to repeated performances of this particular net swoosh, yet Pfeiffer's film deflates it to a simple, breezylime movement of some woven nylon cords. Like the artist's

together with the subject, a sovereign totality." Flood draws from the emptiness of the things around him—stationery from a job at an oil company, cheap celebrity posters from a video store he once worked at, "muted" recycled soap boxes, pop bottles, stick figures diagrammed into corporate flowcharts or wandering through thrift-store paintings—what Gingeras calls "the abyss of the average." Like Martin Kippenberger and Mike Kelley, Flood has the seasoned eye of a ragpicker—curiously, or presciently, the figure so often depicted in Baudelaire's *poésie maudite*. Seeing a dirty speck in the gutter, he thinks, "I might need that." He has a way with words too: Imperatives such as EAT HUMAN FLESH, MASTURBATE OFTEN, DRINK BLOOD, FUCK THE ECONOMY, and COMMIT SUICIDE are written upon canvases—text-based works, they also savor of the Pictures era—Flood's era, too. In his hilariously pornographic collages, the artist taps the barely unconscious consciousness

breakout 2000 video work *John 3:16*, in which he altered and collaged footage from some fifty basketball games when the ball was clearly centered in the frame to create an animation of a seemingly miraculous levitating basketball, *100 Point Game*, through simplification and abstraction, exposes the routinized gestures in televised games as largely fetishistic preoccupations.

While *100 Point Game* features digitally manipulated video transferred to film, for *Home Movie*, Pfeiffer made several alterations to 8-mm film, displaying it on a digital monitor, making several obvious alterations to the film in this move. *Home Movie*'s eight and a half minutes of found 1970s footage depict the activities of a multiracial group of adults and children. Stuffing their VW Beetle full of large balloons, the party makes an excursion to the zoo; upon arrival, they encounter a handwritten sign forbidding balloons on the premises. Undeterred, they head to the grounds of a nearby museum of science and technology and frolic around its grassy fields and fountains among goats and other animals that seem suspiciously like zoo creatures. In several sequences, Pfeiffer has digitally removed the human figures, so the balloons appear to hover untethered just above a child's height. This makes the film's *Sesame Street*-like narrative suddenly surreal, and casts the children's and adults' playtime as an analogue to Pfeiffer's own play with film in his orchestration of inexplicable, enigmatic events.

The physical centerpiece of "Playroom" was the show's titular sculpture, a five-by-five-foot hexagonal structure set eye-level on a white plinth. The work is a re-creation of basketball star Wilt Chamberlain's so-called X-rated or "play" room from his 1970s-era Bel Air mansion, a space of period luxury—mirrored wall panels, a fur-covered water bed—and the site of his much publicized sexual romps (he once claimed to have had sex with more than twenty thousand women). In his architectural model, Pfeiffer removes most of the decorative embellishments (paintings, sculptures, and throw pillows) and makes each of the room's



Paul Pfeiffer, *Playroom*, 2012, steel, glass one-way mirror, wood, MDF, fabric, upholstery, lights, 62 1/4 x 72 x 30".

six walls a one-way mirror, so the experience of looking into the sculpture is a dizzying *mise en abyme* of reflections without a subject (one's own peering face is, of course, left out). Pfeiffer's hollowing out of the space turns it into a Robert Smithson-like non-site (the sculpture's mirrored, geometric, display-case form contributes to the sense of its contents being nearly geologic) and gives the impression that the "love nest" was not dedicated to spontaneous, "free" pleasure but was the epicenter of a rigidly quantified game of sexual conquest. For Huizinga, play was separated from ordinary life and therefore no material interest could be gained from it. Yet, Pfeiffer suggests, "professionalized" games often trade more in routine and spectacle than in authentic, creative, unalienated pleasures.

—Eva Díaz