

Orson Heidrich

Mechanical Advantage

Jackie De Lacy On Pressing



Mechanical Advantage presents a new body of sculptural and wall-based work by Orson Heidrich, which explores the relationship between artist and industry. Created through different outsourced industrial methods, the works in the exhibition consider a flow of production, value, ownership, and reproduction that coalesces around the aesthetics and practices of outsourced fabrication.

Starting from a series of iPhone images taken by Heidrich at fabrication sites that have developed work with the artist over the past few years, *Mechanical Advantage* positions the artist as an interface between industrial & artworld processes; creating objects which morph between being finite aesthetic artworks and functional tools used in the ongoing creation of work.

In short; the images in *Mechanical Advantage* have been extruded to become abstracted, topographic 3D models; translated into machine-readable files; printed, cut, pressed and moulded into physical forms at fabrication houses in Pakistan, China, Australia and other sites around the world. The final works are abstracted from their initial image-forms; aesthetically marked by outsourced industrial production methods, intended future practical uses, and the third party 'contractor-collaborators' lead role in their realisation.

Two of the main works in the exhibition are siblings, or peers, or maybe most fittingly in this context, co-workers. *Cut - Male*, and *Cut - Female*, are aluminium wall works, appearing as metallic frames, with the same image cut into the centre of their two surfaces. These companion works, one with an extruded image, the other a shallow cut impression of the same form, have been produced through a method usually used to create pressing plate moulds.

A pressing plate is a tool, which when fitted with a mould, is used to impress an image onto the surface of



metal, here allowing for the endless reproduction of Heidrich's iPhone photos. As a duo, *Cut* functions as a metallic relief diptych, and as an industrial tool; the works abstracted shape, an extruded image of a barbed wire fence, both depicting and further facilitating fabrication. As a press, the work references various print-making technologies, a tacit acknowledgment of Heidrich's photographic background. Pressing also culminates, aggregates, or transforms different irreducible parts together into a single form, without collapsing their differences. *Mechanical Advantage*, conceptually and as a series of hybrid tool / artworks, is transformed by, and permanently indented with, the conditions of industrial experimentation, labour outsourcing, aesthetic decision-making, artistic collaboration and value-making which occurs in the creation of these works. Like a print, always showing remnants of its press, *Mechanical Advantage* puts forward (rather than invisibilises) its fabrication as a transformative process.

Resting on brackets on the gallery wall, despite being readied with screw holes for more permanent fixing, *Cut* remains implicitly ready for use. The pressing plate troubles the limits between commodities and working objects; the works arriving at their form through industrial experimentation rather than artistic predetermination. These troubled boundaries create a dual relation which hybridises process and outcome, via an artistic practice invested in collaborative fabrication, the aesthetics of technical aberration, and the symbolic entity of value which lies dormant in an object until it is recognised as an artwork.

While we talk in his studio, Heidrich wipes *Cut - Male* with tissues, not liking how dust gathers and oily fingerprints stain the surface of the work. He shows me photos of the works in the factory where it was made; resting on top of a pile of dirt, and haphazardly propped up against a metal drum. The treatment of the plate as an artwork, installed with gloves and wiped down periodically, is clearly driven by the works' emotional and cultural value, not some kind of material fragility.



Installed around the gallery are a series of indented metal works each titled *Extrusion*. These works are the pressed plates made from *Cut*, existing as standalone works, and evidencing the functionality of their larger companions in the exhibition. Each *Extrusion* features the same abstracted image of a barbed wire fence, however the pieces' varying sizes, crops and orientations mean that they each highlight different details; noticeably similar but never the same, obfuscating their pressed image. While the barbed wire pattern is decipherable on both of *Cut*'s male and female mould plates, the image becomes detritus on the surface of *Extrusion*. These smaller pressings bear an abstracted form indented more by the aberrations of complex engineering and back-and-forth fabrication, than from Heidrich's original photograph itself.

Each *Extrusion* announces the production, compression, distribution, and re-production that their image has undergone to be pressed into their metal. The works' carefully framed, gently bent forms give them an air of fragility not found in the imposing, functional moulds which made them. *Extrusion*'s preciousness and abstraction gives value to the works, as rare, delicate and finite pieces at the end of their production cycle. They're the culmination of images that are infinitely replicable, but scarcely recognisable; indicative of an accelerating cycle in Heidrich's practice which reproduces, remixes, and translates fabrication methods to their limit.

I ask Heidrich if when using *Cut* as a pressing plate it becomes solely a practical tool again, he says there's not; he was nervous that the industrial press (30 tonnes of metal driven into the artwork) might tarnish its finish. Where the *Extrusions* represent the near total abstraction of the images pressed into their surface, heralding the function of *Cut* as an industrial arts tool, a third

pressing plate mould in the exhibition, *Cut Relief*, highlights the artistic resonances of the pressing plate form itself.

Hung solo without an extruded counterpart or drilled holes for fixing to a press, *Cut Relief* is a functionless mould plate. Showing an image of a workshop guillotine, this third mould is thinner, with curved bevelled edges on its frame, and more detail in its image, *Cut Relief*, teases out the aesthetic comparisons to a sculptural relief or framed artwork noticeable in *Cut - Male*, and *Cut - Female*. Heidrich expands and re-appropriates his outsourced methods for creative gain, making contracted labour and technical experimentation central to his work, and *Cut Relief* arrives at becoming an artwork through the process of creating moulds – emphasising the beauty in the industrial forms Heidrich chances upon in his process of experimental image re-production.

Rather than resulting in a series of finite, rare and expensive objects – simply turning industry into art – the work in *Mechanical Advantage* will inevitably be pressed, moulded, re-scanned or photographed to become the basis of other printed, rendered and fabricated objects. Like *Mechanical Advantage*'s initial images of fabrication sites, the works' presence will be indented into future works, as reference images; prompts for further industrial collaborations; material experimentations; practical tools and more – the objects in the exhibition here reach their outcome and future-genesis within an ongoing cycle of re-production, culminating around Heidrich's experimental approach to fabrication.



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Orson Heidrich would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation on which this exhibition takes place and pay their respects to all Gadigal elders past, present and future.

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