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READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE
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REVIEW: READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE AT NEW YORK'S SWISS INSTITUTE

By [Drew Zeiba](#)

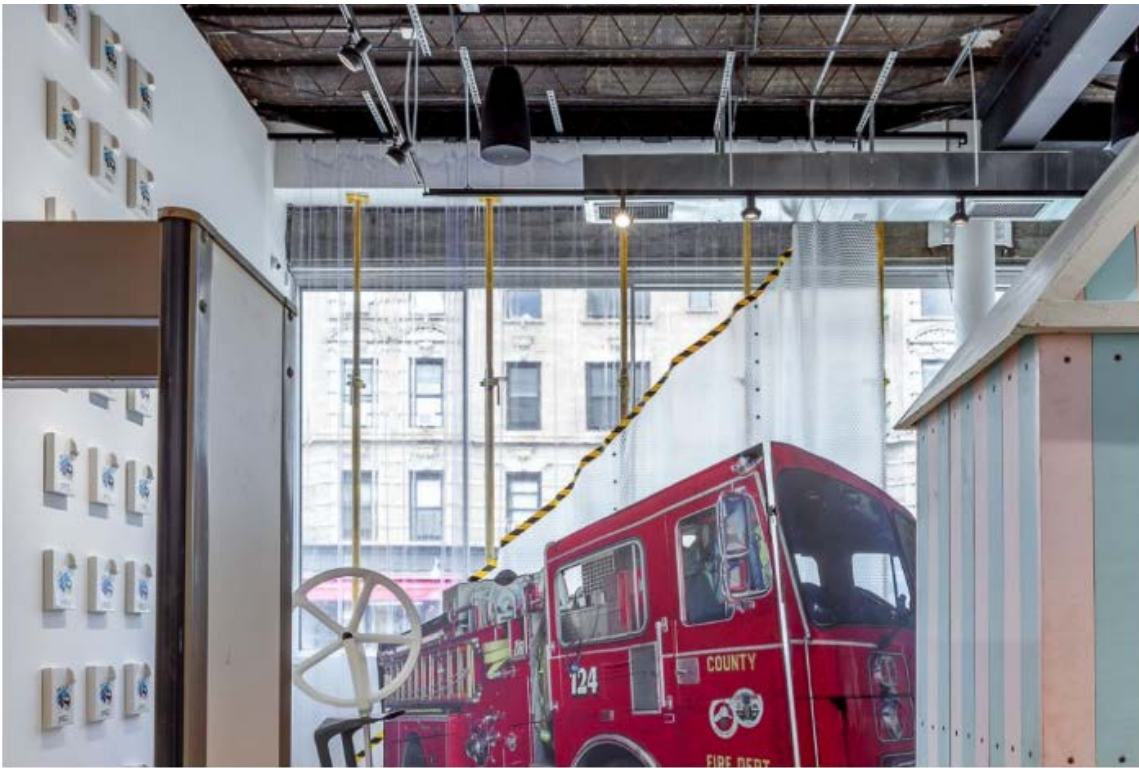


Slide 1 of 2: Installation view of *READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE*, Swiss Institute, New York. Pictured: *Inside Outside* / Petra Blaisse, *Don't pinch!*, 2018; curtain with readymade material; courtesy of the *Inside Outside* / Petra Blaisse with Peter Niessen and Aura Luz Melis. *architecten de vylder vinck tallieu*, *YELLOW*, 2018; yellow construction posts; courtesy of the artists.

38 St. Marks Pl
New York, NY 10003

info@swissinstitute.net
swissinstitute.net

Tel +1 212 925 2035
Fax +1 212 925 2040



Slide 2 of 2: Installation view of *READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE*, Swiss Institute, New York. Left to Right: Reena Spaulings, *Gate*, 2018; oil paint on walk-through security gate; courtesy of the artist. Alan Belcher, *Desktop*, 2012 / 2018; unique installation of 23 ceramic "____.jpg's"; courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lange & Pult, Zürich. Oliver Payne and Nick Relph, *Technical Taxi*, 2007; metal bicycle wheel and plastic stool, pedestal courtesy of Shane Akeroyd Collection, London. Inside Outside / Petra Blaisse, *Don't pinch!*, 2018; curtain with readymade material; courtesy of the Inside Outside / Petra Blaisse with Peter Niessen and Aura Luz Melis. architecten de vylder vinck tallieu, *YELLOW*, 2018; yellow construction posts; courtesy of the artists. Lutz Bacher, *FIRE*, 2016; print on plywood and wood; courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Aldo Rossi, *Prototype for Cabina*, 1981; painted wood; courtesy of Drawing Matter Collections.

In 1913 the French artist Marcel Duchamp inverted a bicycle wheel and attached it to a humble wooden stool, opening an entirely new chapter in the history of art. Nearly 100 years later, Oliver Payne and Nick Relph updated this old metal and bare wood with streamlined 21st-century materials as *Technical Taxi* (2007). The piece opens [READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE](#), an exhibition curated by Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen which marks the third edition of the Swiss Institute's annual Architecture and Design Series (as well as [the opening show for its new East Village location](#)). To say *Technical Taxi* opens *READYMADES* is a bit misleading; with 65 works on display, each a contemporary readymade, the exhibition is absolutely packed, sometimes overwhelming in its density. And this is precisely the point. For [Fischli and Olsen](#), these shifting scales and this onslaught of objects parallels the disorienting experience of being in the contemporary city. And the physical material of the city itself abounds: one of Christo's *Store Front* pieces (1965–66), two sculptures made from the green plywood walls universally recognizable as a construction barrier taken by [Klara Lidén](#) from Swiss Institute's own renovation (*Untitled (loveseat)* and *Untitled (sounds like a whisper)*), a dual channel real estate phantasmagoria by [Lena Youkhana](#) (*Srud office/Motel/Erbil and a small person found on the mountainous Iraq-Iran border*), and revised traffic signs by [Martin Wong](#) (*Traffic Signs for the Hearing Impaired*) are just some examples.

The exhibition also engages in the onerous task of collecting architecture while simultaneously troubling the fact that the “readymade could be the enemy of the architect,” as Fischli puts it. It might be argued the readymade denies an originality to building that is contrary to the notion of the architect as an individual (or office) and author. However, for the architects in *READYMADES*, the call of the readymade is an opportunity. Rem Koolhaas’s *Field Trip* (1971) takes the Berlin Wall as a sort of public readymade and index of spatial and political experience. [Christian Kerez](#)’s *Collecting Architecture* (2018) responds to the exhibition’s premise in decidedly democratic way — on a simple sheet of paper mounted on the wall next to various studies he begins by pointing out the way we can all see into the White House through our televisions and goes on to describe the “working proofs, studies, and exhibitions” as prime examples of the architectural readymade. Unlike a real building, they rarely get changed or destroyed. Of course, in architecture and in real estate not all that is for sale is solid. For *38 St. Marks Pl Air Rights for Sale* (2018), [Arno Brandhuber](#) has taken over the sky above Swiss Institute’s roof with a fog machine and laser lights, reminding us that every last bit of the city is commodifiable, even the air above us.

Beyond the city in general, *READYMADES* also stakes a claim in the city it’s in, culling upon the history of readymades and appropriation-based art that so populated the artistic output of the East Village in the 1980s. Even the title is a New York City-born readymade itself, lifted from a 1987 project by Philippe Thomas, [readymades belong to everyone®](#), that transformed nearby Cable Gallery into a public relations and advertising agency. And while the current show’s jam-packed layout of objects certainly reads with the congestion of the city, in its ecstatic object fetishism it evinces another proto-urban landscape: the e-commerce warehouse. Despite how dematerialized online shopping might seem to the average consumer, it is anything but. Amazon’s fulfillment centers broke the million square foot (that is, over 23 acres) threshold, a number of years ago. The rapidly developing hardware center of Shenzhen, China’s Huaqiangbei electronics market might be another example of these consumer hyperspaces obscured from common view. And, as is well known to most by now, cities across North America have been vying to become Amazon’s HQ2, a bid that will likely irrevocably shift the fabric of the urban center the retailer decides to call home. These central nodes, themselves microcosms of a city, comprise a global supra-urban mesh thriving on and offline, 24/7.

Of course, Amazon's 23 acres, no matter how towering and delirious inside, hardly compete with over 14,000 acres of Manhattan. Still, the general operating logics of the two "urban" typologies run in tandem. The visual overload of READYMADES mimics the over-abundance of images and objects that define the rapid acceleration of global capitalism — be it in Times Square or on your Smartphone. If the readymade began as things bought off a store shelf — a bottle rack, a shovel, a urinal — then the art of selection becomes at once more and less difficult, more and less discerning today. The hyper-availability of stuff means there is just simply so much to mine through, a seemingly infinite number of options populate innumerable online retailers. However, in this surplus there is less significance; culture and objects are disposable, cast off into landfills to fester and re-emerge as an already-pastiche. A 24 karat gold public trash can by [Sylvie Fleury](#), *Yes to All* (2014), doesn't merely elevate the design object so often ignored, if not maligned, that dots city sidewalks, but makes it — and the act of disposal — entirely absurd. If Duchamp reconfigured aesthetic categories, it could be argued that those aesthetic categories have dispersed and mutated into a network of meanings so far outside our range of vision that the very notion of making an "original work" seems almost risible. In a post-readymade culture, everything's been done and will be done again, over-manufacturing begets over consumption and visa-versa. Capitalism's garbage logic is a logic of forgetting limned by the archive of tossed off cardboard and bubble mailers. This is the very nature of the readymade, itself a sort of high-culture breed of upcycling, a zombie conceptualism. It's not that the Swiss Institute's galleries are overwhelmed, it's that we have yet to accept that we are.

Dematerialization is a myth. The internet's best kept open secret is that it runs on physical substrate. It comprises so many objects, from semiconductors and fiber optic cables, to modems, routers, and entire data centers. And online shopping is no less material than its IRL analogue, it's just now we have shopping workers toiling invisibly in high-efficiency warehouses to ensure our things can be rapidly delivered by plane, truck, even drone. In *READYMADES*, this interest in physical consumption is everywhere. In [Richard Sides](#) and [Gili Tal](#)'s flatly post-ironic *Deep down the masters have always been anarchists* (2018), graphic t-shirts that borrow language and imagery from across visual culture are set on humble cardboard boxes, a sort of everyman's plinth. They might remind us of a tacky selection from Café Press or a touristy Canal Street stall. When worn, these shirts act as embodied calling cards, a prime example of the way capitalism trains us to believe our purchases of pre-fabricated goods fabricates our identities. This reflexive construction of art and the self through the performance of consumption is perhaps best represented in [Maria Eichhorn](#)'s *Three Paper Bags* (2009/2018). Eichhorn instructed Fischli and Olsen to hold onto all the packaging they acquired while curating *READYMADES*, the ghosts of products past, and place them in bags from Data Quest, a well-known Swiss technology retailer. The bags, which possess a certain Apple-ified aesthetic, rest casually on the Swiss Institute floor in the midst of the exhibition. Like out on the streets, the readymade urban landscape of *READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE* is a space to perform the rituals of collectible capitalism. The artist as shopper is the prophet of this consumer democracy.

While Duchamp couldn't have anticipated the rapid march of Western hyper-consumption, he perhaps may have helped usher it in. The artistry of the readymade was always already the art of buying. While many cite the bricolage [Bicycle Wheel](#) (1913) as the first readymade, some argue that it is the 1914 [Bottle Rack](#) that truly first embodies the form. It was simply an iron bottle rack bought off the shelf at the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville, a famous Paris department store. In the 21st century, not only the manufacturing of our objects, but our purchasing of them, is increasingly mediated. Readymades may not belong to everyone — and certainly not everyone has the material access to the same readymades — but rather, in the production of the self through rampant overconsumption, readymades are everyone. Selection manufactures ourselves.