

## Cherry and Martin

Kilston, Lyra. "Robert Heinecken: Object Matter," *Art Review*, May 2011, p. 127.

# ArtReview



**Robert Heinecken**  
*Object Matter*

Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles  
19 February – 26 March

Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles  
18 February – 9 April

'There is a vast difference between taking a picture and making a photograph', noted Robert Heinecken (1931–2006), a pioneer in postmodern photography. Heinecken's influential work is on view in two small but revealing four-decade surveys in Los Angeles – where he lived and taught for more than 50 years – featuring the myriad ways he 'made' photographs from found imagery, such as advertising pages from magazines, television stills and pornography.

Heinecken rarely worked with an actual camera. Critic Arthur Danto dubbed him a 'photographer' for his conceptual approach, which laid the groundwork for artists such as Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince. But a few lesser-seen early works on view reveal where Heinecken started. In the gelatin silver print *Typographic Nude* (1965), a woman is shown standing with large dark lettering projected against the contours of her body. This arresting, sensual image, in which Heinecken synthesises the female body with text as though it was branded, signals his keen and long-term interest in how sexuality is used to sell. It's also a fascinating link between his early photographs of women, interiors and landscapes, and the collages of mass media imagery he later became known for. Although he thoroughly transitioned from one mode to the next – traditional and romantic to conceptual and critical – the female figure remained central.

Just a year later, in 1966, Heinecken produced his well-known *Are you Rea* series, for which he layered magazine advertisements on a light table, making a photogram from the results. The outcome was a negative print that mutated images of women into unsettling montages – a placid Stepford wife gone haywire. In other works, he let advertisements illustrate their absurdity without his intervention, as in a magazine spread that emphasised the jarring juxtaposition of a sexist liquor ad facing a charitable ad for orphans.

Pornography received its own reconfiguring too, as in *Cream Six Single* (1970), a layered negative photo emulsion of an impossible knot of naked women. Heinecken later received feminist criticism for his use of exploitative female imagery, but his intent was to expose how prevalent the language of pornography had become and how passively we consume it in fashion ads or on television. In Heinecken's work from the 1980s, the thrall of television usurped print media, and pushed him to pick up the camera again. A grid of colour Polaroids of female news anchors (taken from his television) forms an inventory of hairstyle, makeup and facial expression that displays their uncanny homogeneity and artifice.

Heinecken's oeuvre incisively critiqued how women have been depicted for commercial or entertaining ends, and how the media lies to us. Yet, compared to today's tidal wave of crass reality TV and relentless cross-marketing, the media images of the past few decades seem almost wholesome. To quote Tennessee Williams, 'Mendacity is a system that we live in'. The system might shift, the lights might get brighter, but a system it remains. *Lyra Kilston*

*Figure Parts/Hair*, 1967, 10 black-and-white film transparencies over collaged cut magazine page sections on matboard 40 x 30 cm. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles