



Seth Price: Hell Has Everything At Petzel, New York



Clayton Press Contributor ⓘ
Arts

"Hello. Am I on?" Seth Price, Graduate Seminar, Art Center College of Design, February 24, 2015

A highlighted link on Seth Price's "next home page"

(<http://www.distributedhistory.com/>) points to the Wikipedia entry for Dorothy Demetracopolou Lee (the artist's maternal grandmother), who was the third woman to earn her PhD in anthropology at the University of California-Berkeley in 1931. She died in 1975, two years after Price was born in Sheikh Jarrah, a Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem. Lee's professional bibliography includes a 1959 collection of essays titled *Freedom and Culture*. The first sentence of her introduction reads, "The common theme of the essays in this volume is that culture is a symbolic system, which transforms the physical reality, what is there, into experienced reality." David H. French, an esteemed ethnobotanist and linguist, who reviewed Lee's book said:

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“very few anthropologists will ever have seen her essays that employ anthropological data to explore questions of individual autonomy, the joy of participation, equality of opportunity, freedom, responsibility, and other matters likely to concern us more as citizens than as scholars and scientists. In fact, the book is an appropriate one for a thoughtful person of any occupation who has these concerns.



Seth Price. *We're going to need a smaller map.* 2018. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

Another important distinguishing professional attribute of Lee was that she relied largely on the research and writings of other anthropologists. French described her as “a ‘Method’ anthropologist,” who—like “method” actors—lived their parts. Lee was also a guest at the transdisciplinary Macy Conferences (1941-1960) that discussed cybernetics, a unified approach for studying human, animal and machine interactions and communications. She also participated in the Toronto School of Communication Theory, one of

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many intellectual pioneers who worked (or thought) alongside Marshall McLuhan, the visionary media theorist, including Peter Drucker (management consultant), Glenn Gould (pianist), Margaret Mead (anthropology) and John von Neuman (mathematics).

It is almost like Lee’s enormous and diverse intellectual capacity and community was somehow osmosed or channeled to Price—a bona fide polymath—whose artistic precocity was exemplified by a book he created at age eight, *In the Path of the World: A Book of Strange Drawings and Writings*, which focused on Warner Bros. cartoons and art by Magritte. Few contemporary artists demonstrate cerebral dexterity like Price. He majored in literature and political science at Brown University, taking a minor in video art in the Department of Modern Culture and Media. He studied with Leslie Thornton, a painter turned experimental video- and filmmaker, whose own films are difficult to categorize. Like Price, Thornton’s work crosses disciplines and ideas, including science fiction, ethnographic, and documentary forms. As early as 1998, after graduating from Brown, Price was producing moving image works that were presented in cinemas and film festivals.

In 1999 (or thereabouts) he became a technical assistant at Electronic Arts Intermix in New York, which provided access to video-editing tools that were not yet widely available. As his friend, Cory Arcangel put it, we

“ were two nerds geeking out—a literal A/V club. What we did talk about were things that seemed very present then: the net, music, computers, and stuff we were working on. At the time, I had a sideline in antique computers and HTML, and Seth had a sideline in bizarro

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mixtapes and strange videos. We were not artists making work, but instead, we were nerds making projects.



Seth Price. Installation view, *Hell Has Everything*. 2018 COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

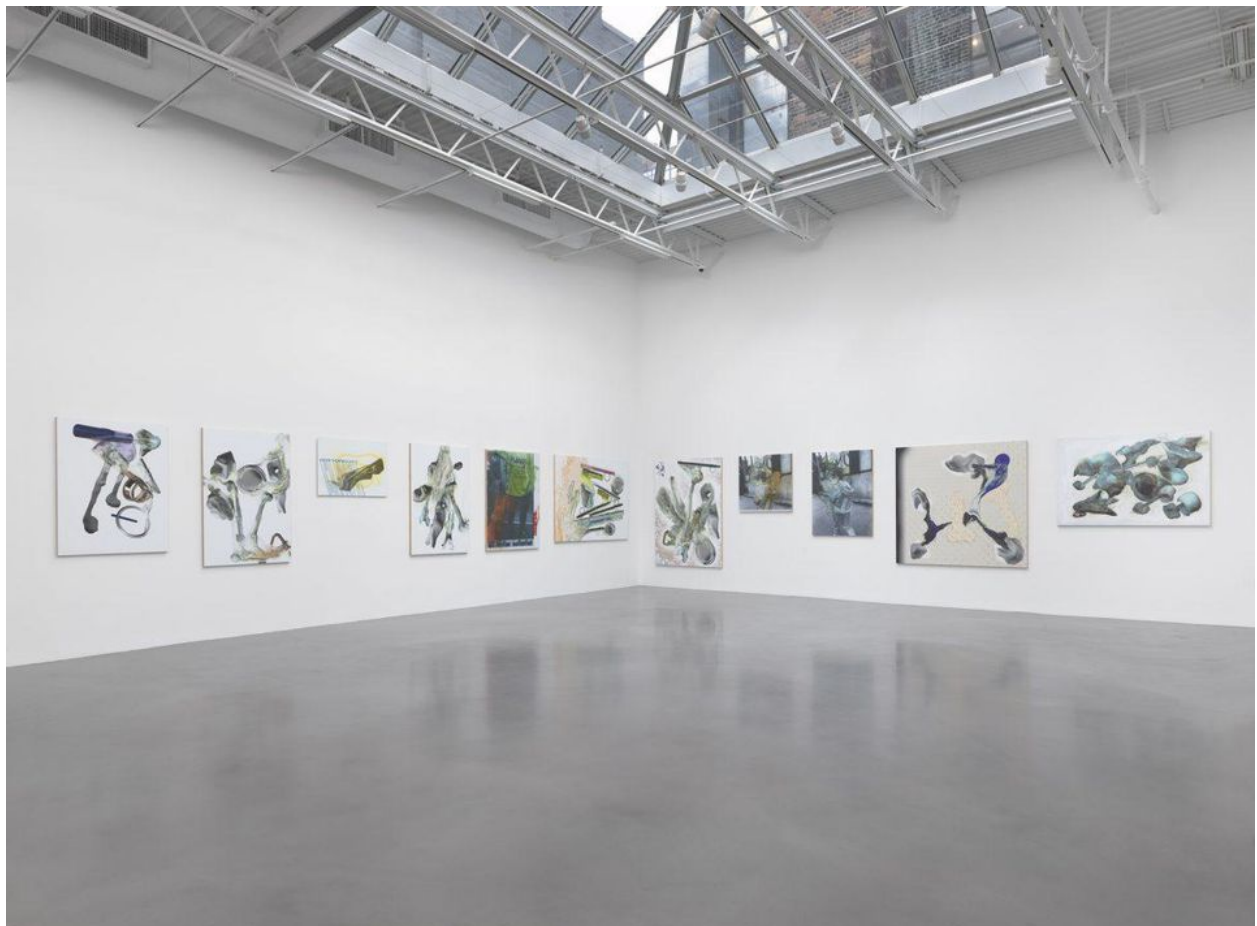
Projects compounded, leading to more projects. Working independently, Price and Arcangel both evolved into artists who work across media and concepts, from video to fashion, from books to sculpture.

Price had his first exhibition in 2004, more or less. (Different galleries publish different dates.) But it was his exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, the go-to gallery on New York's Lower East Side, where Price filled the gallery with high-impact polystyrene vacuum-formed objects, a technique recalling Marcel

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Broodthaers, titled *Different Kinds of Art*. Nearby, a television set was placed on the floor, still in its original packaging, playing an early video recording of a conversation between Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and gallerist Joseph Helman, as well as archival ink-jet prints laminated to safety glass. This was all a different, independent kind of art in 2004, sampling different topics and using different media. This was and is trademark Seth Price. Add to this, Price's orientation to showing or sharing or circulating—distributing his work. While Price uses mainstream art channels—galleries, Kunsthallen and museums, he also freely uses the Internet, as do Cory Arcangel (<http://www.coryarcangel.com/>), Paul Chan (badlandsunlimited.com), and Damon Zucconi (<http://www.damonzucconi.com/>).



Seth Price. Installation view, *Hell Has Everything*. 2018 COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

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Hell Has Everything is Price's first commercial New York exhibition since 2014. He has been rather busy with things, primarily museum exhibitions. Most recently he had an exhibition of six prints on synthetic fabric stretched over very large-scale light boxes at MoMA PS1 (April 15, 2018 - September 5, 2018). That was preceded by a mid-career retrospective presented sequentially in 2017 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and Museum Brandhorst, Munich. (A link to a PDF of the catalog appears at the end of this essay.) There were other institutional exhibitions between 2016 and now in London, San Francisco, Paris and Los Angeles. The London survey was particularly compelling, since the film and video works that were shown there traced a particular "shift in emphasis from production to post-production, and from static presentation to circulation." (<https://www.ica.art/exhibitions/seth-price-circa-1981-archive>)

The current exhibition at Petzel includes ink-jet plus (other material) paintings; a large-scale, video projection suspended from the ceiling over meditation pillows, and back-lit photographs printed on synthetic fabric. *We're going to need a smaller map*, the first painting you see, is painted, printed (with the twelve five-pointed yellow stars of the 12 original member states of the European Union), stickered and then partially obscured with oozy pours of acrylic polymer and varnish, looking and working somehow like candy confection melting. By taking a close look at the painting's surface, you see the layers of technique and media.

Why use all the wall space, when the ceiling is available, and the gallery-goer can lounge on a Yogibo bean bag chair in a near-hypnotic state and stare at a looped video hanging overhead? What you see is not what you think you see. This skyscape is a video of thousands of photographs of a squid's skin that

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were then processed through software for map-making and 3D cinema. Like his anthropologist grandmother, Price sees systems "whereby the self is related to the universe—the relevant universe in each case, whether society, nature, the known universe, or ultimate reality." Kicking back beneath the video, *Social Synth*, you enter another reality. The projection overhead is accompanied by two sort-of photographs backlit and mounted to the wall. Their technical descriptions are a mouthful: "Dye-sublimation print on synthetic fabric, embroidery, aluminum, LED matrix." They are extreme close-ups of skin, which are "stitched together" using satellite-imaging software, blown up, printed on fabric and stretched over commercial light boxes.



Seth Price. *Hell Has Everything*. 2018. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

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In the adjacent large gallery Price compels you to get up close and personal by directing your vision to a vortex of eleven paintings clustered on the far side of the space, turning it into an "escape room" of puzzles. Price has always been interested in material, conventional things, like paint, ink and canvas, and more unconventional things like archival polyester film, aluminum composite Dibond, acrylic plastic bonded to wood. These paintings use printing, collage, paint and photography. He manipulated the images by using chemicals, pigmented polymer fluids, and powdered earth. But once Price—or any artist—plays with new materials, they invariably become more conventional. There is a visual stickiness, gooiness to these works, which betray painting, printing and photography, while adding yet another perspective on the artist's long-term interest in referencing the body.

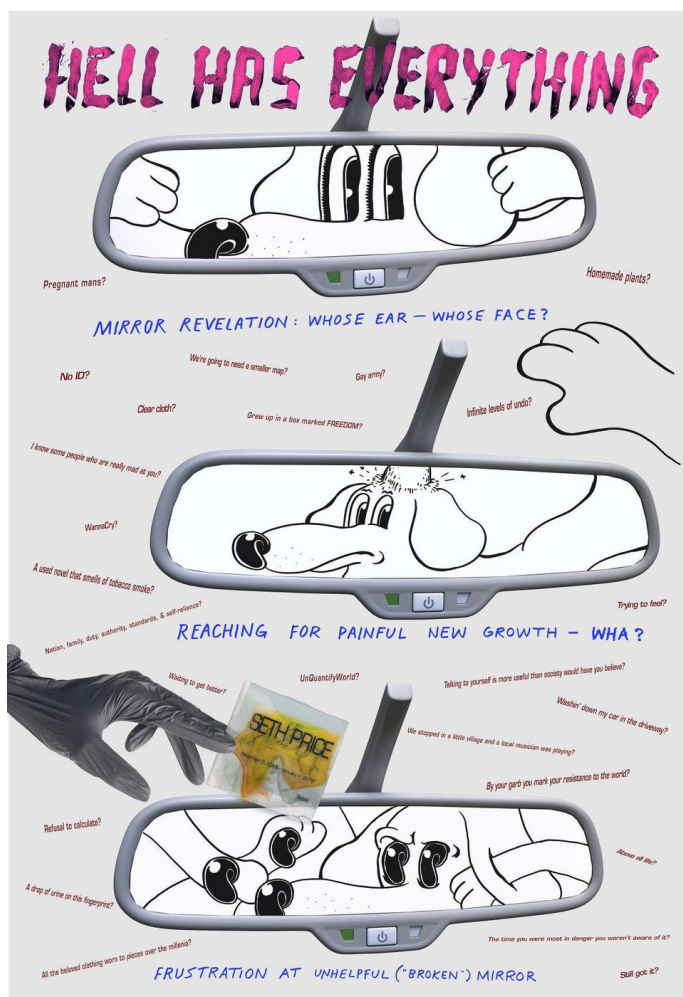
In a November 2018 interview with Will Fenstermaker in *The Brooklyn Rail*, Price said he is interested,

“ in the contemporary. In the life I live, in the corner of the world I'm in, if I say I'm interested in contemporary culture then I'm already talking about something that's heavily technologized. . . I have a weird push-pull relationship with culture, I don't like to get too deep into anything in particular. I like to take things in osmotically.

Even Price himself recognizes the process of osmosis in how he receives, filters and creates "things," whether the rare ideas or objects. Again, borrowing from Lee's essays, you understand that all of Price's works are in effect "different codifications of the same reality, and different response's in terms of these codifications."

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Seth Price. HELL POSTER FOR WEB. 2018
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PETZEL, NEW YORK.

It is something of a relief when you read that he has spoken about his early difficulty with identifying as an artist. Watch his interview and performances online, and you see an artist talking unpretentiously—sometimes ironically—about the nature of art making. He admits, “I think it’s that I see being an artist as an activity, not an identity.” This observation aligns well with Bruce Nauman’s opinion, “If I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art. At this point art became more of an activity and less of a product.”

Take a poster on the way out, or just download is here:<http://www.distributedhistory.com/>

For more information by and about Seth Price, see:

<http://distributedhistory.com/windex.html>

<http://organic.software>

For PDF’s of recent publications by or about Seth Price, see:

<http://sethpricestudio.com/writingarchive/HowtoDisappearinAmerica.pdf>

<http://sethpricestudio.com/bookarchive/2009.%20PRICE,%20SETH.pdf>

<http://sethpricestudio.com/bookarchive/2012.%20FOLKLORE%20US%20FASHION%20SHOW%20LOOKBOOK.pdf>

<http://sethpricestudio.com/bookarchive/2017.%20Social%20Synthetic.pdf>

[Seth Price: Hell Has Everything](#) At Petzel, New York through January 5, 2019.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/claytonpress/2018/11/28/seth-price-hell-has-everything-at-petzel-new-york/#1f19d24c7748>