

Flash Art

by Ed Schad

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It is best to imagine Sean Paul's 18 panels at Thomas Duncan Gallery as a running film in which each negative has been spliced at an awkward joint, the image split open. The resulting film stills, frozen as though caught or hung up in the projector, move forward in a staccato rhythm, with bumps and cuts that make the content of the film hard to register. Each panel has the crispness of '60s American pop art, yet ultimately wants the critique of pop offered by European artists like Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter, following close on the heels of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Paul wants the pop machine to break down and the true contents of capitalist advertising and the ulterior motives of the market economy to come into view.

Paul's fractured views show ads for sex workers, escorts and prostitutes, ripped from the back of weekly newspapers, seen as though through a veil that also reads a bit like a chain-link fence. Some of the images take longer to see than others, coming into full view with phone numbers, while others remain fuzzy and hard to see. His panels reveal the service economy that exists behind the glossy, official images of advertising and the market -- groups of workers that feed the prurience of a system both repressed in its desires and oppressive in its need to fill those desires.

In turn, Paul suggests that art is not free of this quandary: artists are behind their images in much the same way that sex workers are in newsweeklies. Paul's formal activities, therefore, constitute a sort of resistance to this condition, rupturing and splitting imagery, looking askew at something barely noticed because it is always in plain view. When the panels are broken off from the series, the overall effect will be lost, but at the moment, in the gallery, it is great to see these complex and multi-layered works in action.