

bition's provenance. Which in fact brings up the show's biggest problem: It came entirely from the "private collection" of an individual the gallery refused to name.

—Sarah Valdez

### Robert Heinecken: Image as Object at Roth, New York

In 1962 Robert Heinecken (1932–2006) helped launch the photography department at UCLA, which quickly became known for fostering a lively and influential



Robert Heinecken, ...*For Different Folks #2*, Unique photogram of magazine page, bleached, stained, redeveloped with pastel chalk (8 1/2 x 6 in.), 1970. Courtesy Andrew Roth Inc.

critique of photography's social function in society at large. As this show demonstrated, he effectively engaged the same in his own work, eventually forsaking the camera itself and using found media imagery. He delighted in undermining its visual language, which he valued as "authentic and societal rather than subjective and personal." Unlike his better-known Los Angeles contemporary John Baldessari, Heinecken didn't simply appropriate this material for his own purposes, but instead dealt with it as a cultural artifact. Appropriately, the most radical of the works in the show—

altered periodicals from 1969 to 1974—were displayed in vitrines.

The show's thesis, that the barbed social commentary Heinecken extracts from source material gains in significance in three dimensions, is a tough sell. His most visually engaging works explore not sculptural space but overlapping images, an inherently pictorial device. *Cereal Nude* (1965), an early, conventionally camera-made work, presages the artist's prolonged focus on the depiction of women in both advertising and pornography. In this grainy, black-and-white print, an image of supermarket shelves is superimposed across the body of a young woman, making her body nearly indistinguishable from the neatly arranged packages. Also included are several untitled photograms from the "Are You Rea" series, contact prints of pages culled from pornographic magazines that fuse the pictures from both sides of the page and resemble both negatives and double exposures. Though they distract from the show's ostensible subject, these two-dimensional works exemplify the artist's penchant for deriving unsettling hybrids from the recombination of familiar, even clichéd motifs.

Heinecken was not particularly interested in beauty, but in subverting commercial photography's glamorization of surface appearances. In *Periodical #7* (1972), he overprinted photographs of a half-eaten TV dinner onto an advertising spread featuring canned beef stew and Catherine Deneuve. The actress's alluring gaze is filtered through breaded shrimp and tin foil. In this and other darkly comic works like it, the artist presciently assails our culture's appetite for celebrity, our unwillingness or inability to distinguish between personality and product, and our embrace of consumption as our primary form of leisure activity. This scabrous body of work may be too cantankerous to ever appeal to a mainstream audience, but its layered critique was well ahead of its time.

—Stephen Maine