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CASTELLI

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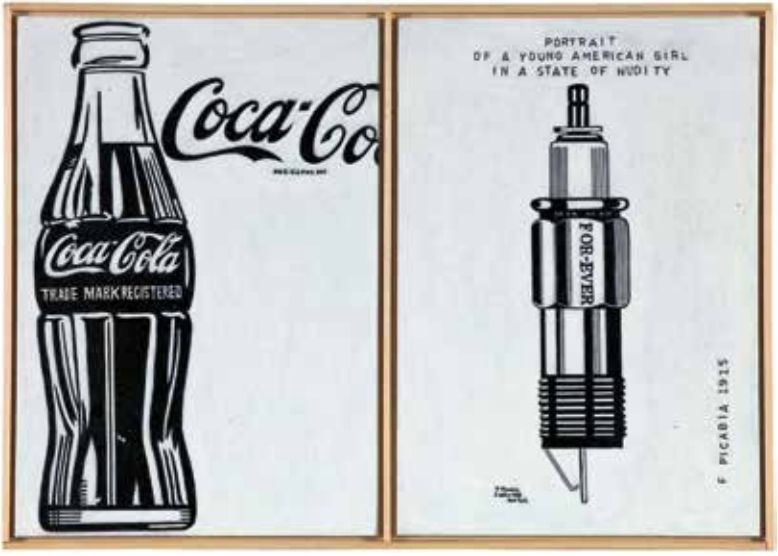
Painting the Same Painting Then and Now

Elisa Schaar

I wished I had stuck with the idea of just painting the same painting like the soup can and never painting another painting. When someone wanted one, you would just do another one. Does anybody do that now?

Andy Warhol, 1981



Andy Warhol, 'Large Coca Cola', 1962, and Francis Picabia, 'Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity', 1915, 2012
Oil on canvas
9½ x 13⅜ inches

Since the mid-1960s, Richard Pettibone has been making hand-painted, small-scale copies of works by other artists — a practice due to which he is best known as a precursor of appropriation art — and for a decade now, he has been revisiting subjects from across his career. In his latest exhibitions at Castelli Gallery, Pettibone has been showing more of the "same" paintings that had already been part of his 2005–6 museum retrospective,[1] and also including "new" subject matter drawn from his usual roster of European modernists and American postwar artists. Art critic Kim Levin laid out some phases of the intricate spectrum from copies to repetitions in her review of the Warhol-de Chirico showdown, a joint exhibition at the heyday of appropriation art in the mid-1980s when Warhol's appropriations of de Chirico's work effectively revaluated "the grand old auto-appropriator".[2] Upon having counted well over a dozen *Disquieting Muses* by de Chirico, Levin speculated: "Maybe he kept doing them because no one got the point. Maybe he needed the money. Maybe he meant it when he said his technique had improved, and traditional skills were what mattered."[3] On the other side, Warhol, in her eyes, was the "latter-day exemplar of museless creativity".[4] To Pettibone, traditional skills certainly still matter, as he practices his contemporary version of museless creativity. He paints the same painting again and again, no matter whether anybody shows an interest in it or not. His work, of course, takes place well outside the historical framework of what Levin aptly referred to as the "modern/postmodern wrestling match",[5] but neither was this exactly his match to begin with.

Pettibone is one of appropriation art's trailblazers, but his diverse selection of sources removes from his work the critique of the modernist myth of originality most commonly associated with appropriation art in a narrow sense, as we see, for example, in Sherrie Levine's practice of re-photographing the work of Walker Evans and Edward Weston. In particular, during his photorealist phase of the 1970s, Pettibone's sources ranged widely across several art-historical periods. His appropriations of the 1980s and 1990s spanned from Picasso etchings and Brancusi sculptures to Shaker furniture and even included Ezra Pound's poetry.[6] Pettibone has professed outright admiration for his source artists, whose work he shrinks and tweaks to comic effect but, nevertheless, always treats with reverence and care. His response to these artists is primarily on an aesthetic level, owing much to the fact that his process relies on photographs. By the same token, the aesthetic that attracts him is a graphic one that lends itself to reproduction. Painstakingly copying other artists' work by hand has been a way of making it his own, yet each source is acknowledged in his titles and, occasionally, in captions on white margins that he leaves around the image as an indication that the actual source is a photographic image. The enjoyment he receives in copying is part of the motivation behind doing it, as is the pleasure he receives from actually being with the finished painting — a considerable private dimension of his work. His copies are "handmade readymades" that he meticulously paints in great

Marcel Duchamp, 'Bicycle Wheel', 1913-1964, 2013
Wooden stool with metal bicycle wheel and fork
53 x 25 x 17 inches

Marcel Duchamp, 'Poster for the Third French Chess Championship', 1925, #2, 2012
Oil on canvas
9¼ x 6½ inches

Marcel Duchamp, 'Poster for the Third French Chess Championship', 1925, #4, 2012
Oil on canvas
11 x 7¾ inches

Marcel Duchamp, 'Poster for the Third French Chess Championship', 1925, #3, 2012
Oil on canvas
9¼ x 6½ inches

quantities in his studio upstate in New York; the commitment to manual labor and the time spent at material production has become an increasingly important dimension of his recent work.[7] Pettibone operates at some remove from the contemporary art scene, not only by staying put geographically, but also by refusing to recoup the simulated lack of originality through the creation of a public persona.[8] In so doing, Pettibone takes a real risk. He places himself in opposition to conceptualism, and he is apprehensive of an understanding of art as the mere illustration of an idea. His reading of Marcel Duchamp's works as beautiful is revealing about Pettibone's priorities in this respect.[9] When Pettibone, for aesthetic pleasure, paints Duchamp's *Poster for the Third French Chess Championship* three times in slightly different sizes, he refuses the separation between the intellectual and retinal dimensions, as well as any conceptual concern about the redundancy of the material object.

Elaine Sturtevant, who started making copies of works by peer artists in New York at the same time that Pettibone started in Los Angeles, initially relied on source material by a similar roster of artists, including Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol. This can be seen as indicative of how the practices of copying and repeating were an extension of the logic of Pop Art and related modes of art making with intrinsic reproducibility, although from the outset the two artists took this logic into entirely different directions, with Sturtevant pursuing a more conceptual trajectory. Pettibone cites Warhol's first exhibition of *Thirty-two Campbell's Soup Cans* at Ferus Gallery in 1962 and Duchamp's retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963 — where he saw *Boite-en-valise* — as his most important influences.[10] As many members of the rising West Coast art scene of the sixties, Pettibone followed the latest trends from New York City through exhibition catalogues and magazines, in particular *Artforum*, a then recently launched magazine in which Pop Art was regularly illustrated in color spreads. Pettibone did not directly respond to the printed reproductions per se: it was, rather, the gap between these reproductions, the expectations they created, and the experience of viewing the actual works that interested him. Pettibone started making copies of

Jasper Johns, 'Light Bulb', 1960, 2012
Oil on canvas
7¼ x 8⅞ inches

the paintings he saw published in *Artforum* in the same sizes in which they were reproduced, and completed these copies with characteristic stretcher frames — effectively miniatures — neatly constructed from model-making materials. With its connections to the worlds of childhood and the marginal, and as a "metaphor for interiority" as literary critic Susan Stewart theorized in *On Longing*,[11] the miniature took Pettibone's work right out of a straightforward Pop Art narrative. Returning Pop Art imageries to the size of *their* original sources and doing so at a time contemporary to Pop Art itself, could be seen to poke fun at Pop Art's inflatedness, both in terms of its heavily debated technique of enlargement and in terms of the rapidly expanding art market of the time.[12]

Frank Stella, 'Ouray', 1961, Three Times, 2011
Oil on canvas
21⅛ x 21⅛ x 2 inches

Pettibone's framed copies are hybrids that challenge conventional ways of looking at art and reproductions alike. His paintings possess a striking materiality and sensuousness that succeeds in homogenizing the different textures, scales, and mediums of their sources. In re-materializing the photographic reproductions that form André Malraux's *Museum without Walls*, Pettibone creates a fictitious museum of another kind, one that probes the relation between materiality and meaning and explores issues of fidelity,

Frank Stella, 'The Marriage of Reason and Squalor', First Version, 1959, 2011
Oil on canvas
18¼ x 26¼ inches

in particular with regard to changes in scale and medium transformations.[13] The works he copies respond in different ways to changes in scale, and the same work can look very different at a scale shift. This is most evident with appropriations of Frank Stella's stripe paintings, partially because their simple geometric pattern is easily reproducible in different scales.[14] Pettibone's appropriations of Stella's work, which span his career, range from some that fit in the palm of a hand and address the sense of touch, to others that more than two feet wide and neither are tactile objects nor possess the objecthood of Stella's work, but rather register distinctly as paintings. In addition, Pettibone has been particularly interested in how the photographic reproduction of a work of art can alter the perception of its medium, as his selection of the new sources in

the recent work also indicates. When in 1965 he made his first paintings of sculptures based on the two-dimensional reproductions of Warhol's *Brillo Box*, Pettibone's paintings also played with the fact that Warhol's sculptural object was itself painted. Pettibone's recent paintings based on images of Picasso's *Still Life With Guitar* published in the catalogue of the exhibition

Picasso, 'Still Life with Guitar', 1913, 2013
Oil on canvas
11¾ x 8¾ inches

Picasso: Guitars 1912–1914 held at the Museum of Modern Art in 2011, take their cue from the fact that Picasso's three-dimensional works can hardly be recognized as sculptures in photographic reproduction — that they had been made by Picasso as though they were pictorial. In a way, Pettibone's paintings of Picasso's *Guitar* tell us that photographic reproductions of sculptures can be distorting, but also revealing at the same time.[15]

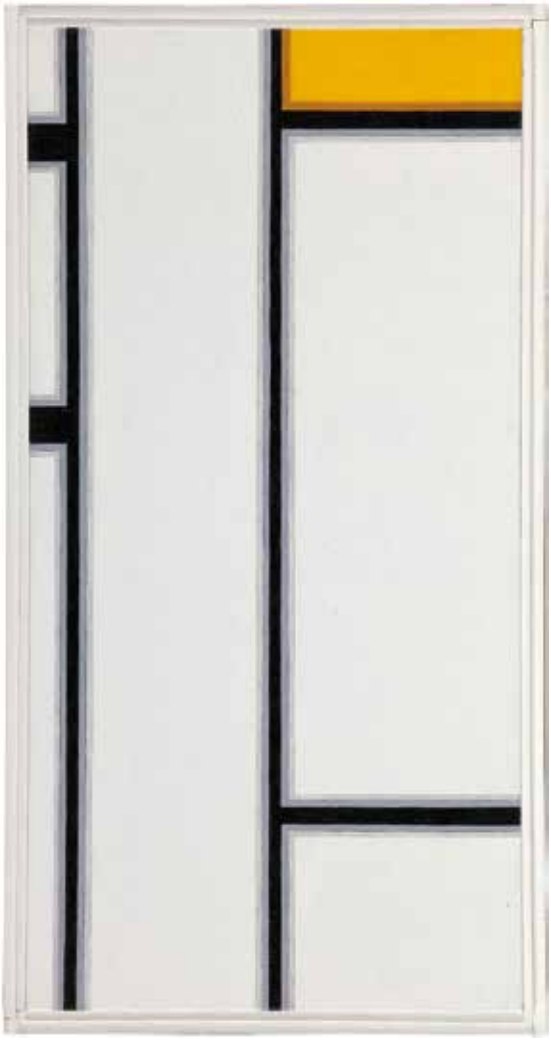
Picasso, 'Still Life with Guitar', 1914, 2013
Oil on canvas
11¾ x 8¾ inches

Piet Mondrian, 'Composition (Blanc et Blue)', 1936, 2012
Oil on canvas
16½ x 8¾ inches

In working from catalogues, Pettibone himself engages in what is effectively a cataloguing and collecting activity. Connoisseurial attention to a minor visual detail can start a new, extensive series, as we see in the work exhibited in the show *Andy Warhol's Sixty-four Campbell's Soup Cans* at Castelli Gallery in 2006, for which Pettibone copied Warhol's set of thirty-two canvases two times, taking into account two different types of packaging.

Piet Mondrian, 'Composition A # 1 with Red', 1935, first state of 'Composition with Blue, Red and yellow', 1935-42, 2012
Oil on canvas
13 3/8 x 7 1/8 inches

If Warhol's *Thirty-Two Campbell's Soup Cans* paintings — the number of which was pre-determined by the available flavors — provides an example of what Umberto Eco has referred to as the logic of "everything included", then Pettibone opens it up to the competing logic of "etcetera".[16] Pettibone does not just do what Warhol did, but also what Warhol wished he had done. Pettibone does neoplasticist compositions that Piet Mondrian once did but then



Piet Mondrian, 'Composition # 111, Blanc-Janué, 1935, first state of 'Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue', 1935-42, 2012
Oil on canvas
13½ x 7 inches

repainted, he remakes Mondrian's frames that were destroyed, and then makes all of these paintings once again, all in scale with each other. The infinity of lists is such that, as the poet Albert Mobilio puts it: "The list maker often is compelled to acknowledge that each accounting predicates an uncountable number of shadow lists, alternative choices abounding. Such recording seeks order even as the process implies the chaos of ever-lengthening


CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI NEWBORN 1915
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inventories."[17] In the mid-'80s, when the modern/postmodern wrestling match was in full swing, Pettibone was in his studio upstate in New York and, rather than appropriating works by other artists, he was recording his thoughts in writing on monochrome canvases. Examples of these little-known works bear word lists, enumerations, and tallies. Surely these works are oddities in his oeuvre, but oddities can be revealing. Indeed, aren't enumerations and lists everywhere present in his painting, from his shortlist of favorite artists to his recent revisiting of their works?

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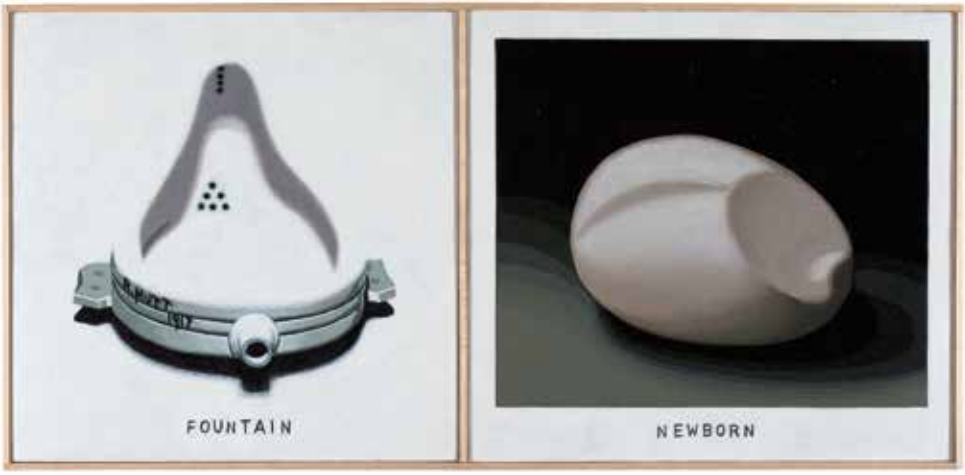
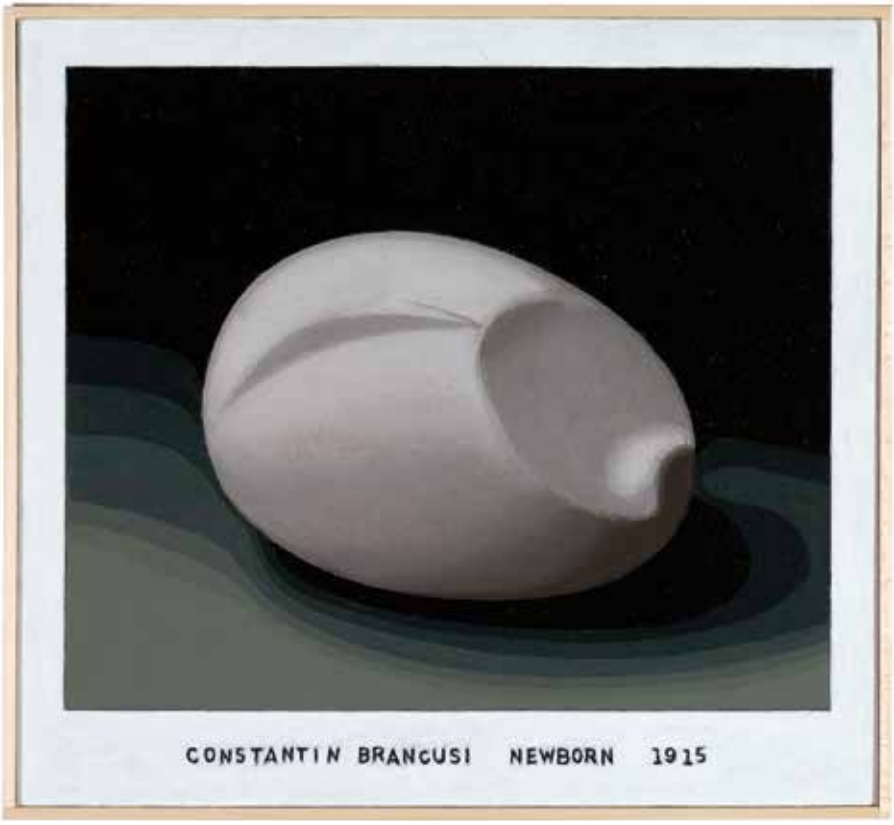
Constantin Brancusi, 'Newborn', 1915,
2013
Oil on canvas
12 canvases
each 8¼ x 9 inches

Many of the central issues in Pettibone's work, from the interest in serial repetition to the idea of making paintings of sculptures, find full expression in *Constantin Brancusi, Newborn, 1915,* a group of twelve paintings based on a photographic re-



Fountain, Newborn,
2013
Oil on canvas
8¼ x 17¼ inches
#1 of 2

production in which Brancusi's sculpture is seen against a dark background that silhouettes its ovoid shape, a technique that contributed a painterly quality to the reproduction and that might well have played a role in Pettibone's selection of it as a source.[18] Brancusi's modular and simple forms have been the



One element from the work in twelve canvases: Constantin Brancusi, 'Newborn', 1915, 2013
Oil on canvas
8¼ x 9 inches

subject of appropriation for various artists, such as Sherrie Levine.[19] However, Pettibone's *Newborn* relates more to Warhol than Brancusi: it is another, new experiment in "museless creativity" or painting the same painting. At first glance the paintings may appear to be straightforward copies, but indeed Pettibone took some liberty with the shadow of the sculpture, which graduates from the first to the last painting, from a single dark band into a ripple that metaphorically visualizes the process of repetition. Pettibone's *Newborn* can be displayed in different spatial arrangements, therefore engaging the viewer on different levels, like Warhol's soup can paintings. It can be displayed in a single

line to emphasize the sequential nature of what had started as an open-ended experiment, or displayed in a grid to emphasize the paintings' status as a group. In her book *On Longing*, Stewart writes: "To play with series is to play with the fire of infinity. In the collection the threat of infinity is always met with the articulation of boundary. Simultaneous sets are worked against each other in the same way that attention to the individual object and attention to the whole are worked against each other."[20] In Pettibone's work, the collection is always "played against" the handmade miniature. The precision and concision of the miniature is the flipside of the material excesses of museless creativity and what is effectively a serial collecting and cataloguing activity. If copying solves the question of where to begin, copying the same painting again and again raises questions about containment — when to stop and how to find closure — all questions that, in addition to the more obvious issue of originality, are central to Pettibone's work.

1.The exhibition "Richard Pettibone: A Retrospective" was organized by Ian Berry and Michael Duncan (I.C.A., Philadelphia, 2005; Tang Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, 2005–2006; Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, 2006).

2.Kim Levin, "The Counterfeiters: De Chirico Versus Warhol," (1985) in *Beyond Modernism: Essays on Art from the '70s and '80s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 250–55.

3.Levin, "The Counterfeiters," 252.

4.Levin, "The Counterfeiters," 253.

5.Levin, "The Counterfeiters," 252.

6.Pettibone's approach to his sources is a formal one, and in the case of Pound would imply setting aside the poet's political beliefs. Formalism was a dominant, though problematic, strategy for dealing with Pound and comparable cases in the critical literature for most of the twentieth century. Mary Deveraux argues for inserting "much of what we humanly care about back into the aesthetic arena" in "Beauty and Evil," in *Aesthetics and Ethics,* ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 246. See also 242.

7.On the notion of the "handmade readymade," see David Deitcher, "The Handmade Readymade," in *Post-Pop Art*, ed. Paul Taylor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 139–57.

8.Thomas Crow addresses vernacular forms of copying in "Handmade Photographs and Homeless Representation," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 97–110.

9.Jason Gaiger distinguishes between different claims to the beauty of Duchamp's readymades in "Incidental and Integral Beauty: Duchamp, Danto and the Intractable Avant-Garde," (2008) in *Beauty (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, ed. Dave Beech (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 119–25.

10.See Ian Berry, "Attention Serious Artists: A Conversation with Richard Pettibone," in *Richard Pettibone: A Retrospective*, 14–15. T.J. Demos reads the *Boite-en-valise* in relation to Duchamp's itinerancy in his article "Duchamp's *Boite-en-valise*: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement," in *Grey Room*, 8 (Summer, 2002), 6–37.

11.Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 37–69.

12.On the debates about scale in Pop Art, see Deitcher, "The Handmade Readymade," 142–5, 152–4.

13.André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls* (1947), excerpt reprinted in *Art and Its Histories*, ed., Steve Edwards (London: Open University Press, 1999), 302–7.

14. Stella himself experimented with scale. See Brenda Richardson, "Dimensions," in *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings*, exh. cat. (Baltimore: Museum of Art, 1977), 14.

15.The exhibition catalogue that Pettibone used as his source is by Anne Umland, *Picasso Guitars: 1912–1914* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2011).

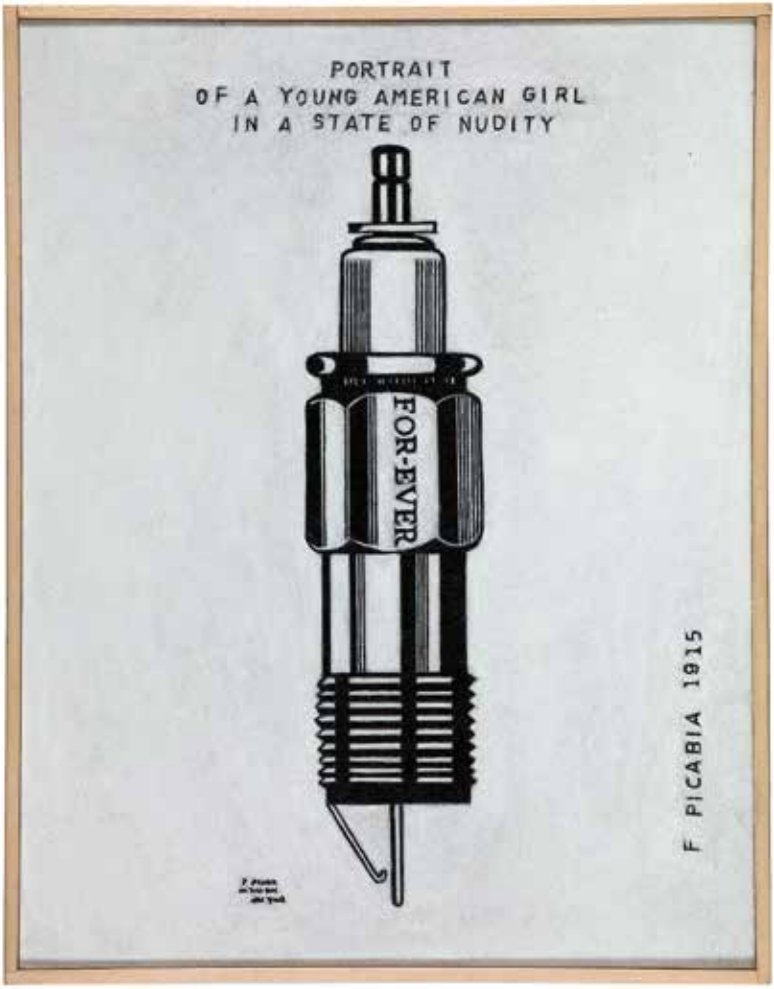
16.Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists: An Illustrated Essay* (London: Rizzoli, 2009), 7, 356–7.

17.Albert Mobilio, "Enumeration Sensation," review of *The Infinity of Lists*, by Umberto Eco, *Bookforum* (December/January, 2010). Accessed 23 November 2013, http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/016_04/4670.

18.In his article on the reproduction of works of art, Trevor Fawcett points out that in the early twentieth century the strategy of painting on photographic negatives was used to silhouette sculptural objects. See Fawcett, "Reproduction of works of art", *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Accessed 23 November 2013, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T071551.

19.On Brancusi as the subject of appropriation, see Roxana Marcoci, "The Anti-Historicist Approach: Brancusi, 'Our Contemporary,'" in *Art Journal,* 59, 2 (Summer, 2000), 18–35. Marcoci has also written on photographic reproduction of sculpture including work by Brancusi, see her exhibition catalogue *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

20.Stewart, *On Longing*, 159.



Francis Picabia, 'Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity', 1915, 2012
Oil on canvas
9⅜ x 7⅜ inches

Francis Picabia, 'Portrait of Stieglitz', 1915, 2012
Oil on canvas
11 x 7¾ inches

All works in this catalogue by Richard Pettibone.

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