



With their rebel mantra, **ART HIJACK** finds a muse in the devil inside

**TRACE Magazine, September 2007**

Art Hijack is a conceptual art collective created by Trong Nguyen and Elana Rubinfeld, two art world tricksters who have made it their business to challenge the capital-A art world snobbery. The story of their collaboration is a seemingly never-ending journey into their imaginations, and is only fully understood after sharing a drink or two with these colorful personalities.

Trong and Elana met in 2004 and immediately got along, solidifying their bond during a road trip to Art Basel Miami Beach – he had the tickets, she had the wheels. The duo soon realized that with their shared talents, they could probably take over the world. They formed Art Hijack initially as a public relations and consulting firm focused on the visual arts. But one thing led to another and their circle of insanity began to spin. Their first project was an exhibition at the Roger Smith Hotel in New York featuring the art collection of Rick Haatj (an anagram of Art Hijack). They conceptualized the show to spotlight famous works that have, through the years, been stolen. Trong painted replicas of these works and the two put on a straight face to the world, hiding behind a seamless press release and mysterious (and fictitious) power collector. Art Hijack was then invited to Art LA to exhibit the collection, where half of the works displayed were sold. Yes, sold! Next stop, the Istanbul Biennial.

Throughout their collaboration, the two have created several projects that represent their unending devilish humor, the most recent being the “firing” of one another and hiring of their subsequent replacements:

Renee Vara and Eric Doeringer, titled “Art Hijack 2.0.” And, of course, the interviewing process was filmed and exhibited. “Being an artist, you might as well turn everything into a project,” says Trong. “We are basically out of the picture now, because we want to be stress-free.” Yet they will still be performing several Art Hijack pieces in Montreal and New York and Trong will still be the painter behind the Rick Haatj collection, so how can anyone trust these two?

Separately, Trong and Elana are each primarily artists with other art world tie-ins. Trong is an emerging superstar curator leading Greenpoint, Brooklyn’s gallery scene with his always on-point New General Catalog. Elana’s resume is rock solid, having worked everywhere from PS1 museum to the public relations firm Blue Medium, acting as an artist’s assistant to a major art dealer’s associate. Their fingerprints are everywhere, but what will their next crime be? The two won’t budge. For now, they are hoping that the next generation of Art Hijack makes them proud. “We are emeritus members of this group and we are handing over everything we have: our website, our cards, our stamps, our projects, our resume, our credentials,” says Elana.

“Three years worth of exhibitions, three years worth of connections,” adds Trong. “I’m excited to see what their first project will be, because we’ve basically thrown together two people who don’t really know each other.” Another interesting and devious project from Art Hijack – let’s see how it turns out.

– Steven Psyllos

DECEMBER, 2004

Trong Nguyen, Elana Rubinfeld  
Roger Smith Hotel

By Mary Hrbacek



A mysterious aura pervades this collection of work, presented in the penthouse of the Roger Smith Hotel in New York. In the playful spirit of Marcel Duchamp, Private View: The Collection of Rick Haatj pretends to be a collection of high-class stolen originals; by artists such as Edvard Munch, Marcel Duchamp, Picasso and others. These works are actually meticulous copies made by Trong Nguyen, a co-founder with Elana Rubinfeld of Art Hijack, a combination of art collective and promotion firm. Intended to confound viewers in order to stimulate public dialogue on themes of attribution, originality, art preservation and ethics, the exhibit raises questions on the very nature of collecting; what determines the perimeters of a coherent collection and why are these limitations so often narrowly defined. The clever bluff teases viewers and tests

their sense of the absurd. Two original pieces by Trong, both silhouette portraits etched on vintage mirrors, obliquely explore self-identity and the artist's perception of the other.

The iconoclastic spirit behind the "Haatj Collection" (an anagram for Art Hijack), raises ethical issues probing the regulations that apply to an installation of works so perfectly recreated. Copies are frequently to be found in the art marketplace. The potentially thorny process of determining attribution was explored some years ago in the Rembrandt: Not Rembrandt show at the Metropolitan Museum. Signatures protect artists from unlawful duplication, with the result that unsigned works, perhaps unfairly, command lower prices. In the juncture where art and commerce converge, art may be a commodity, but it is not unprotected. Artists' rights groups have fought for laws making the deliberate alteration or destruction of an artwork illegal.

The expectation that serious art should be viewed exclusively in galleries and museums has been supplanted by the proliferation of independent art fairs in recent years. In this context, Art Hijack, with its novel exhibition concept, provides artists with yet one more creative alternative to get their artwork shown before a critical, engaging audience.

#### Ed Note:

Roger Smith Hotel is located at 501 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.  
Tel: 212-339-2092. Art Hijack can be reached at Tel: 718.797.1645  
e-mail: [info@arthijack.com](mailto:info@arthijack.com)

Tuesday, December 14, 2004

## Theatrical Openings

By Catherine Krudy



Edvard Munch's *The Scream* has seemingly resurfaced from its daring midday theft from the Munch Museum in Oslo last August. It reappeared in the penthouse of the Roger Smith Hotel during a private viewing of the art collection of Rick Haatj. Other works in Mr. Haatj's collection included Pablo Picasso's *Head of a Woman (Dora Maar)*, Georgia O'Keeffe's *Special #21 (Palo Duro Canyon)*, and Edouard Manet's *Chez Tortoni*. No authorities were involved, as the mysterious Rick Haatj was revealed to be the brainchild of a newly formed collective named Art Hijack. The fictive collector's name exists as an anagram of the group's title.

Created by two artist curators, Trong G. Nguyen and Elana Rubinfeld, Art Hijack simultaneously functions as a project-based art collective and a communications firm for cultural organizations. Nguyen and Rubinfeld's deft promotional skills were demonstrated by the enigmatic and witty invitations to the event. In the visual language of a pulpy horror movie, the invitations intrigued guests by exclaiming the theft of Maurizio Catellan's Whitney Biennial piece—an event which individuals conscious of the art world know as a sustained joke. The viewing project consisted of eight carefully recreated masterpieces: seven paintings and one sculpture (Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*). Two 'original' works, a pair of vintage hand mirrors etched with Nguyen and Rubinfeld's silhouettes were also displayed. The silhouetted self-portraits framed the artists' profiles in the negative reflective surface and served to reference the complex identity of the evening's organizers.

Art Hijack represents an unabashed honesty about the many, interlacing forces at work in the art world. Nguyen notes that their collective employs a "strategy that uses any reasonable means necessary to consistently put the artists and their works first." By taking control of the tools used by galleries and art organizations for promotion, Art Hijack seeks to maintain a unified independence from outside authoritative decisions. Artists have often made use of personas, like Duchamp's alter ego Rose Selavy, as a means for expanding their public presence. Art Hijack's Rick Haatj represents the evolution of the artistic persona in the present marketplace.



FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2006

## The Best of 2006: Art Hijack Begins Executive Director/Collaborator Search

By far the funniest thing I have received in my inbox this year comes from the art collective [Art Hijack](#), which until now has consisted of two members Trong G. Nguyen and Elana Rubinfeld. As some of you may remember, I recently gave [a luke warm recommendation to another Nguyen project](#), New General Catalogue's *"The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, Her Lover, And Their Dinner Guests"*. The post basically consists of me complaining about Nguyen coming off as egotistical, and begrudgingly granting him that though the project had not been defined, his work did tend to be interesting.

Proving that Nguyen comes up with good shit, cut to the receipt of an email this week from Art Hijack with the title "Art Hijack is Hiring" and an attachment titled "firetrong". This letter informs me that Trong Nguyen has been fired from the collective citing artistic indecision of working medium as the source of irreconcilable difference. As a hoax firing, I might even find this more amusing than the original Art Hijack project, which involved the complicated construction of fake art heists, and resale of "the originals" at art fairs. But, the success of firetrong is up in the air because it depends on the response the call for applicants draws. The project is ripe with potential to turn into a giant joke at the expense of dim witted applicants, which sufficed to say, is considerably less interesting. I have provided below the call for employment and have posted the letter of dismissal. You may notice that the letter it is utterly unreadable on the blog, which is why I advise you to either click [here](#), or right click on the image and go to "view image" to read it properly.

## ART FAG CITY RECOMMENDS

### Art Collectives

[0100101110101101.org](#)  
[The Atlas Group](#) [\*Walid Raad]  
[Brainstormers](#)  
[Beige Records](#)  
[Contagious Media Group](#)  
[Glow Lab](#)  
[The Guerrilla Girls](#)  
[LTTR](#)  
[MTAA](#)  
[Zombie and Mummy](#) [\*Olia Lialina]  
[Paper Rad](#)  
[Church of the Subgenius](#)  
[RTMARK](#)  
[Radical Software Group \(RSG\)](#)  
[tART](#)  
[The Yes Men](#)

### Art Blogs

[Anaba](#)  
[Cory Arcangel](#)  
[Artblog](#)  
[Artitems](#)  
[Artists Unite Issue](#)  
[Art Soldier](#)  
[Art Addict](#)  
[bloggy](#)  
[Eyebeam reblog](#)  
[Eye Level](#)  
[The Wreck](#)

NEW YORK  
ENTERTAINMENT

12/13/07

Art Candy

3:00 pm

## Art Collective Makes Shakespeare More Like 'The Bachelor'



An image from Art Hijack's performance *All You Need Is Love*.

Photo credit: Carolina Gambin. Image courtesy of the artists and ISE Cultural Foundation, New York.

"In Pursuit: Art on Dating," a new group exhibition at Soho's small but curatorially interesting ISE Cultural Foundation, tackles dating in the 21st century (i.e., MySpace, Facebook, JDate, eHarmony random encounters on the subway, *I Love New York*, etc.). Collective Art Hijack performed their *All You Need Is Love* at the center Tuesday, and above is a photo from a previous performance. This riff on *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that in our day and age there would be three Juliets to one Romeo — sort of a Shakespeare-does-*The Bachelor*. Live. Could get interesting. "In Pursuit" is up at ISE through January 11. —Rachel Wolff



August 16-22, 2007

# ARTSWEEK

## Matchmaker, matchmaker

If you love performance art and good food, galerie Articule has a special project this weekend that is sure to fill you up with both. New York-based artists **Trong G. Nguyen** and **Elana Rubinfeld**, aka Art Hijack collective, have chosen four contestants from right here in Montreal to play the parts of one Romeo and three Juliets in this Saturday's unique performance of *All You Need is Love*.

The drama starts at 8 p.m. at both restaurant la Khaima (142 Fairmount W.) and Articule (262 Fairmount W.). A live Internet feed links the two locations. Ideally, you want to be in the restaurant, where most of the action happens, but you can watch for free through Articule's front window.

*All You Need is Love* is a humorous blend of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. Other performers include **Kennis Hawkins** and **Will Rawls** (Dance Gang); invited guests **Athésia**, **Giselle Numba One** and **Wounds of Sarah**; and a special death-defying appearance by **Marcel Duchamp**, as both himself and his cross-dressing alter-ego **Rose Sélavy** (a pun on the French phrase "Eros, c'est la vie").

The Matchmaking happens on August 18, for \$25, which includes wine and a three-course dinner. RSVP: (514) 842-9686.

—CHRISTINE REDFERN



**THE DATING GAME:** Inspiration for Articule's *All You Need is Love*