

Aaron Flint Jamison

The spaces between
rumour, information
and circulation

by Jonathan P. Watts

'... So Flint gets on stage wearing an Arnold Schwarzenegger mask with a flashing strobe light inside and begins reading a puritan sermon. He's switching between registers: first-person singular and plural. It's quite beautiful ...' This is one of many stories Jamie Stevens, curator at Cubitt Gallery, London, has told me about Aaron Flint Jamison – known to his friends as Flint. The Schwarzenegger performance occurred on one leg of a toilet-venue tour Stevens booked for Flint and artist Steven Kado in 2007. Passing through Brighton, Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds and Nottingham, it concluded in London where he opened for his friends, Dirty Projectors.

Recently, in the Zürich-based *Du* magazine, Hans-Ulrich Obrist nominated Flint as one of the 27 most important living artists today. Asked by the magazine for a publicity shot, Flint supplied a caricature portrait of Liam Gillick rendered in the hand of a street artist – the kind hawked to tourists the world over. Or so Stevens said. He also told me that, in 2008, Flint organized a yoga class on the Large Hadron Collider as an art work. In fact, there's about as much chance of understanding dark matter as there is of processing information about Flint.

There is intense conscientiousness in these ludic manoeuvres, a punk bellicosity sharpened by more than a decade's involvement in non-profit gallery spaces, studios, and print and record publishing initiatives. In 2002, Flint founded the Department of Safety (DOS) in Washington, a non-profit live music venue, gallery and studios, with a 'zine library and artist residency programme, in a former police and fire station. When DOS closed, Flint and Curtis Knapp co-founded Yale Union (YU), a contemporary art centre in Portland, Oregon, with a gallery, artists' studios and printing press. At YU, Flint has overseen the development of one of the leading independent print workshops in the US.

In 2007, Flint began producing *Veneer Magazine*, intended as a series of 18 issues, currently at issue number

nine, with its own idiosyncratic pricing system. *Veneer* is distributed through a combination of subscriptions as well as bookshops, museums, libraries and galleries. For each issue of *Veneer*, a thousand copies – in two different versions – are lavishly produced, combining different paper stocks, and analogue and digital print techniques. Subscribers receive all 18 of an edition of 300 copies. Those issues stocked in regular outlets are part of an edition of 700 copies. Flint has an algebraic formula that inflates subscriber price as new issues are released. Unless you understand algebra, it's hard to know the price of a subscription at issue 18. One of the many benefits of subscribing is that, according to *Veneer's* website, Flint has offered to build bookshelves to house the issues. Inserted between the leaves can be found postcards and useless implements in specimen bags. Sometimes the pages have been perfumed; once, or so we are told, they were ritually whipped. Perhaps in homage to Marcel Broodthaers's *Pense-Bête* (1964), Flint sealed an issue closed by edging it in expanding foam. For issue three, he attempted to fund an issue entirely by 'reverse-advertising' – running companies' ads without their permission and invoicing them afterwards. Stevens told me that *Veneer's* liberal libel, plagiarism and copyright infringement has meant Flint has needed to work with a lawyer to write a 'shield' to protect him from legal notices.

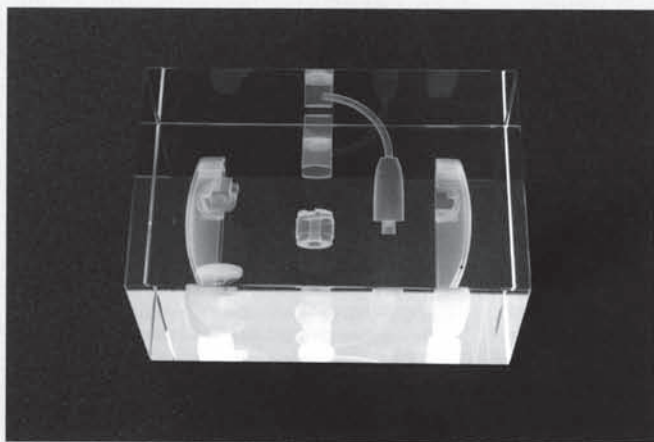
Although artists such as Adrian Piper, George Kuchar and Sturtevant have contributed to past issues, much of the content has the appearance of trade journals, promotional material and textbook literature. In *The Century of Artists Books* (2004), Johanna Drucker characterizes a kind of artists' book 'structured around the presentation of information as information'. 'Which is to say,' she continues, 'they are composed of material which is purely denotative.' No sooner have you read *Veneer*, than you have forgotten what it is you have read. Yet the seemingly limitless intricacies between *Veneer's* printed matter, its anarchic website and Flint's art practice transcend lumpen denotation. Flint has designs on the noisy surface of information aesthetics.

Flint has a gallery-based practice that incorporates lavish printed matter, and made and readymade objects. Among the latter, purple heartwood, 3D printing and other hi-tech materials are motifs familiar across works. *Frank [Canary Book]* (2012) is a cloth-bound letterpress book presented on a portable laptop table. For *Big Buddy* (2012), Flint studied sports rucksack manufacturing and produced his own curtain from georgette, polyurethane and zippers. *Stretched to Place* (2011) is a 'Mastercool' infrared

thermometer presented as found in its plastic case on a white plinth.

'Initially,' Stevens explained to me, 'Flint needed approximately £20,000 to make his latest show at Cubitt – four times the budget.' Told that it wouldn't be possible, Flint decided to do the research and make the thing himself. At the Cubitt opening, I could hear what a quarter of £20,000 sounded like before I could see it. A false wall bisected the space; embedded inside it was a luxury domestic jacuzzi. Its elevation, from horizontality to verticality, precluded any use whatsoever, and the dry pumps were working overtime in the absence of resistant flow. Facing it, two small sculptural works stood on a plinth and a shelf. On the plinth, atop a silver holographic sheet, was a 3D print, a rapid prototype of what could be a machine component isolated from its ensemble. Embedded at the centre of a block of purple heartwood, equal in size to the shelf, was what appeared to be vacuum-formed carbon fibre. A door led through a utility cupboard into the rear portion of the gallery where the botched innards of the jacuzzi were plumbed into a conveyor belt also constructed of purple heartwood. In the corner, filed away in a plastic form-moulded case and mounted on a camera tripod, were five identical handmade books. In one, set in letterpress text on thick paper, I read emblematic questions Flint routinely asks of systems, information and circulation in his work: 'OUTPUT What? To where? To what end?'

Aaron Flint Jamison is an artist based in Portland, Oregon, USA. Recent solo exhibitions include Air de Paris, France; Centre d'édition contemporaine, Geneva, Switzerland; Artspeak, Vancouver, Canada (all 2012); and Cubitt, London, UK (2013). He is the co-founder of Yale Union, Portland, and the publisher of Veneer Magazine.

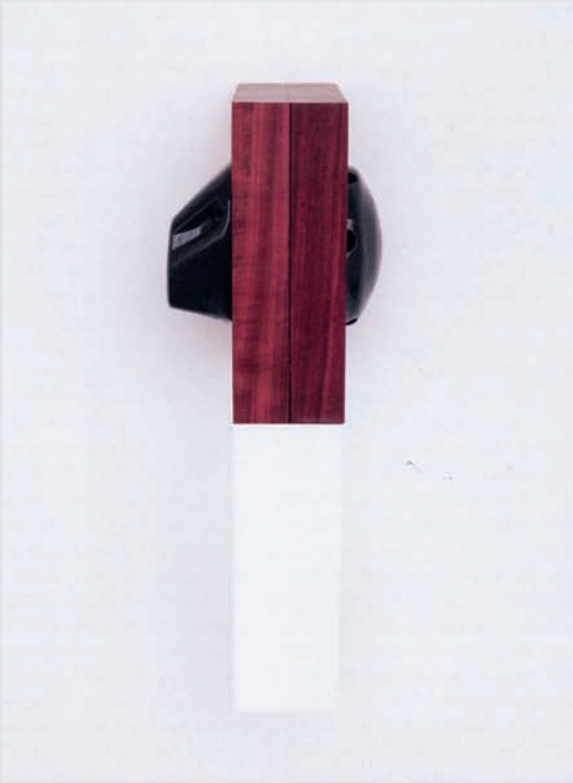


1
He is Risen / Plastikman's
Sternum, 2012, crystal,
6 x 12 x 8 cm

2
Planset, 2013, purple heartwood,
carbon fibre,
installation view at Cubitt
Gallery, London

3
Turbine, STL?, 2013,
mixed media, installation view
at Cubitt Gallery, London

4
A Floating Brand, 2012,
book, LED Technostrobe lamp,
purple heartwood, and five copies
of the book A Floating Brand,
dimensions variable



2

Aaron Flint Jamison has designs on the noisy surface of information aesthetics.



3



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