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Ryan McGinness: Varied Editions

by Greg Lindquist

Pace Prints Chelsea
521 West 26th Street, Third Floor
between 10th and 11th Avenues
New York City
212.629.6100

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Images courtesy Pace Prints, details to follow

"PoPoMo." "Sample not for sale." "Ambition Suspicion." "Outsource DIY." "Most people just steal your time." "Fate vs. Hard Work." "Ground-swell artist vs. Gallery-made artist."

Such slogans appear on 777 various size buttons by Ryan McGinness exclaiming titles, miniature paintings, visual puns, anecdotes, and personal philosophies. Each is fastened to a large raw canvas, the individual buttons coalescing into the graphic form of a snake chasing its tail, the Uroboros. In this painting, *Island Universes (Snake)* (all work 2007), a new form is given to an old symbol in the language of Ryan McGinness' vocabulary. Such work raises a central question in his latest exhibition "Varied Editions": How many different forms can McGinness employ to his seemingly inexhaustible vocabulary?

While creating new symbols (which are found interspersed with his previously familiar lexicon) for Pace Prints Chelsea's inaugural show, the strengths of McGinness' work remain its formal design principles—its symmetry, shape, color, form—and also the visual intelligence of gestalt, irony, and humor. Ultimately, for McGinness though, the success of this show can be measured by the ambition of his ideas and ingenuity of his entrepreneurial spirit. That the form of each piece is linked to an edition, or the ability to be precisely duplicated, is a key concept of this exhibition.

McGinness has displayed a tireless, if not obstinate, effort in making every mark with his own hand in his paintings, and when, in the rarer instance of fabrication, having as active part as possible in a piece's production. But, as he continues to seek a wider range of material possibilities beyond the traditional notion of painting and has the resources of Pace Prints' printmakers, his work appears to be more directed. One of his buttons "Art Making + Art Directing," suggests that these are ideas to which McGinness has clearly given thought, recalling Andy Warhol's methods of manufactured production.

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The resulting new forms are both conceptually and materially compelling. Laser-cut skateboards, flocked wallpaper, buttons pinned on raw canvas, gold leaf on paper, painted aluminum sculpture and fluorescent-metallic spray paint are all interwoven with his signature silkscreen technique. The most technically impressive are works like the laser-cut skateboards, etched with symmetrical patterns of symbols and are fanned out like a Pantone swatch in the piece *Rainbow McTwist*. The aluminum sculpture *Untitled (Varied Edition Sculpture 1)* is an enmeshment of flattened planes in which one discovers surreal juxtapositions of objects that include flora, scissors, scalpel blades, skulls, snake heads and baby birds.



Although his use of new materials expands his lexicon of symbols, the work feels too even in its overall polished and glossy appearance. For instance, in the black hole painting series, such as *Untitled (BH 24inc. 1)*, the component arabesque lines and laces appear perfectly executed—their spacing evenly aligned, overlapping and concentrically placed. In addition, each line is mechanically articulated, crisp and full, without smudge or imperfection. Lost in these varied editions is the intuitive, painterly process McGinness'

brings to the silkscreen technique, where clusters of individual forms are discovered through successive layering, the strokes of the squeegee broken and smudged, indicating the imperfect presence of a hand rather than machine. Opting for an appearance that, for industry, would be considered sloppy, McGinness exploits an inherent tension of fine art and commercial imagery.

But to say that McGinness has abandoned his painterly approach would not be accurate. An edition by definition implies multiples that look exactly alike. That the symbols can be translated to an infinite amount of media seems to be McGinness' main point. Blurring the lines between product and work of art, McGinness' oeuvre has always taken on a manufactured quality. By expanding the variety of forms these symbols take, Ryan McGinness unremittably explores their limitless associations given by new materials.