

The New York Times

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Break Even

Andrew Roth
160A East 70th Street, Manhattan
Through Oct. 28

This little firecracker of a show, organized by the artists Nicolás Guagnini and Gareth James, is both highly conceptual and materially intense, and got its start in the pages of Artforum. The two curators, working with the dealer Andrew Roth, bought a full-page ad in the magazine's Summer 2006 issue, but left the page blank except for a thin ruled border, which the magazine required to insure the empty page wouldn't be mistaken for a printing error.

The curators then commissioned seven artists — Alejandro Cesarco, Rodney Graham, Jutta Koether, Guillermo Kuitca, Seth Price, Nancy Spero and Lawrence Weiner — to create an original artwork using the blank page as printed in the magazine. The understanding was that all seven pieces would be sold together as a single piece, with profits split between the artists and dealer, with Mr. Guagnini and Mr. James staying outside the commercial loop.

But can anyone or anything stay outside the loop? That's the question this shrewd exercise in the genre of institutional critique asks. And the answer seems to be no. The ties between art journalism, marketing, curating and art-making are, despite the erection of phantom firewalls, tight and fast. This is not, of course, news to anyone familiar with the art industry, where conflicts of interest are a way of life.

But the least you can do is stay alert to them. And Mr. Guagnini and Mr. James — founders of Orchard, an artist-run gallery on the Lower East Side — insure that we do in a show that is also an essay, that takes place in a gallery and in a magazine, that is a single work of art incorporating other works. And those other works are terrific, from Mr. Cesarco's minimalist contribution — he removed the ad page from the magazine and sliced it into strips — to Ms. Spero's maximalism. In her hands, every page of the Artforum issue is radically altered and enhanced, as if to advertise that however entangled the web of object, cash and hype may be, art-making rules.

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