

Josh Kline

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Josh Kline, *Aspirational Foreclosure (Matthew/ Mortgage Loan Officer)*, 2016, 3-D-printed plaster, ink-jet ink, cyanoacrylate, foam, polyethylene bag, 21 × 28 × 44".

I first visited Josh Kline's studio in the fall of 2008, and I still haven't recovered from the shock. At the time, Kline was filling bankers boxes with Bic pens, then slathering them in beige paint. Drawings of Tylenol bottles lay crumpled together in a pile. Everything seemed half-finished or badly neglected, yet Kline spoke of the work with animated conviction. Even in his studio, Kline harped on his day job, deeply bothered by how the protocols, postures, and products of his office had come to saturate his body.

Kline no longer reports to an office, but he is nevertheless preoccupied with employment—or rather, "Unemployment," his recent solo exhibition. In one room, four bankers boxes loaded with framed photographs, sneakers, and other personal effects hung from the ceiling by cables. Each was encased in a clear plastic sphere riddled with thorn-like extrusions, a shape that recalled electron-microscope close-

ups of viruses. As rhetoric, the sculptures conveyed a clear enough message: The boxes were metonyms for laid-off workers, and the cases metaphors for unemployment as a contagion. As form, Kline's return to treating bankers boxes as ready-made containers signaled the degree to which his work emerged out of, and remains marked by, conditions of crisis. Eight years have passed since the collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered a global free fall, and in that time nothing has dispelled the widespread apprehension that most of us are living precariously.

In response, Kline has developed a practice that merges social science with science fiction. Working in the self-devised genre of "distributed portraiture," Kline has subjected individuals from a cross section of professions and lifestyles to interviews, digital scans, and other methods of gathering information. Taken together, this ongoing inquiry amounts to a catalog of social types, akin to August Sander's photographic chronicles, or what French caricaturists once called a *physiologie*. After an initial focus on "creatives," Kline has collaborated with janitors, deliverymen, Twitter activists, and, here, white-collar professionals stuck on the dole. "Unemployment" imagined a future where the managerial middle class has devolved into a lumpen proletariat that supports itself by collecting trash. Life-size 3-D-printed likenesses of a laid-off accountant, lawyer, small-business owner, and loan officer lay curled up on a carpeted floor, wrapped in recycling bags. Nearby, shopping carts overflowed with flesh-colored silicone casts of office-cubicle bric-a-brac, or PET-plastic bottles molded into the shape of hands. The ensemble willfully confused sealants with skin, junk with limbs, disposal with asphyxiation. In an economy that renders the greater population superfluous, how can we know the ragpicker from the rag?

Kline balanced the pessimistic outlook of this sculptural ensemble with *Universal Early Retirement (spots #1 & #2)*, 2016, which advocates for a government-mandated basic income in the sunny visual language of a pharmaceutical TV ad. The disjunct between the video's socially progressive message and thoroughly commercialized aesthetic accounts for its unsettling force. The same can be said for Kline's rejection of traditional sculptural techniques in favor of 3-D printing—a technology widely expected to eliminate swathes of manufacturing jobs. The conflict crops up even in the exhibition's checklist, which conscientiously identifies everyone involved in each work's production, from studio assistants to location scouts. The convention is borrowed from the film-and-television industry, yet, in a gallery context, this recognition of collective labor quietly punctures the myth of artistic autonomy and promotes a model of mutual interdependence. There might come a time when capitalism no longer needs us, but we'll still need each other.

—Colby Chamberlain