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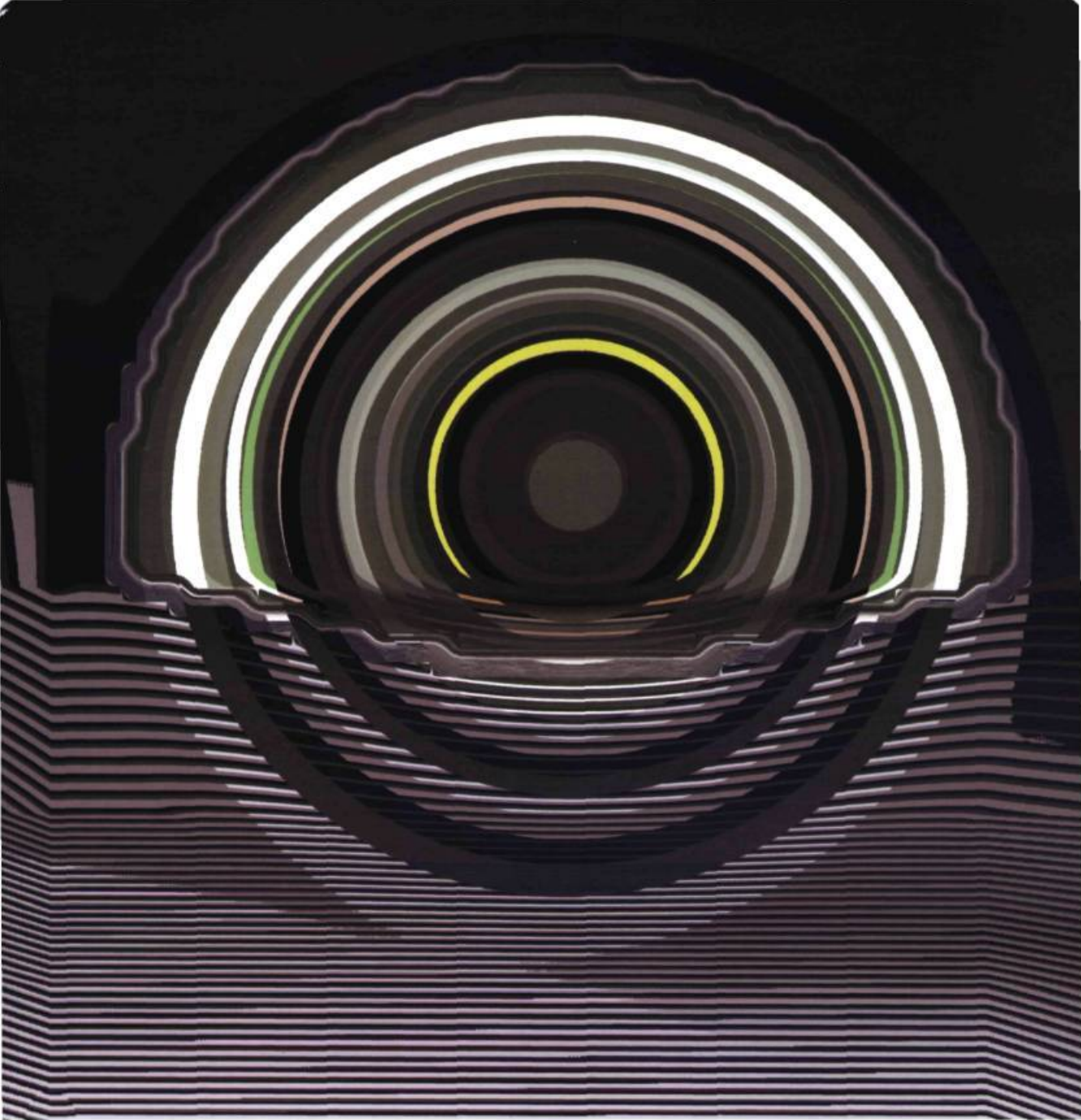
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ACTUALITÉS / DÉBATS

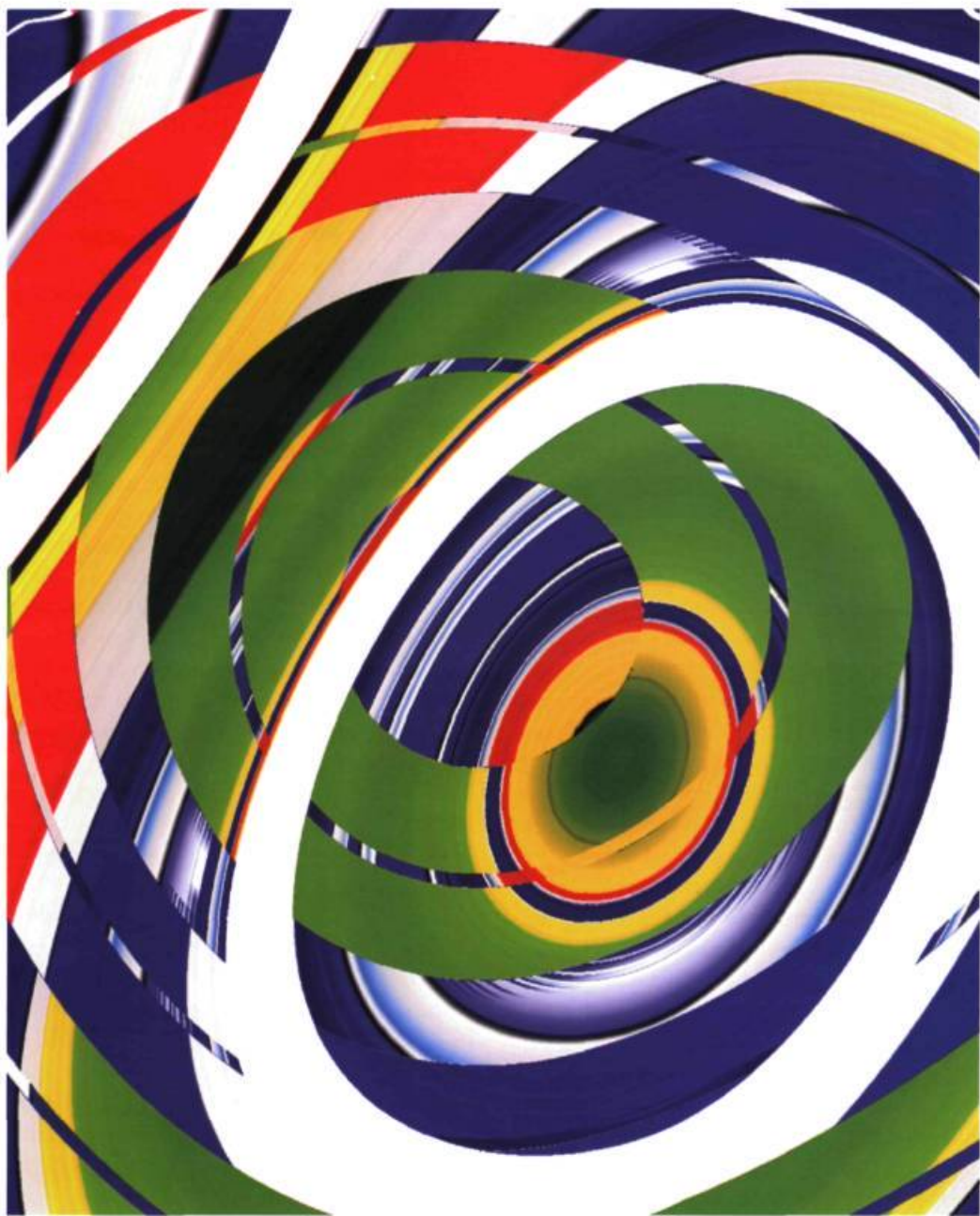
INCREDIBLE FLUX/NEW MEDIA FLOW PAUL EMILE RIOUX'S ICONIC VISION

evolving out of Op and Pop into New Media, Paul Emile Rioux is evolving his own particular style of art. From pop symbols, labels and identity markers, and using the latest digital technology, Rioux reminds us that the language of art has moved further along from its early beginnings in the 1970s. What was once a fixed image can now be manipulated and transformed within the matrix of the computer screen. Pixels can be expanded until they attain their own beautiful tenor. What pop was, and what op was, become

a new hybrid artform. Shape, colour, flux, flow, with a fluid in-matrix non-object-based language, develop. This new media application of otherwise natural symbols reminds us of the links between primitivism and pop culture, and how unconscious and deeply rooted such features as the tendency to organize shapes, to develop symbols with a hieratic meaning and to read into the ordinary a deeper meaning... We are reminded of Vasarely, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol, but Rioux makes no attempt to copy or imitate. The op pop is a pretext to play on and with form, colour and context per se.



Paul Emile Rioux, *Jelcoba F1v* (serie *Heinz*), 2004-05.



Paul Emile Rioux, *Coke 8-3* (serie *Pixel de Marque*), 2004.

A simple Barilla pasta box image of a wheat chaff becomes the jumping off point to develop a series of images to do with the tragedy of 9/11. The pixels are aggrandized so much they resemble buildings, skyscrapers, and we look at the structures within the structure. Rioux's first exhibition originated out of the Andy Warhol soup-can image. What originally was an ironic, even tongue-in-cheek play on and with art and commercial symbols for Warhol becomes a more surreal, hypertropic experience when Rioux first exhibited these works at TM Gallery. After successive experimentations, a second show called *Jell-O* saw Rioux evolving this use of pixels and manipulation of the image into an abstract language of expression. The brand aspect of Jell-O gelatin, subtly transformed, became bio-form, an anachronism, even ironic given the initial commercial intentions of Madison Avenue's packaging experts. The language of art thus has been taken further in a new media.

Yet another exhibit featured Heinz imagery. The way these images are manipulated is so beautiful that it evolves into a kind of new primitivism. We are reminded of the links between Mickey Mouse's ears and the Venus of Willendorf, something Walt Disney was undoubtedly aware of. What is sacred in art is the way images develop their own iconic status. Rioux has evolved a meaning simply by rephrasing objects and icons of the everyday. He does this by accessing what is ordinary and rendering it in an extraordinary way, into a unique status. These images can involve movement or stasis, a kaleidoscopic effect, but above all they involve a search that expresses a new language, where old standards are rephrased into a novel new-technology idiom. Some images morph, while others build strata and formal sequences. Other images are akin to painting with pixels, and evolve during the process. These works have captured the pop and op idiom and transformed it from graphic commercial commentary into a new, more exploratory level of experience. Paul Emile Rioux is well-versed in the language of commercial visual culture, and begins with the initial form, icon and phraseology of the pop-world icon but he offers an equally formidable break with the pop language, as if what he reveals likewise reduces, removes or rephrases. It all seems to awaken a spiritual significance that uses the cadence of a commercial language. This irony is also as contemporary as contemporary can be. Whether a bar code or a label or simply the form of an object, each element is stretched, distended, taken out of its original form, to build into a new form. Form out of form uses the new technology.

Rioux builds form out of form, bit by bit, pixel by pixel, but the image arrived at is less about the construction of a composition or the multiple layering of imagery, which is so common among design-

ers, new-media artists and the liker. Instead, Rioux causes us to reassess the value and meaning of the art image as a static idiom. The interchangeability of what were once completed pictures, instead suggest a random and ongoing character to art, that new art can render a state within a state, where images are always at the point of becoming – never complete or entirely confabulated, conflated, emasculated by the creator. It was as if art became a paraphrase for a state of chaos.

Contrary to the modernist ethos – where art built its meaning distinct from the ongoing world that surrounded it, even if experience was the stimulus for that era's art – Rioux's art exacts a beautiful editing that is purely visual and does not seek to fit a particular category of visual experience whether kinetic, filmic, graphic or ideational. The suggestion with all these works, which are highly experimental, is that art, at its best, escapes categorization, and its essence recalls real-world experience yet builds entirely new visual and poetic forms. Painting becomes a medium as exchangeable as the new-digital printing. We begin to reassess the purpose and nature of the artistic gesture. The forms are built on a flat surface but also express a bio-formal language that is itself distanced from the new technology of digital printing. This effect – very visual – is itself an irony. It is particularly ironic because the artistic adventure Rioux is engaged in enables us to envision entirely new ways of viewing and envisioning the matrices of creation used in new technologies.

This reformulation of the very colourful and vivid imagery seen in Rioux's art, some of it drawn from commercial insignias, is an embodiment of a new leap forward in electronic imaging, far from the beginnings Leo Steinberg wrote in the early 1970s in *Artforum*. Now artists such as Rioux can morph images, mixing the real and the virtually constructed, so much so that a new reality emerges out of all this. This experimentation and imagistic optimism is comparable to the Futurist era of the early 20th century. Constantly evolving and morphing new themes, Rioux continues to address a central question as to the role of the picture plane, but increasingly also suggests an interchangeability, or replaceable and flowing pixel-image mimeticism. Some of these works verge on abstraction, so much so they uncover an unconscious primitivism, an ancient and hieratic coding of symbols that is quite elemental really. Rioux does this through the use of simple, generic commercial icons and codes, labels of the everyday experience in a post-consumer culture. And so Rioux, the artist, challenges our assumptions as to where the language of art can draw its inspiration. Even when the latest technologies are applied by Rioux, an ancient metaphor can replace the idiomatic mix, or manifestation, of merged digital imagery.



Paul Emile Rioux, *Jell v9* (serie Jell'O), 2003.

Colour fields, or neo-geo-circuitry, or pure geometrics, can be alluded to, but they have been surpassed by the messenger, and the medium is the message, as the media theorist Marshall McLuhan once commented. The age-old technique of painting makes way for computer-generated imagery. We rediscover a life world because the medium is so fast, and our consciousness is challenge in the process. While spatial aspects are crystallized, frozen at a moment in time, they are nevertheless constructions enacted within a matrix with its own rules and limitations as exacting as the old-fashioned canvas was for painters. A lyrical aspect remains, still poetic, eviscerating space, rendering the image into something substantial. And artists such as Paul Emile Rioux are developing this new optic, one that emerges out of

the non-space of the computer screen, yet draws on fragments and elements of our contemporary reality, playing on and with the dialogic characteristics of technology's latest tools, only to discover some ancient... some entirely novel ways of seeing. All this, through an essential impulse, to invent, to reconfigure, to merge fact and fiction.

JOHN K. GRANDE