

I Love Only You installation Kenneth Steinbach
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Over the past decade I have developed several bodies of work using imagery taken from failed and devalued fiat currencies from across the world. *Fiat* currencies are paper monetary systems willed into existence by government or para-government agencies. Their values are entirely defined by decree, without being backed by physical commodities, such as gold. The functions of these fiat systems are constantly challenged as they encounter real world circumstances, their values endlessly changing in cycles of expansion, decay, and political upheaval. Most modern currencies are fiat currencies, and the history of their failure is both a fascinating and sobering study.

The imagery used in the *I Love Only You* installation are silhouettes of figures, texts, animals, architecture, patterns and other symbols found on such currencies. This installation focuses on the dominant pre 20th Century European empires such as England, Germany and France, which tended to be very embellished and baroque. The drawings employ the bi-lateral left/right symmetry used in virtually all currency design, a visual strategy used to evoke a sense of stability, completeness and hierarchical order. In short, the way it is used to convey and support forms of power. We see this kind of symmetry used in other situations where forms of power are evoked as well, most notably in the architecture of religious structures, government buildings, museums, and financial institutions.

These currency systems are clearly representative of Jacques Ellul's concept of *technique*, way of relating to the world that emphasizes efficiency, productivity and rationality. Both powerfully attractive and malignant, *technique* exists as a value system in search of an application, a way of thinking that seeks to dominate our internal landscape. Once embraced, it thoroughly defines our ideas about the natural world, our social relationships, the health of a society, individual self worth, and even aspects of our spirituality. Rather than leading to greater agency and understanding, however, the misapplication of efficiency, productivity and rationality found in *technique* lead instead into barren ways of thinking that deny important aspects of our humanity.

In working with this imagery, I am working to create moments that evoke the precise but unpredictable logics that characterize the function and dysfunction of these monetary systems in diverse economies across the globe, systems that operate in simultaneously helpful and indifferent relation to human need and desire. Rather than seeking to simply critique or deconstruct these systems, the works seek to reinterpret the imagery, finding alternative forms of value and meaning in their reinvention as objects of contemplation and meditation, and even beauty.