

## When Paintings Are Easily Reproduced

by [Hrag Vartanian](#) on January 11, 2012



A view of Alfred Steiner's "Erased Schulnik (Diptych)" (2010) and "This Is Not a Work of Visual Art"

(2010) at Norte Maar's "Guilty/(NOT)Guilty\*" (photo courtesy Norte Maar)

So far, the debate about artistic copyright has been safely in the realm of design and photography — with certain exceptions, of course — but how will that conversation change when anything can be easily reproduced and presented without proof of origin or even the original artist's touch?

These are questions that emerged when I saw Alfred Steiner's "Erased Schulnik (Dptych)" (2010), which is currently on display at Norte Maar's *Guilt / (NOT) Guilty\** exhibition in Bushwick.



A detail of the surfaces of both parts of the diptych. (photo courtesy the author) (click to enlarge)

A copyright lawyer by day, Steiner bought a glob-erific clown painting by [Allison Schulnik](#) at Canada gallery on the Lower East Side. He then proceeded to have a replica of the work fabricated on a ZPrinter 650 3D printer. The result is a quite good monochromatic reproduction of the painting that is full of the brushstrokes and textures that until recently we thought we couldn't so easily reproduce.

Looking at the potential in this art work, I realized it was only a matter of time (months?) before paintings with their grooves and quirks could be churned out at will. Will we soon all be able to own a perfect reproduction of a Picasso that only x-ray machines and laboratories will be able to say is a "fake"?

I am excited by the new frontier Steiner's work suggests. I think the piece is thought-provoking and full of contradictions — *if they are both part of the same work, is there really a fake, what if I like the copy better than the original?* The title is an obvious reference to Robert Rauschenberg's "[Erased de Kooning](#)" (1953) and I feel like it is a wink — or slap — at the once revered status artists had as singular creators, that special status feels somewhat compromised.



A detail of Steiner's work with the "original" on the left and the "copy" on the right. (photo courtesy the author)

Norte Maar's director, Jason Andrew, explained to me that the copy is rather heavy as it is reputedly made from a dense carbon — hanging on the wall you wouldn't know.

In the press materials for the show it mentions:

To cover himself legally, [the artist] sent an e-mail to give [Schulnik] a head's up that he'd done the deed. She's not worried. Yet."

I wonder if painters are threatened by the possibility that artists (and maybe corporations or governments) in the future will be able to reproduce, remix and reconfigure their works — brushstrokes and all — into new versions or perfect copies.

I wonder if this changes the debate in the minds of non-photographers, who until now weren't faced with the possibility that they could be copied this easily.

Then again, this may cause great relief to some painters, museums, galleries and collectors, who in the future won't bother to ship art — which is an expensive, difficult and laborious process — and instead simply print out copies for exhibit around the world.

Up until now print makers and artists who used mechanical means to create work (think Dan Flavin, Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger) were at an advantage because they could churn out works and editions until their hearts content. They could show the same work in three different cities simultaneously, but this may just level the playing field. So much potential in such a small work.

**Guilty / (NOT) Guilty\*** continues at Norte Maar (83 Wyckoff Avenue, #1B, Bushwick, Brooklyn)