

Classy

by Jacob Peter Kovner

“Recently, I phoned Andrew Solomon, heir to a substantial pharmaceutical fortune and author of the beautiful depression memoir *The Noonday Demon*, and asked if he’d discuss the psychological effects of inherited wealth. In the most gracious way, he declined. I pointed out that in his book, he was willing to talk about a depression so profound he attempted to contract HIV in order to have a reason to kill himself; yet he was too shy, on the phone, to talk about his inheritance. Why was that? He thought a moment before replying. ‘Because I think talking about money causes people not to take you seriously when talking about other things,’ he said.”

-Steven E. Wolf, “Rich Kid Syndrome” in *New York Magazine*

Classy has existed since 2013, a venture by artist Jacob Peter Kovner, which addresses the problem of speaking about money.

Kovner assumes the identity of the son of a New York hedge fund billionaire, Bruce Kovner. In a series of works, viewers use Kovner as an avatar to experience the problems of inherited privilege: complicity in the hegemony of the wealthy, the compromised subjectivity of not having earned what one has, and the ambivalence of inheriting a role in society.

Classy works primarily with two forms: narrative and therapy. Narrative is used as a means of examining the co-mingling of real and fake always inherent in identity formation, and therapy is used as a form that frames many of the interactive works involved with the project.



Image in collaboration with Jerome Byron Hord

1130 Fifth Avenue (2016)

This book is the reader for Classy.

It lies between memoir and novella. Framed by two academically-styled essays, the heart of the book is a narrative which traces Kovner's cathartic process following the mysterious death of his billionaire father. Kovner meets with a psychic who prescribes him a regimen of peculiar art therapy. This remedy brings Kovner to write a tell all, which is met with public success. The writing of the book-in-book opens as many questions as it addresses.

This meta-narrative is supplemented by architectural renderings of key scenes and objects within the book, created by architect and designer Jerome Byron Hord. The book places political issues within the context of personal narrative, recasting problems of hegemony as problems of paternal authority, speculation as an economic issue to a creative issue, and blurring the lines between memory and reconstruction.



Image in collaboration with Jerome Byron Hord

Trust (2016)

Trust is an installation which opposes two narratives.

The exhibition is organized around two contrasting timelines. The first tells the story of Classy, and Kovner-as-artist. The second tells the story of 1130 Fifth Avenue (see above), and Kovner as a protagonist with in the novel. The two timelines are largely filled with the same events, yet the sequences diverge.

Throughout the space, the events described in the timeline are documented. These documentations again, are divergent. The novel is represented by brief excerpts which tell one story, and the artistic practice is documented by an array ephemera which complicate the literary version.

These two narratives are placed against the backdrop of pages upon pages of Kovner's trust document, which paper the walls, windows and tables, making clear the political and juridical significance upon which these personal and creative stories rest.



Stills, Classy Trailers

Classy Trailers (2015)

The trailer project is an ongoing mixed-media and multichannel video installation. Kovner's narrative of privilege and Oedipal conflict gets moulded by the rules and cliches of different short forms--film trailers, perfume commercials, etc. These pop-cultural forms are displayed alongside Kovner's ephemera, creating a tension between the structuring action of pop-cultural tropes and the attempted agency of own research.



Carl Rogers leading Group Therapy, Life Magazine

Classy Group (2014)

Revised and developed since an initial version in 2013, Classy Group is a performance and group therapy session. Staged at a large table in a small room, audience members are also participants in an intimate event. Kovner provides the jumping off point: a first person confessional comprised of a collage of different source material. Audience members are called upon to reflect and question their own desires and expectations, as well as those of the performer



Still, Classy Encounters

Classy Encounters (2013)

In this installation, viewers enter the gallery and are offered a multimedia survey of issues surrounding money today, from gentrification to the gap between rich and poor. They are then given the opportunity to discuss these issues with somebody (Kovner) who present himself as part of that problematic group, the extremely rich. Unlike much of the work that problematizes the economics of the 1%, the installation does not treat wealth and subjectivity as a phenomenon 'out there,' but rather examines the dynamics of identity production in which we are all complicit.