

ARTFORUM

David Levine

FEINKOST

Bernauer strasse 71-72

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The discarded head shots and cover letters that David Levine has culled from casting agents and used to wallpaper this gallery all proclaim that their subjects are flexible, professional, and extremely eager. Yet it is unlikely that these actors would be pleased with the role they now play in Levine's artwork, as their unwitting participation in his project does not cast them in a flattering light. Nevertheless, it is a role more poignant, challenging, and meaningful than most acting jobs.

Levine's *Hopeful*, 2005–2009, evokes uncomfortable degrees of voyeurism, schadenfreude, empathy, and pity. The New York–born and Berlin-based former actor is known for his satiric investigations into the conventions and pretensions of creative professions. His most recent Berlin show assigned student actors to follow acknowledged artists and assume their identities, even re-creating their work in a mixture of Method acting and appropriation. In contrast, *Hopeful* looks at the acting industry at large, which, according to Levine's estimate in an article in *Cabinet*, generates enough volume that roughly ten thousand head shots circulate weekly between key points in New York alone.

The project's wider impact emerges from the parallels between this one-sided form of professional self-promotion and solicitation and the viewer's own experiences in seeking work or struggling to achieve creative and professional ambitions. As encountered in a gallery context, the obvious corollary is the art world, where artists' slides and mission statements could easily replace the head shots on the walls. But no field is exempt from similar dynamics—which is why the exhibition does not exploit others' failures but rather urges viewers to confront their own aspirations, snobbery, and ideas about success. As many of the actors themselves claim, they could be anyone at all, if only for a moment, if only the agency would ask them.

— Ana Finel Honigman



David Levine, *Hopeful*, 2005–2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view.

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