

BUCK ELLISON

Buck Ellison (b. 1987, San Francisco, lives and works in Los Angeles) received a BA in German Literature from Columbia University, New York and an MFA from the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main.

Recent exhibitions include *Genuine Fake Economy*, ICA London, 2026, *Every Good Boy Does Fine*, M+M, Hong Kong, 2026, *Get in the Game: Sports, Art, Culture*, SFMOMA, San Francisco, 2025, *Post Scriptum: A museum forgotten by heart*, MACRO Museum, Rome, 2024, *Burning Down the House: Rethinking Family*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, 2024, *Best Reply*, Barbati Gallery, Venice, 2023, *the Horizons: Is there anybody out there?*, The Long Museum, Shanghai, 2023; *Little Brother*, Luhring Augustine, New York, 2023; *The 16th Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art: manifesto of fragility*, Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, 2022; *The Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet As It's Kept*, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2022; *Made in L.A. 2020: a version*, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and The Huntington Libraries and Museum, Pasadena, 2021; and *Antarctica*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2018. Ellison has been profiled in *The Financial Times*, *Aperture*, *Artforum*, *Art Review*, *The British Journal of Photography*, *Vogue*, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*.

His work is in the collections of the Rennie Collection, Vancouver; The Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; Aïshti Foundation, Beirut; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA); and The Whitney Museum of American Art.





In this exhibition at the ICA London, *Genuine Fake Premium Economy*, Buck Ellison presents new commissions that dissect the visual and linguistic codes of contemporary private banking. Central to his contribution is a series of walnut-framed lightboxes ostensibly advertise Orlo & Co., a multinational private bank he has imagined.

Drawing on meticulous research into this industry and its vocabularies, Ellison examines how terms such as “values”, “passions” and “philanthropy” are deployed as euphemisms investment returns and wealth preservation.

In this vein, he has crafted taglines which misconstrue adages from Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith to promote personal wealth building.

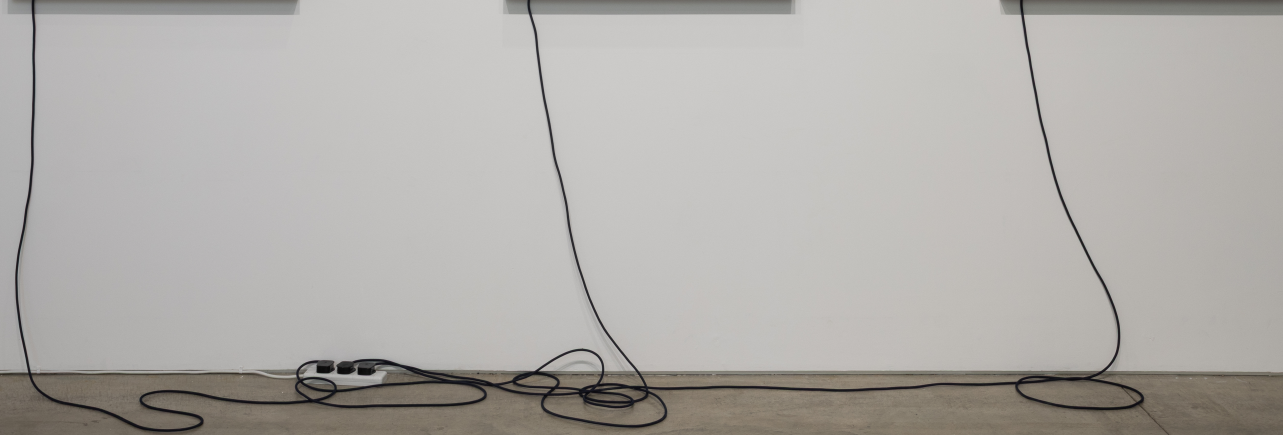
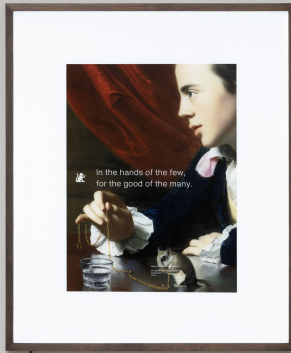
These texts are laid over images of historical paintings, a strategy Ellison observed employed in private banking marketing material, where such imagery seeks to manufacture institutional trust and legitimacy.

Also on view is *Jack’s Office* (2026), an installation that brings together both found objects and ephemera Ellison has designed to conjure a portrait of a 30-something-year-old American working for Orlo & Co.’s London offices. Personal effects such as a framed family photograph and an old T-shirt bearing the name of a prestigious boarding school hint at the institutional structures which have enabled Jack to coast through Orlo & Co., doodling on company letterhead paper with a pen picked up from a stay at a luxury hotel in Paris.

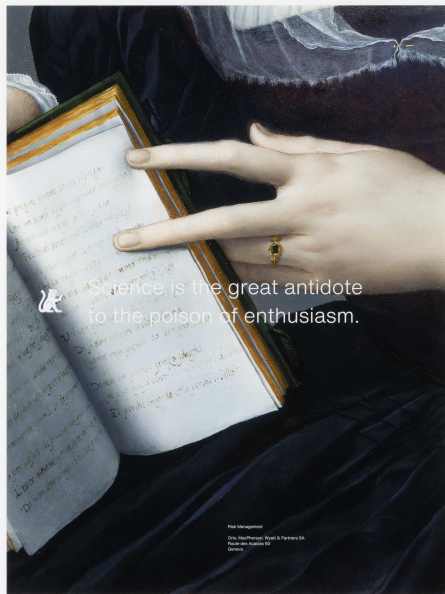


Genuine Fake Economy
ICA, London

Installation view







Agnolo Bronzino, Portrait of Laura Battiferri (c. 1555-1560)

Poet Laura Battiferri holds a copy of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* ("scattered rhymes"). Sonnets 64 and 240 appear together, a nonsequential pairing that suggests her command of the text and her own hand in its transcription.

The painting's austere profile-often likened to paintings of Dantedraws on longstanding associations between profile portraiture and authority, echoing ancient Greek and Roman conventions of putting rulers in profile on coins and medals.

Orlo & Co. uses "science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition," attributed to Adam Smith, to market its risk management services, led by a strong team in its Geneva office.

Buck Ellison
Science, 2026
 Chromogenic print on Duratrans film, walnut
 artist's frame
 36 x 30 x 3 inches
 Edition of 2 + 1 AP

John Singleton Copley, Boy with a Flying Squirrel (1765)

This work was the one of the first American portraits painted in profile and the first to travel from the colonies for exhibition in England, its transatlantic passage echoed by the flying squirrel (native to North America) and glass of water.

Copley's ties to Britain deepened with his 1769 marriage to Susanna Famham Clarke, daughter of British East India Company agent Richard Clarke; tea consigned to Clarke under the Tea Act was among that dumped during the Boston Tea Party. Though later dubbed the painter of the American Revolution, Copley remained a staunch loyalist, returning to England before the war began.

Orlo & Co. blended ideas from Adam Smith and Andrew Carnegie to craft this tagline for its endowments and philanthropy division.

Buck Ellison
Hands, 2026
Chromogenic print on Duratrans film, walnut
artist's frame
36 x 30 x 3 inches
Edition of 2 + 1 AP





Édouard Manet, In the Conservatory (1879)

In this late work, Manet depicts Gustave Caillebotte and Madame Guillemet; she appears in profile, not meeting his gaze, leaving their relationship deliberately ambiguous.

19th-century greenhouses displayed and acclimatized plants from French colonial networks. They supported the study and cultivation of economically valuable species like coffee, cacao, rubber, and orchids.

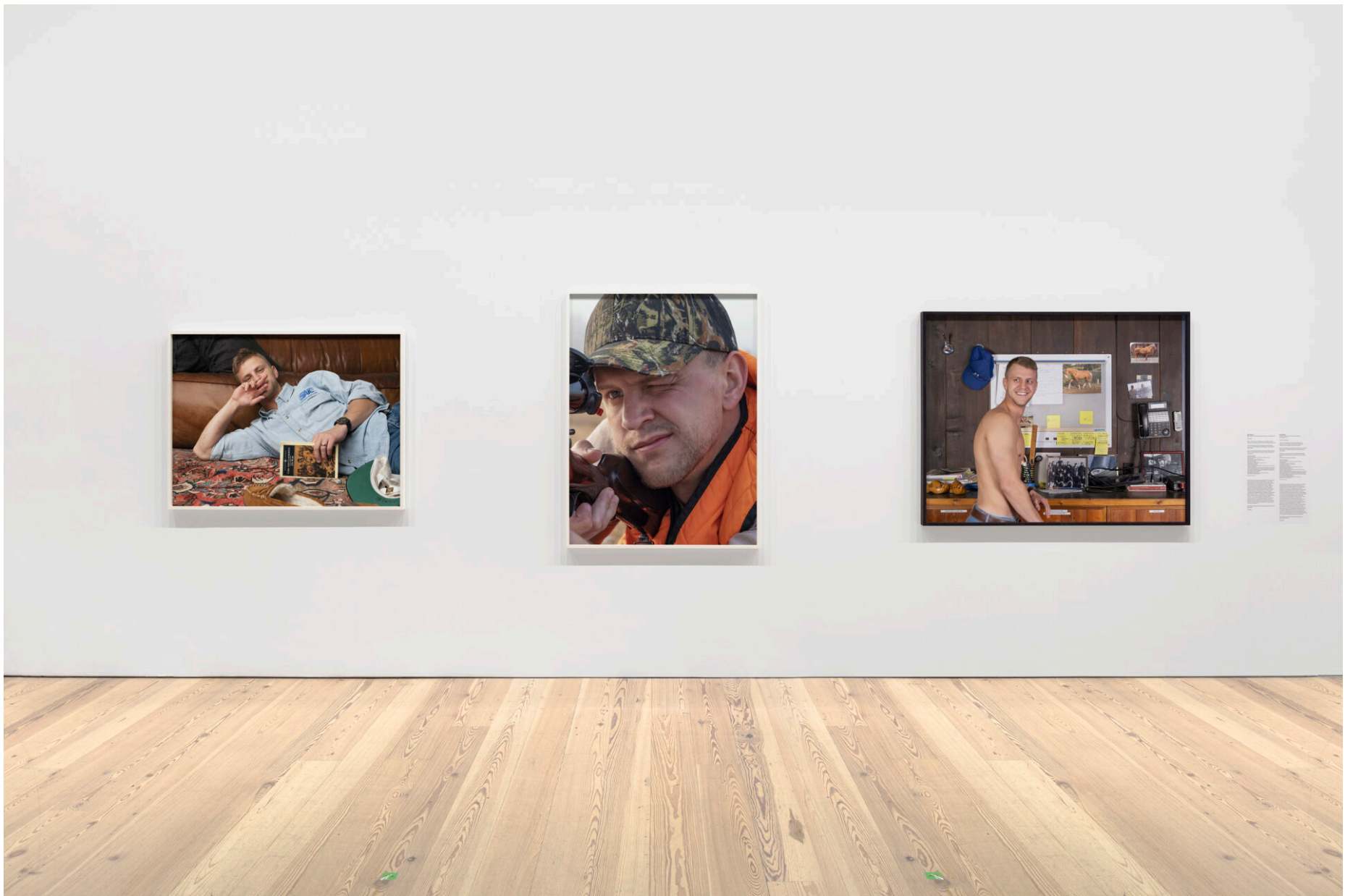
"Virtue is not a single act, it is a habit," attributed to Aristotle, is used to market the family office services division in Vienna.

Orlo & Co. promotes a "dimmer switch"

Buck Ellison
Virtue, 2026
Chromogenic print on Duratrans film, walnut
artist's frame
36 x 30 x 3 inches
Edition of 2 + 1 AP



As conversations about race, racism, and inequality surge into the mainstream, Ellison remains one of the only artists describing the myths of white male power from within its walls. His contributions to the 2022 Whitney Biennial — three fanciful portraits of Erik Prince, the financier and founder of the private security firm Blackwater — depict a powerful white man at leisure among roomfuls of work focused on abstraction and alterity. (Indeed, they raise the pointed question of what “alterity” would mean in an equitable world.) In 2019, Daniel C. Blight, a lecturer on photography at the University of Brighton, included Ellison in his book “The Image of Whiteness,” and used one of his photos on the cover. “Living Trust,” the artist’s first monograph, won Aperture’s Best First PhotoBook award in 2020.



Installation view
Whitney Biennial 2022

Buck Ellison

The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday, Steyr-Mannlicher Luxus in .027 Winchester, See Statement 11, New Nanny, 2003, 2021

archival pigment print

58 x 43 in.

147.32 x 109.22 cm

23 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (framed)

58.75 x 44.25 cm (framed)

BE 25.027

Edition of 5 + 2AP







Drawing on the vocabulary of stock photography, Buck Ellison produces meticulously detailed images that examine white American wealth. On the surface his large-format images appear to mildly reproduce the habits and tastes of affluent families, WASP dynasties, or Ivy League students. Lurking beneath this, however, is a deep inquiry into how whiteness and privilege are sustained and broadcast. With references to seventeenth-century Dutch family portraits, Ellison plants codes in his compositions, telling details that act as clues. These tableaux showcase the mechanisms that quietly, even politely, obscure inequality in the United States.

For a series of photographs investigating the ultraconservative, evangelical DeVos family, Ellison paid actors to reenact everyday moments that we would not otherwise be able to see. These works are coupled with a pair of carefully composed and inherently narrative “still lifes.” Additionally, a video work by Ellison is on view in the museum lobby, on the monitors usually reserved for signage. Using a litany of tropes from pharmaceutical and bank advertisements, the artist presents a hollow, mechanized version of white masculinity and fatherhood.



Installation view
Made in LA 2020: A Version
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles



Buck Ellison
Dick and Betsy, The Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, Texas, 1984, 2019
Archival pigment print
119 × 87 cm





Buck Ellison
i an oug he ergla e lu al Bea h Flori a, 2019
Archival pigment print



Installation view
Made in LA 2020: A Version
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles



Luhring Augustine is proud to present *Little Brother*, a solo exhibition of works by Los Angeles-based artist Buck Ellison. On view in the gallery's Chelsea location from March 17 through April 29, the exhibition includes photography, film, and a new wallpaper installation. The artist will participate in two lectures during the course of the exhibition: the first will be April 25 at Princeton University's Effron Center for the Study of America in conversation with Dr. Shamus Khan, Willard Thorp Professor of Sociology and American Studies, and the second will be April 27 at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

Ellison's practice produces a deep network of inquiry into how whiteness and privilege are sustained and broadcast. The six photographs and the film that comprise *Little Brother* were made between 2017 and 2022; in them, Ellison imagines Erik Prince, founder of the private security firm Blackwater, as he might have appeared on his Wyoming ranch in 2003, the year the firm received its first U.S. contracts to engage in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ellison carefully staged every piece in this project—hiring actors, sourcing props, researching filming locations—and combed through tax filings, transcripts of congressional hearings, military contracting price lists, as well as Prince's autobiography in order to create this meticulous portrait. For the presentation at Luhring Augustine, Ellison also produced the new, hand-silkscreened wallpaper. The design is an expansion of his exploration into the world of his subject; inspired by Prince's often-cited assertion that his plan for Afghanistan was modeled after the British East India Company, the motifs in Ellison's wallpaper examine that company's introduction of opium into China in the 1830s. A reader published by the artist accompanies *Little Brother* and will be available for visitors at the gallery; in his text for this book, Ellison notes:

Erik Prince is often touted in the media as a war criminal, as a political shadow figure, even as a monster, especially following Blackwater's massacre of seventeen Iraqi civilians in 2007. I'm interested in what happens when a viewer is forced to get close to a snake in the grass. If the camera allows us to desire, or to be curious, or to feel empathy.

I tried earnestly to understand someone whose actions make my stomach turn. I wanted to know what he likes to eat (Powerbars), his favorite song ("At Last"), and his favorite books (too numerous to list). I wanted to try to look at him with tenderness. This became my strategy for making these works. Not to forgive, but to claw towards precision and understanding with a gentle heart.

Buck Ellison
Little Brother



Installation view
Little Brother, Luhring Augustine, New York

Buck Ellison
Oak Moon, Net gain or (loss) from sale of assets not on line 10,
Aircraft hours are "wet lease", Powerbars, 2003, 2021
archival pigment print
144.15 x 108.59 cm
Edition of 5 + 2AP





Installation view
Little Brother, Luhring Augustine, New York



Installation view
Little Brother, Luhring Augustine, New York



Installation view
Little Brother, Lühring Augustine, New York

Buck Ellison
*Monday Morning, 990-PF Nonexempt
Charitable Trust Treated as a Private Foundation,
Phoenix-Seneca Growth Fund, Gray Sweatpants,
Double E Ranch, Wyoming, 2003, 2021*
archival pigment print
123.57 x 164.47 cm
Edition of 5 + 2AP





Installation view
Little Brother, Luhring Augustine, New York



Every Good Boy Does Fine takes its title from the mnemonic taught to beginner music students in English-speaking countries to memorize the lines of the treble clef staff: E, G, B, D, F. The phrase carries the quiet authority of things learned so early they feel like nature — what Bourdieu called habitus: dispositions absorbed in childhood, before conscious choice begins, reproducing social hierarchies precisely because they feel like instinct.

The British version says the good boy deserves favour. One is an outcome; the other an entitlement. That the same five notes produce two such different ideological statements — absorbed by children on either side of the Atlantic without knowing another version exists — is precisely what the exhibition is interested in. What else was learned this way, and what does it cost?

Ellison presents a selection from his series *Long Still Lives* (2023–2024). Each image is stitched from five photographs, echoing the way sheets of wallpaper are lined together on a wall. His work *Untitled (Fall)* depicts cut melons, transferware plates, Florentine greeting cards, spilled tea, and images of a boy at Eton College's Fourth of June celebration, where students row in boater hats. Eton was an explicit pipeline for imperial administration, designed to produce a ruling class confident in its right to govern—at home and abroad. Its boater hat traveled with it. Hong Kong schools established under British rule adopted the hat directly, dressing colonized children in English clothes to make them legible within the imperial order and strip away local identity.



Installation view
Every Good Boy Does Fine, M+M, Hong Kong



Buck Ellison
Untitled (Summer), 2022 (detail)
 archival pigment print
 24 x 83½ in.
 60.96 x 212.09 cm.



Installation view
Every Good Boy Does Fine, M+M, Hong Kong



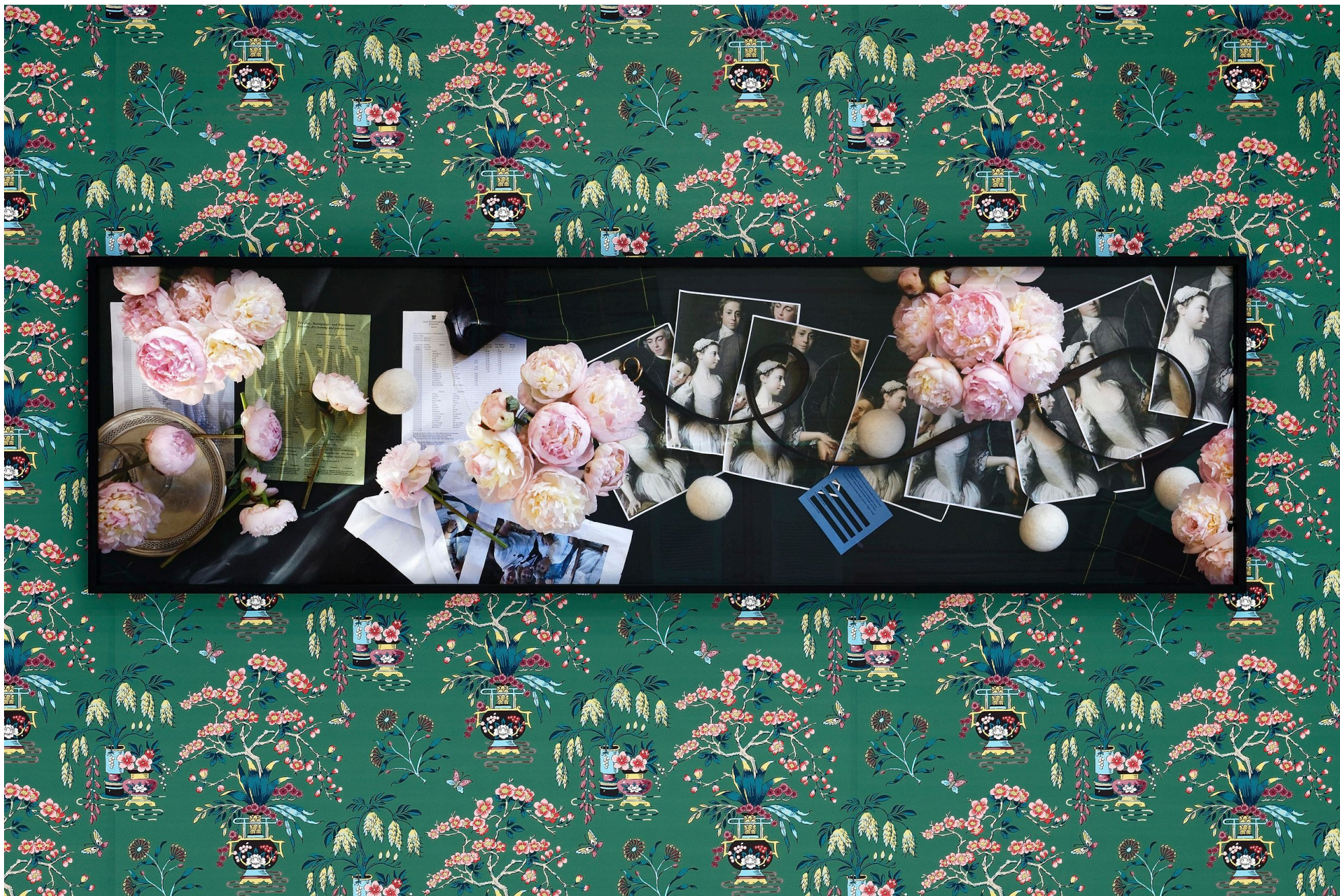
Buck Ellison
Untitled (Fall), 2022 (detail)
archival pigment print
24 x 83½ in.
60.96 x 212.09 cm.



Installation view
Every Good Boy Does Fine, M+M, Hong Kong



Installation view
16th Lyon Contemporary Art Biennale, Lyon



Untitled (Spring) depicts five vases of peonies, clothing care items, a blue card, a dog leash, a schoolgirl's skirt and prints from Allan Ramsay Thomas' work, 2nd Baron Mansel of Margam with his Blackwood Half-Brothers and Sister (1742), which depicts the descendants of a noted British admiral.

Buck Ellison
Untitled (Spring), 2022
 archival pigment print
 24 x 83½ in.
 60.96 x 212.09 cm.



On a wallpaper from Schumacher (one of the oldest American wallpaper makers still extant), entitled Ming Vase, with its porcelain, ribbons and peonies, the artist places two photographic still lifes. His works trace the history of Lyon's botanical gardens, which were planted to inspire silk designers.

Untitled (Winter) includes a black ribbon, two travel alarm clocks, hotel stationery, a pair of porcelain ducks and prints from John Singleton Copley's painting, *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel* (1765).



Buck Ellison
Untitled (Winter), 2022
archival pigment print
24 x 83½ in.
60.96 x 212.09 cm.



Antarctica. An Exhibition on Alienation

Kunsthalle Wien

Curators: Vanessa Joan Müller, Nicolaus Schafhausen

In a sketch for a film, Michelangelo Antonioni notes: "The Antarctic glaciers are moving in our direction at a rate of three millimeters per year. Calculate when they'll reach us. Anticipate, in a film, what will happen."

Metaphorically speaking, to feel cold means to feel deeply alienated. Alienation was already a dominant concern for sociologists around 1900: the alienation of man from society through individualization, alienation from nature through urbanization, alienation from work through mechanization. For philosophers like Theodor W. Adorno, alienation thus turns into a key concept in terms of the role art plays in and for society: Without alienation there is no art, and ultimately it is only art that prevents total alienation.

Ironically, it is the countercultural protest against "social coldness" and against the "rigidification" of middle-class society in the 1960s that anticipates the ideologemes of flexible Capitalism 2.0. This move, in fact, paves the way for a new type of alienation – one which reverses the metaphors: Coldness and rigidity are replaced by liquefaction, start-up and dynamics – social alienation, however, continues even as people now strive for self-optimization.

Antarctica looks at the pattern underlying alienation – this "relationship based on the absence of a relationship." Showing numerous contemporary artworks; the exhibition explores how the term "alienation" functions in our world today. In doing so, it also addresses the following question: What other forms of relationship to the self and to the world do we need? Before we can even begin to create something like a space supportive of self-determination and self-realization?

Artists: Viltė Bražiūnaitė / Tomas Sinkevičius, Burak Delier, Buck Ellison, Isabella Fürnkäs, Eva Giolo, Thibaut Henz, Jan Hoeft, Hanne Lippard, Joanna Piotrowska, Jeroen de Rijke / Willem de Rooij, Jana Schulz, Andrzej Steinbach, Ingel Vaikla, Peter Wächtler, Ian Wallace, Tobias Zielony

Curators: Vanessa Joan Müller, Nicolaus Schafhausen



Antarctica. An Exhibition on Alienation
Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna

Installation view

The *Untitled (Christmas Card)* group portraits initially appear to be representations of perfect families. However, the extensive staging casts doubt on their authenticity. The promises of the white US-American middle class are manifest in Buck Ellison's meticulously planned photographs: family as a lifestyle offer.

Their aesthetics are reminiscent of commercial advertisements and generate a cold, almost clinical image of a society striving for perfection through self-discipline and self-optimisation. With an ironic undertone Ellison exposes a yearning for social success which is distinguished by taste and education. In this world the possession not only of economic but also of social and cultural capital is communicated via imagery.

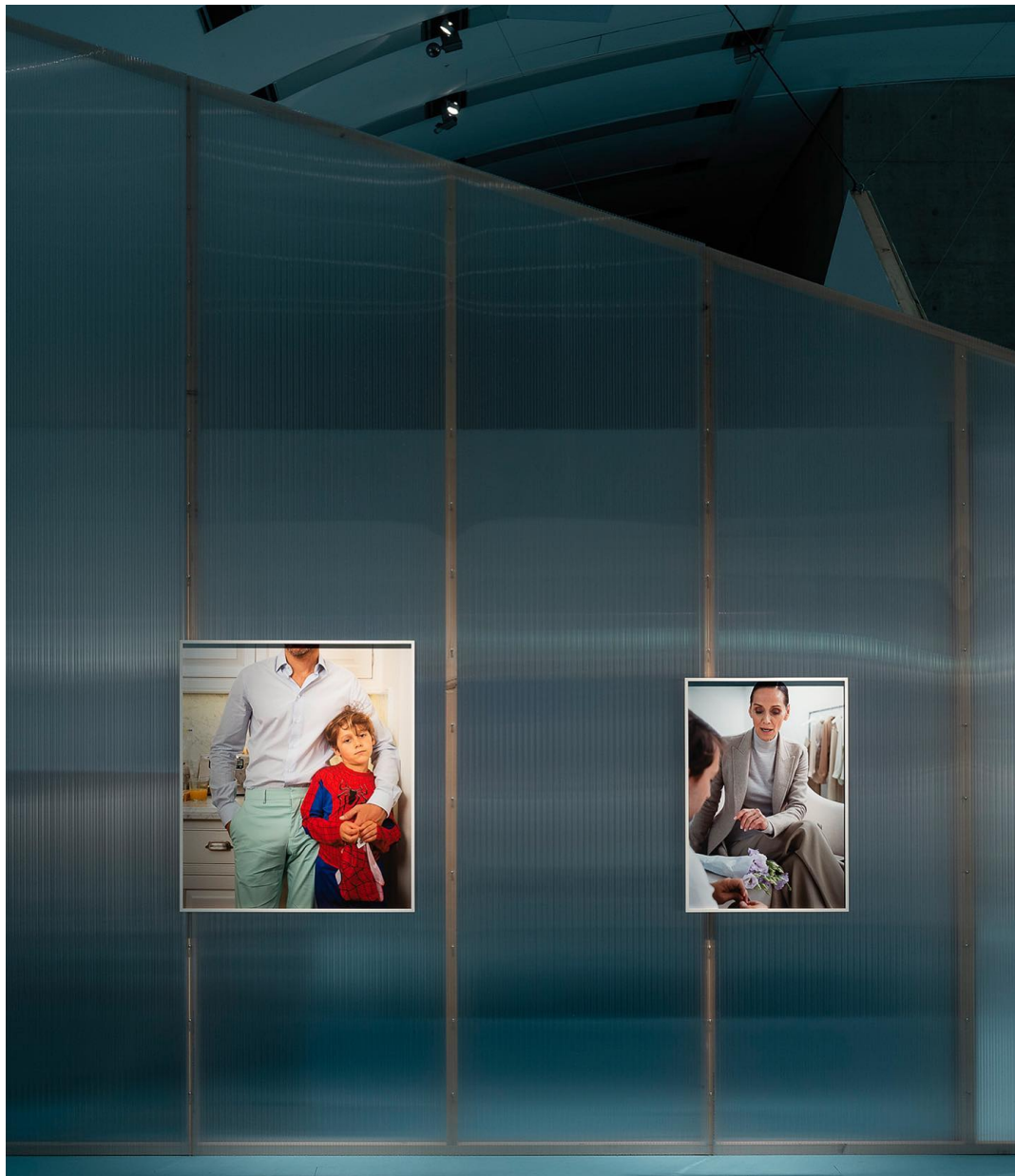
The aspiration for an expressive, unique self, which performs within the neoliberal logic of distinction and competition, is manifest in the attempt to give life both an aesthetic and ethical structure. This endeavour is no longer restricted to the highest social class, but also affects a level of society, whose material possibilities are limited but have profited from the revaluation of cultural assets. The successful self is defined by the performative display of its singularity, a trend the sociologist Andreas Reckwitz describes as the "singularisation of society". Contrary to individualisation as the social transformation from heteronomy to increased self-determination, singularisation refers to the complicated relationship between independence and the desire for uniqueness, an expectation which has reached all levels of society. Reckwitz regards the concomitant "cosmopolitan feeling of cultural self-empowerment" of the new middle class as one of the causes of growing social polarisation.



Buck Ellison
Untitled (Christmas Card #6), 2017
archival pigment print
116 × 160 cm



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Prosser Gallery Inc.



Antarctica. An Exhibition on Alienation
Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna

Installation view



Buck Ellison
Anxious Avoidant, 2016
Archival pigment print on Dibond
109 x 94 cm

In developmental psychology “anxious avoidant” or “insecure avoidant” is one of four kinds of infantile attachment types used to describe the relationship between mother and child. In this context, Mary Ainsworth’s so-called “Strange Situation Test” is used to examine the child’s behaviour in relation to the presence as well as the absence of the main attachment figure. Although “insecure avoidant” children appear to be unimpressed by their attachment figure’s absence, they manifest high stress levels in this situation.

Often these children are confronted with high expectations, judgements, and instructions from their parents during their upbringing. Consequently, they develop a need to fulfil expectations that can be so dominating that it suppresses their own feelings, wishes, or even personalities. As a relief from the potential emotional burden of being rejected by their parents should they fail to fulfil these expectations, these children develop an avoidance of attachments. At the same time, their self-perception as well as their self-evaluation depends on reassurance from others and generates a personality structure between success orientation and inner emptiness.

In his photographs Buck Ellison portrays these smooth, almost sterile surfaces and their simulations of seemingly perfect lives, in which subjective appreciation depends entirely on outward perception.





At Barbati Gallery in Venice, Buck Ellison presents *Best Reply*, his first solo exhibition in Italy. Working with photography, film, and collage, Ellison produces a deep network of inquiry into how whiteness and privilege are sustained and broadcast.

This exhibition presents a series of ten new photographs, alongside a five-photograph series from 2018. These tell a simple story: two brothers take friends to their family's ski house, which they refer to as "the cabin." Amid games, snowball fights, and puzzles, a subtle romance unfolds. The artist also plays a game here: is it possible to visually represent the act of not talking about money?

Muddy Children depicts the game Salad Bowl, where players guess words from clues, but are forbidden to say certain taboo words. In Regency England, discussing money was deemed vulgar, partly due to its potential to steer dialogue toward the topic of slavery. A brutal network of forced labor played a central role in the British Empire, so silence was not just about avoiding moral discomfort — it was economically essential. The popularity of parlor games developed in lockstep with this embargo on speaking. Games allowed people to play the unsayable.

In *Stable Marriage Problem*, one character practices for the law school entrance exam (LSAT). The exam's creators claim it "tests your ability to understand complex sets of relationships and make deductions based on the given rules". These skills mirror those used to hide power or advantage from others. In calling their eight-bedroom ski house "a cabin" the two boys appeal to middle-class virtues and tell us we are all the same. It is a tiny gesture, harmless really, but shows us one small way that inequality is hidden, justified, and propagated.

Fresh snow dampens sound. The trapped air between snowflakes absorbs vibration and noise.

An artist book was made alongside this exhibition and will be for sale at the gallery.

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Ellison has been profiled in [Aperture](#), [Artforum](#), [Art Review](#), [The British Journal of Photography](#), [The New Yorker](#) and [The New York Times](#).



Buck Ellison, *Best Reply*
Barbati Gallery, Venice

Installation view





Buck Ellison, *Best Reply*
Barbatì Gallery, Venice

Installation view



Buck Ellison, *Best Reply*
Barbati Gallery, Venice

Installation view









Buck Ellison, *Best Reply*
Barbati Gallery, Venice

Installation view

Buck Ellison
Hawk-Dove, 2023
archival pigment print
140.97 x 105.66 cm
Edition of 5 + 2AP





Buck Ellison, *Best Reply*
Barbati Gallery, Venice

Installation view



Buck Ellison, *Best Reply*
Barbati Gallery, Venice

Installation view



Installation view
Slip Lead
Stora Sunby Castle, Stockholm





