

# JOHANNES VOGT

## OPEN SPACE

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### On the Contemporary: “Who Wore It Better?” by Matt Sussman

October 22, 2013 | By **Brandon Brown**

“Who wore it better?” is a question of our time. It is also a question of time: of now, not later. It invites snap judgments rather than careful deliberation. Usually, we are asked to judge two celebrities wearing the same garment on separate occasions (that are typically in chronological proximity to one another). As with pornography, one knows the answer when one sees it.

“Who wore it better?” is in on the racket that is contemporary celebrity. It’s premised on the fact that the average celebrity gossip rag reader knows better than to assume stars do things such as choose their own clothing or dress themselves. To be a star wearing the same outfit as another star (especially if you are a female star, and especially if you are a female star walking the red carpet) is to have your rank as a celebrity taken down a notch by dint of your failure—and by extension, your stylist’s failure—to project exclusivity and originality.

At the same time, the question “who wore it better?” reveals that that very projection of exclusivity and originality, and the sense of style it indexes, is just that: a manufactured effect. To ask the question, then, voids the criteria for judgment on which it is premised. It is symptomatic rather than diagnostic.

This leads me to [whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info). I first came across the site this summer, and as with so many stumbled-upon Internet wormholes proceeded to lose much of an afternoon scrolling through its contents. Following in the footsteps of its US Weekly precedent, [whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info) presents two pieces of art that are, superficially, strikingly similar in appearance. And, like any single-serving Tumblr, it does this again and again and again, but to devastating effect.

The pairings are presented with minimal contextual information (when I first visited the site there were no artist names, links to artists’ sites, or titles of individual works; crucially, dates still haven’t been provided). Do the resemblances arise out of direct homage or a knowing allusion to one work by the other? Or, are they the byproducts of sheer chance or plain ol’ art historical ignorance? Or, are they due to some combination of the above?

And does any of this matter? On the great content leveler that is the Internet what counts is who’s working “it” harder: Bruno Peinado’s or Anish Kapoor’s giant, mirrored globule? Gerhard Richter’s or Michalis Pichler’s photorealistic painting of a blank page being turning up at the lower left-hand corner? Helmut Smits’s or Fred Pradeau’s installation involving filtering Coca-Cola into another liquid (water, in the former’s case, alcohol in the latter’s)?

[Whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info) jokingly throws its weight behind the specious dismissal frequently leveled at contemporary art that “everything’s been done before,” while seriously calling into question the continued efficacy of unoriginality,



Oliver Babin, Slip Inside This House vs. Veronica De Anda Tosteen, Banana Peel. Courtesy of [whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info).



Dennis Oppenheim, Safety Cone vs. Lillian Bourgeat, Le Cone du Chantier. Courtesy of [whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info).

imitation, parody, and appropriation as aesthetic strategies (even if the site itself can be seen as the latest salvo in such a tradition). At the same time, the site reframes Clement Greenberg’s famous quip that he could identify a masterpiece in just fifteen seconds by asking the viewer to surmise “better-ness” (for the question implies no such thing as mastery) in just such an instantaneous manner. In this way, [whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info) acts as a solvent upon the criteria by which we make aesthetic judgments.

Viewing pair after pair on the site, it’s hard not to slip into the familiar affective modes that both online and tabloid content frequently feed, and feed off of, a spectrum of what poet and critic Sianne Ngai would call “ugly feelings”: bemused indifference, schadenfreude, embarrassment, and perhaps, at the furthest extreme, outrage. It is certainly easy to brush off [whoworeitbetter.info](http://whoworeitbetter.info) in the way that it is easy to throw down that issue of *Star* or *InStyle* when you leave a waiting room, but the effects of asking and trying to answer the question itself stick around like a bad hangover. I hope the site becomes the impetus for an actual exhibition. Given how easily swayed gate-keeping institutions such as publishers and museums seem by things born of the Internet, it seems likely. It could be called “Noah’s Ark.” Of course, there couldn’t be any wall labels.

Matt Sussman is an Oakland-based writer and Managing Editor of Reviews and Columns for *Art Practical*. In addition to *Art Practical*, Matt’s writing has also appeared in the *SF Bay Guardian*, *Art in America*, *The Wire*, *Flavorpill*, and *KQED Arts*. He also works at the Bay Area Video Coalition.

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WIRED.CO.UK

## Research project shows how often great artists think alike

10 September 13 / Tom Cheshire

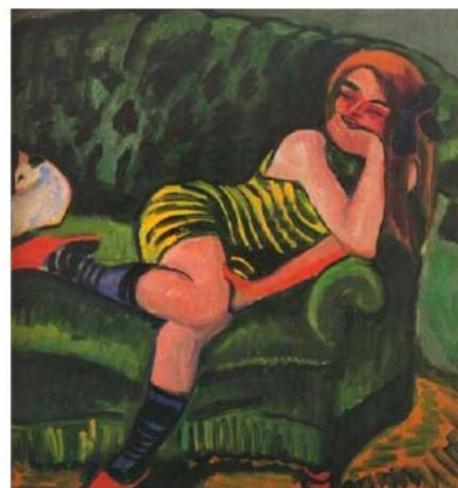
When Hollywood stars step out wearing the same dress, they know they'll be subjected to a brutal next-day deathmatch: who wore it better? But modern works of art borrow each other's clothes just as often, as pointed out by a new site - part of an "ongoing visual research project presenting associations and common practices in contemporary art." Whoworeitbetter.info, set up by two US-based artists, posts similar-looking artworks side-by-side. "I think it has always been the case that similar trains of thought are occurring simultaneously around the world, or maybe just being copied completely, but the internet makes it so that you can witness this in real time," says cofounder Alison Feldish.

The site does not aim to bitchily point out that Simon Decker really doesn't have the pins to be wearing the same look that Marcel Duchamp totally rocked: "It's important that this isn't seen as competitive or mean-spirited," Feldish says. Indeed, similarities should even be celebrated, according to Derek Frech, Who Wore It Better's other founder. "Striving to be seen as the genius creator decreases the potential and possibilities in making," he says. "I care less about whether it is homage, plagiarism or an example of simultaneity, and more about the implications of the relationships between ideas."

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## HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE



Who Wore It Better

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner 'Female Artist' :: Max Pechstein 'Girl on Green Sofa with a Cat'

“Who Wore It Better” is the art world’s answer to Joan Rivers. The clever blog pulls together artwork doppelgangers, juxtaposing contemporary and classic masterpieces that -- like starlets walking the red carpet in awkwardly similar gowns -- are so similar you can’t help but do a double-take.

The collection of works range from recognizable paintings by Vincent van Gogh to obscure digital renderings by the South Korean art collective Shinseung-back Kimyonghun. Packed with nods to art history buffs and an endless stream of tasty visual feasts, the site poses an entertaining game for any expert or art newbie: which strikingly similar artworks pulled off the look?

### Hilarious Blog Points Out Artwork Doppelgangers And Asks You ‘Who Wore It Better’ 8/16/2013

“Our interest in the project was a response to the relationship between art and capitalism, more specifically the art market... [and] why individual artists would prefer to consider themselves unique, original creators,” the group behind “Who Wore It Better” stated in an email to The Huffington Post. “We think that in removing the ego from art production -- collaborating in groups being a method for doing so -- the quality or intentions of the art change in a way that is far more dynamic and furthers critical dialogue.”

So maybe the blog is more an anti-Walter Benjamin mixed with Joan Rivers. Scroll through some of the nearly-identical pairs (some intentionally so, we admit) below and feel free to break out your inner art critic in the comments.