

Nick Warner, 'Keith Farquhar', frieze, October 2013

# frieze

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## Keith Farquhar

### Piper Keys, London

The first half of the press release for Keith Farquhar's show 'Ken & Cady Noland' comprised a pithy Facebook comment written by a friend of the New York-based art critic Jerry Saltz. This was posted after Saltz uploaded a photograph of Paul McCarthy's *Balloon Dog* (2013) – a vast inflatable version of Jeff Koons' famous polished-metal sculpture – taken at Frieze New York earlier this year: 'Blatant imitation is the last form of rebellion.'

For the second exhibition at the young artist-run space Piper Keys, Farquhar produced a new body of work that pairs the colour-field painter Kenneth Noland with his daughter, Cady. Decades separate their practices: the former is a bastion of postwar American abstraction who died in 2010, the latter an enigmatic artist's artist who has frequently ducked institutional attention. Farquhar's works here provide a sort of illustrated reader of this father–daughter relationship, picking at the proximities and distances between their work. The largest piece in the show, *Ken & Cady Noland* (all works 2013), comprises a plywood hoarding on which an enlarged version of Noland Sr.'s *Epigram* (1961) – sourced as a low-resolution digital file found online – has been direct-printed. Five circular holes are cut into the unoccupied, lower portion of the board, creating a crude pillory, a reference to Noland Jr.'s *Beltway Terror* (1993–4). Father and daughter are amalgamated into a single piece. As a generational continuation, Farquhar invited friends' children to attend the private view, to sit in the stocks and have their faces painted. This childish performance extends this deconstruction of Kenneth Noland, the MoMA-sanctioned painter, from digital printing to village-fête family fun.

Farquhar's mode of appropriation produces a deliberate kind of confusion – rebellious, but with a playful edge – by carefully mismatching and caricaturing different materials and processes. While the works' aesthetic seems incidental, it's clear that Farquhar has gone to great and specific lengths to achieve an exact result. UV direct-printing allows for the printing of digital imagery straight onto plywood and other surfaces, such as the corrugated steel used in *Abstract Painting* (Potato), which takes its cue from Christopher Wool's signature spray paintings. The pixelation resulting from excessive enlargement, again, seems careless but is

delicately executed. UV direct-printing allows for enough clearance for these industrial materials to be fed through the printer bed. Consequently, the peaks of the corrugated metal's undulations are sprayed perfectly, while the troughs – too distant from the print head – become distorted as the printer sprays ink too wide. So, counter-intuitively, the distortion renders Wool's spray paint most accurately, while the correct printing is hugely pixelated, the printer's technological imperfections ironing out the deliberate imperfections of Farquhar's enlargements. Where Farquhar's efforts to highlight the appropriation of specific styles (with famous, not marginal, works by both Noland, and the inclusion of the McCarthy/Koons piece in the press release) may have been lost in the father-daughter relationship, or a critique of blue-chip art, it is driven home in his deconstruction of Wool's much more low-fi paintings.

Farquhar is an acute choice for Piper Keys, and his readiness to engage with the gallery was palpable throughout this compact show. Amused by the proximity of the gallerists' living quarters to their exhibition space, he pulled their tumble dryer from beneath a kitchen counter and made a work of stripes and block colours on its side panel titled *Halley's Prison (Wet to Dry)*, a reference to Peter Halley's ongoing prison series.

Farquhar's works tell a distorted and pixelated story. In this instance, the tale is one of domesticity and family relationships and American art. Photographs of the opening, depicting children in the 'Cady' stocks, getting their faces painted, peppered the wall behind the office computer – a sort of pastiche of the white-collar worker's family photographs. These images not only appropriate this domestication of the workspace (something which the gallerists at Piper Keys have taken as far as possible) and accentuate Farquhar's already potent engagement with the space, but further continue these notions of parenthood, adding a third generation to an already bi-generational show.

Nick Warner

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