

Art Now LA  
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Allen Ruppertsberg  
*25 Ways to Start Over*  
Marc Selwyn  
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by Jody Zellen



The works of Allen Ruppertsberg can be applauded for their wit, intelligence and humor. Each project is conceptually savvy and visually engaging. In his latest exhibit titled *25 Ways to Start Over*, Ruppertsberg does not disappoint. The works are based on a set of questions or premises that engage with the concept of “starting over.” Among the 25 ways of starting over prescribed within the pieces are the directives to: Change your name, Begin at the beginning, Do a self-portrait, Embrace nostalgia, as well as Count backwards from 100. Each suggestion becomes not only the title of the individual artwork but also appears as texts within.

Ruppertsberg is an avid collector, reader and writer. Some of the works in this exhibition draw from his stockpile of “pulp fiction” books written by authors using pseudonyms. Others take their point of departure from *Life: a User’s Manual*, Georges Perec’s 1978 novel where the main character makes and later dissolves images fashioned into jigsaw puzzles. In the three large works inspired by Perec, Ruppertsberg presents a large digital print mounted to plywood that features a combination of disparate ephemera: snapshots, drawings, posters, book and album covers and the typewritten title *25 Ways to Start Over*, and a subtitle: for example, *#20 Do a self-portrait (tic-tac-toe)*. For this piece, he combines nine appropriated images— old photographs, reproductions of statues, spin art, etc.— and overlays them with crudely drawn X’s and O’s so they become the background of a tic-tac-toe game.

Ruppertsberg removes large shapes from each printed image — a figure, a head, a leg, as well as text bubbles like those found in comics — that become voids in the composition. The cut-out elements are hung on the wall or placed on the floor. While it is possible to realign the missing elements to complete the image, Ruppertsberg is more interested in drawing attention to the absence than in the possibility of recombination. *25 Ways to Start Over (#13 Count Backwards from 100 (99, 98, 97, etc))* is a similar work that hangs alone in the back room. It is a large two-panel digital print filled with numbered fragments (from 99 to 1) taken from reproductions of works of art. Myriad associations and references are inferred but through Ruppertsberg’s deliberate ambiguity, his intentions are never revealed.

The standout in the exhibition is *25 Ways to Start Over (#14 Embrace Nostalgia. Get Out the Old VHS Tapes)*. Here, Ruppertsberg has covered a wall from floor to ceiling with a mural collage of flattened old VHS tape boxes presented as an overlapping cacophony. This site-specific piece complements four works all titled *25 Ways to Start Over (#3 Change Your Name)* where Ruppertsberg combines various pulp fiction novels by writers using pseudonyms (pierced with holes as they have been screened onto pegboard), with “real” books, drawings, album covers and miscellaneous found objects. On a nearby table is *The Pseudonym Library of*

*Allen Ruppertsberg*, a book that reproduces a number of the covers that appear in the works, in addition to providing biographical information on the “real” identity of the authors. It also includes an introduction by Al Reed (Ruppertsberg’s own pseudonym).

Vernacular as well as pop culture, as well as its nostalgic allure have always attracted Ruppertsberg: be it trashy book covers and their titles, or outdated VHS tapes. In this presentation, he curates an ironic trip down memory lane, whimsically and thoughtfully connecting past and present. As in his other works, he considers them in relation to our current moment and weaves a narrative that juxtaposes these objects from the past with contemporary times and in this particular series, he contemplates the absurdity of starting over.

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