



Victoria Miro

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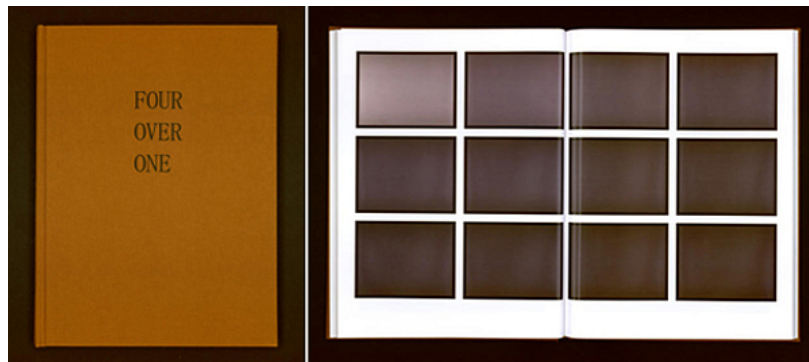
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Phil Chang

05.13.10



Left: Cover of Phil Chang's *Four over One* (2010). Right: A view of the book.

Los Angeles-based artist Phil Chang considers the recession by imaging economy and obsolescence in his first artist's book, *Four over One*, published by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A launch party for the project will be held at Printed Matter on Saturday, May 15, 5–7 PM; Art Catalogues at LACMA will host a reception on Sunday, May 23, 4–6 PM.

THIS PROJECT STARTED IN 2007. I was very interested in what was happening in the world of economics—namely the recession and the jolting destabilization of our collective notion of something as seemingly basic as a house. I wondered whether I could depict the recession through photography. Would that mean photographing unemployment lines or foreclosed homes in Riverside, California? Or would I need to go to Lehman Brothers or AIG and take shots of their buildings in Los Angeles? That wasn't that interesting to me. I wanted to do something where the structural procedures, the way of making the photograph itself, could address the recession. I started by using an archival book scanner: I laid out a sheet of expired photographic paper so that it was exposed to the light of the scanner, which in turn transformed the surface of the paper as it registered the light. It's really important to me to create a digital image that renders the paper useless—the zero-sum process mimics capitalist cycles of built-in obsolescence.

In July 2009, Charlotte Cotton, then head of photography at LACMA, asked me to turn this body of work into a book. It had never occurred to me to present the work in that format, and she was very generous and really believed in it. I began to work with designer Jonathan Maghen of Textfield, Inc. We read a lot of popular business literature from August to October. We read Chris Anderson, the former editor of *Wired*, who wrote this provocative book *Free* about the regulation of digital information. We were reading Lawrence Lessig's lectures about rethinking copyright laws, and some of Malcolm Gladwell's writings, as well as Astra Taylor's insightful essay "Serfing the Net," which looks at how the notion of "free" has been marketed to obscure the uneven economic relationship between art and commerce.

We looked at popular business writing because Jonathan and I were thinking about developing ways to employ an economy of means in both my photographic work and the production of the book. For example, with a single sheet of paper I can produce nine unique images. That economizes the production of the work. Jonathan conceived of a format, a signature structure for the book, a color and imposition scheme, and an experimental use of parent sheets in order to economize printing and stay within a limited budget. With offset printing, the more you print, the cheaper everything is; we worked hard to use certain business strategies to maximize efficiency, while producing a minimum number of books (500), printed locally at Typecraft Wood & Jones in Pasadena.

The title, *Four over One*, refers to the color scheme we used. Instead of printing "four-over-four" full color, which would not be cost effective, we printed four colors on one side over one color on the other—it's a direct way to keep everything in line, from the business tropes we were thinking about to the importance of production. The number four itself is significant because it speaks to the specific way color gets reduced in offset printing to cyan, magenta, yellow, and black. Since the photographic paper being scanned is outdated, it is weak and registers light in a strange way that ends up connecting back to a corporate palette of colors, really pacifying colors—an Old Navy palette, if you will.

— As told to Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

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