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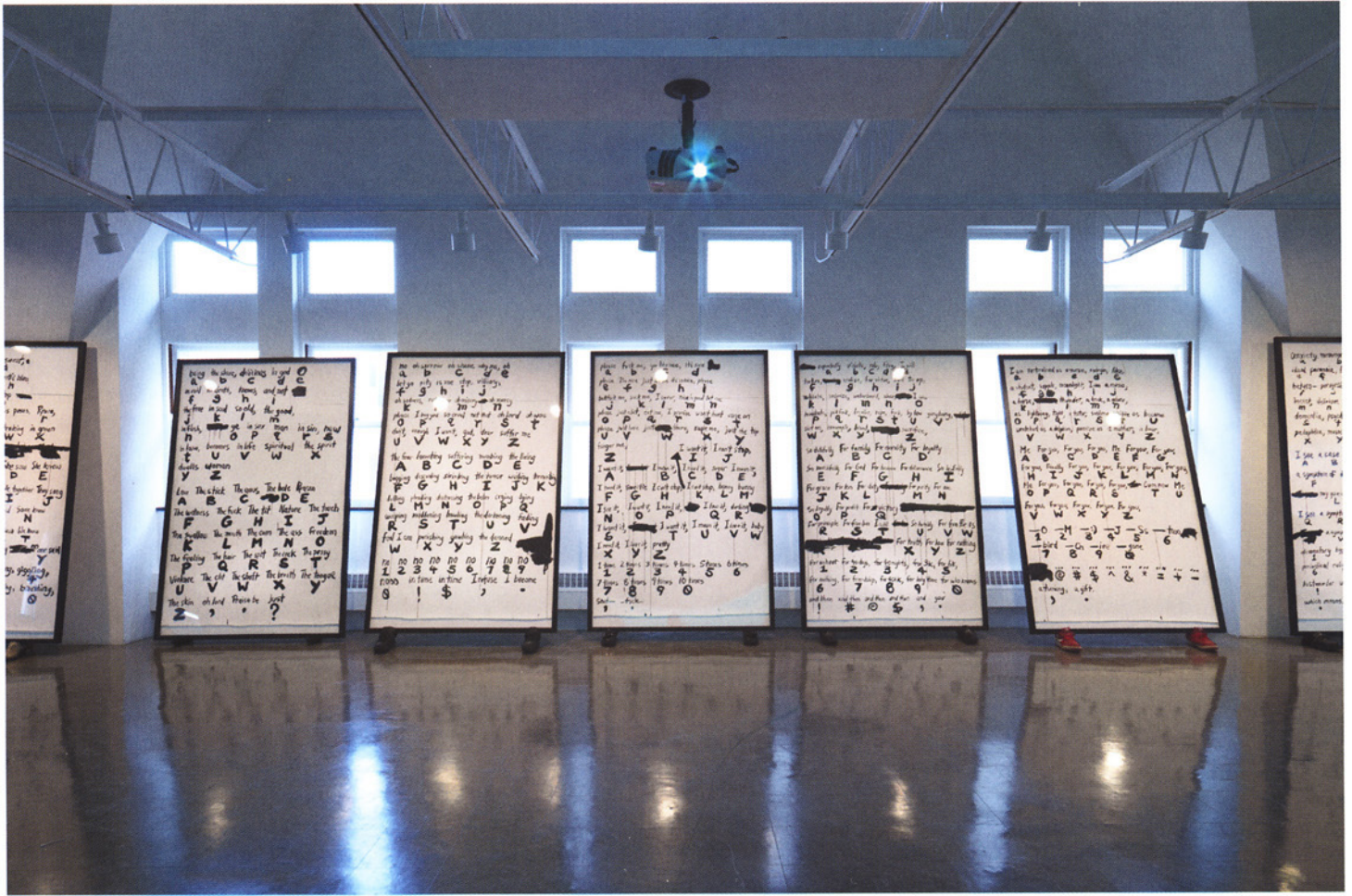
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PAUL CHAN
CHICAGO

Paul Chan's *My laws are my whores* explores the connections between sex and violence. Combining drawing, animation, sculpture, and video, the heady exhibition also delves into the relationships between pleasure, power, and the law (Renaissance Society; March 1–April 12, 2009). Here, the law's actors—lawmakers, law keepers, and law's subjects—take center stage. Drawing direct associations between the Marquis de Sade's culture of sadism, the U.S. Supreme Court Justices, the popular television show *Law & Order*, and other political tropes, Chan's show confronts us with truths that we don't wish to hold self-evident.

Nine charcoal portraits of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices tower above us as we enter the exhibition, much as they do in real court hearings. Chan replaces the judges' lips with single squiggly lines, causing them to appear even more sterile and inaccessible than they already seem. The digital animation *Untitled (After A Certain Chateau)*, 2009, occupies the other side of this wall, thus immediately setting up a thematic juxtaposi-

tion between the Marquis de Sade and the Supreme Court Justices, including Justice Antonin Scalia, who is known for his regulation of bodies and sexual freedom. The law is sadistic, and we accept it as such.

Untitled (After A Certain Chateau) presents an animated voyage into Sade's now-infamous house, where sadistic pleasure ruled as the highest law. Projected onto the wall and the floor simultaneously—like *The 7 Lights* at the New Museum—it creates the illusion of light streaming through a window. Tingly, anxiety-filled, shadow-like animations of men engaged in sexual acts with one another run on a loop for our voyeuristic consumption: one man hangs from a noose while another fellates him, men masturbate together, and some bodies vibrate continuously. Ominous black squares—monochrome paintings?—appear and disappear in the Sadean Chateau where, in Sade's masterpiece *120 Days of Sodom*, four nobles had their way with the prostitutes they bought.

Connecting modern-day elected officials, religious leaders, lawmakers, and their sex workers to Sade,

Chan bases *Ted Haggard*, *John Edwards*, and *Eliot Spitzer are in a bar*, 2009, on actual eighteenth-century engravings of the Sadean Chateau. This seven-teen-by-fourteen-inch ink-on-paper drawing sits on a small piece of cream-colored carpet on the floor, leaning against a blank white wall. In order to see the piece, we must get close to the floor and adopt a submissive, vulnerable position. Here, the three hypocritical men, representing civil and religious law, appear tangled in a sexualized pile with other anonymous bodies. The anti-gay evangelical preacher who confessed to soliciting sex and meth from a male prostitute, the former Presidential candidate accused of adultery, and the New York Governor dethroned by a prostitution scandal are re-imagined in a contemporary Sadean narrative.

Visuals, however, make up only half of the exhibition's pornographic equation. Chan also radicalizes the notion of language, creating eighteen sex-speak Mac, Windows, and Linux-compatible fonts that are downloadable from both the Renaissance Society's website and the artist's own site, www.nationalphilistine.com.

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Paul Chan, *Oh why so serious?*, 2008, plastic and electronics, edition of 3 / ABOVE: *Font Drawings*, 2008, ink on paper, 84 x 54 inches each (courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York)



Each tap of a single letter reveals a sex-infused word or phrase. The fonts are named after generic as well as historical figures who have influenced the history of sexuality. The font Oh Dr. Ebing—named after the nineteenth-century Austro-German sexologist Dr. Krafft-Ebing, whose works examined homosexuality, sadism, masochism, and pedophilia—turns even the simplest sentence into a sexual aberration. Typing the letters y and z produces "I see masochism." Chan's fonts serve to democratize his art practice, much like Cory Arcangel's use of the open-source model. As such, the Internet bridges the white cube and a broader audience—a concern that Chan weaves throughout much of his oeuvre.

Chan also presents a physical version of these otherwise non-tactile fonts, by way of nine giant font maps drawn onto dog-eared pieces of paper. Each framed work is placed on a pair of thrift-store gym or dress shoes, and leans against the wall. The font map of Oh_Boy is named *The Body of Oh Boy*, 2008, making the shoes seem like the titular boy's feet. A computer

keyboard covered in gravestones sits in the middle of a white table close to these drawings, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between sex, death, and language that trumps Chan's pornographic fonts. Unplugged, its USB cord dangles to the ground.

Nearby, the video *The Mother of All Episodes*, 2009, plays on a flatscreen monitor lying on the glossy gray floor. Here, Chan subtitles season six, episode one of *Law & Order* with all eighteen of his fonts, effectively muting the entire show—except for the distinctive "dun-dun" sound. The monitor's position requires us to lean forward uncomfortably, making it difficult to watch more than ten tedious minutes of this otherwise addictive television show. This particular episode reinforces problematic racial stereotypes: a black bum discovers a murdered well-to-do young white girl wrapped in a sheet in a crime-ridden New York City neighborhood's vacant lot. Sexualized speak tumbles out of his mouth as he walks around babbling "The anus ye the Good O the tit O so old in sex." Chan also substitutes the text during the transitional scenes with phrases THE TASK

OF SEX TODAY IS TO LEGISLATE, PORNOGRAPHY IS PASTORAL, and LAW IS SEX IN DRAG. The direct, factual content echoes Jenny Holzer's truisms. Meanwhile, the "dun-dun" sound echoes throughout the gallery, mimicking the double strike of a gavel against wood.

Chan's exhibition posits a dour reflection of a society whose political, civic and religious leadership enacts aspects of the Marquis de Sade's philosophy and practices. It's clear that sex, sadistic pleasure, and the law are inseparable. As the judges smile absurdly, their slight grins reveal a sinister knowingness. It's obvious who is on the masochistic end.

—Alicia Eler

ABOVE: installation view of *My laws are my whores* at The Renaissance Society, 2009 (courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York)