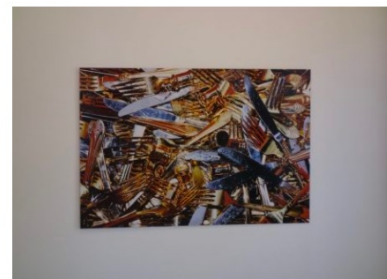
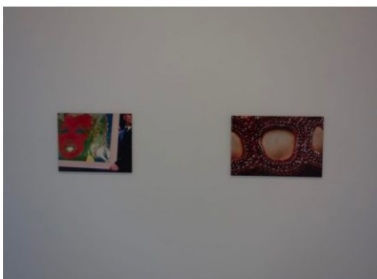
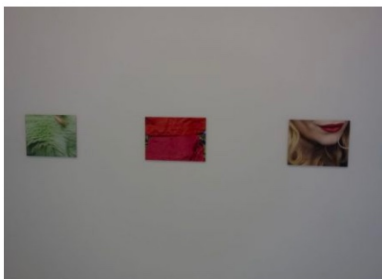
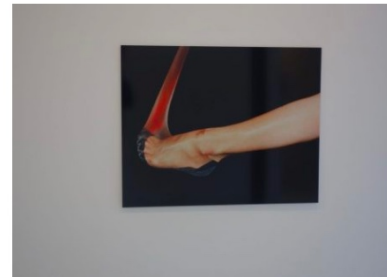
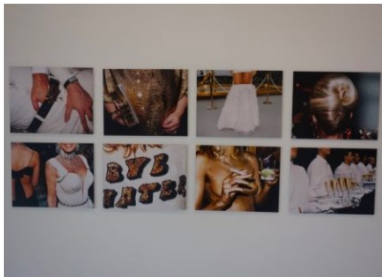
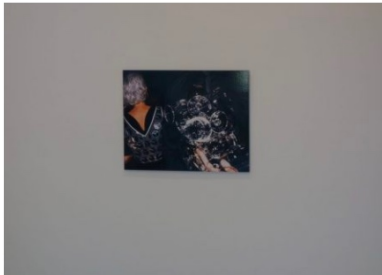


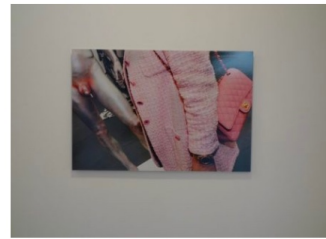
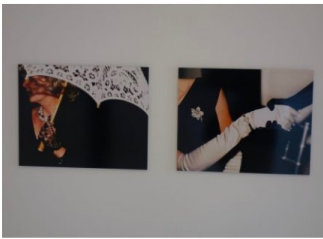
COLLECTOR DAILY

Jessica Craig-Martin: Public Relations @Nathalie Karg

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / April 18, 2017

JTF (just the facts): A total of 55 color photographs, hung unframed against white walls in the main gallery space, the entry areas, and the back office. All of the works are c-prints on Dibond (the checklist did not provide dates). Individual print sizes range from 11×14 to 28×36, and the prints are available in editions of 5. In some cases, the prints have been gathered into named/thematic groups (*Security, Freedom, Golden Rule*). (Installation shots below.)





Comments/Context: Since Bill Cunningham's death, I have often returned to his old haunt in the Sunday Styles pages of the *New York Times*, curious to see how the newspaper has attempted to fill his enormous shoes. And while there continue to be pictures of street fashions and society galas to be found in those pages, the thing I have noticed most (in his absence) is just how excellent Cunningham was at isolation and cropping – the eagle-eyed clarity of his choices, from strappy heels on the sidewalk to the cut of a gown at night, feels particularly missing, the wide view replacements now populating those pages thoroughly failing to match the tight essence of what Cunningham was consistently observing.

It was with this in mind that I wandered into Jessica Craig-Martin's show (sadly, on the day before it closed), and discovered another society photographer who innately understands the power of cropping. Her pictures don't "set the scene", provide the broader "atmosphere" of dimly lit, elaborately set tables and silent auction offerings, or show us wealthy patrons and socialites stiffly posing with their fellow party-goers. Instead, her pictures get right up close, where her flash blasts her subjects with brightness and pushes their details and surfaces into full view. And this is where things start to get weird.

For many, the sameness of these parties, with their tried-and-true formulas for flower arrangements, table sizes, bar placements, and "festive" attire could easily dissolve into a faceless wash of mannered fanciness. But Craig-Martin seems to revel in the overlooked minutiae of these events, uncovering the boldly surreal hiding in plain sight. In her hands, even champagne glasses at the ready and tumbled piles of gilded cutlery become symbolic motifs for her larger investigations into the social habits of the rich and famous.

Documentary projects exploring the lives of the 1% haven't been an obvious subject for contemporary photographers, even with all the attention paid in the press to the perils of income inequality – Martin Parr's *Luxury* and Lauren Greenfield's recent *Generation Wealth* are two of the most notable efforts in this area, but the list isn't exhaustively long. Within this subgenre, Craig-Martin seem to be carving out her own identity, deliberately bringing fragmented intimacy to the forefront, and opting for the intensity of powerful details rather than the depth of broader narrative or character studies.

All of these photographers of the wealthy test the edges of absurdity, but Craig-Martin applies a more incisively surgical eye to her findings of anthropological ridiculousness. Her isolation of the plushness of a minty green fur, the curve of perfectly applied pink lipstick, or gloved hands embracing with lady-like formality is just enough to make us shake our heads with quizzical amazement at the choices and behaviors in this strata of global society.

Craig-Martin's observations function even better when ganged into thematic groups – her grids of images offer clever juxtapositions, color echoes, and opportunities for repetitions that give the pictures a better sense of context. *Freedom* sets its sights on the red, white, and blue of political party conventions and fund raisers, where the stars and stripes have quietly seeped into countless personal statements. Of course, there is the obligatory flag waving here, but it is the poshness of the patriotism on display that gives these pictures their bite. Jewel encrusted GOP elephant pins, a star covered embroidered yamaka, red leather cowboy boots with stars and fringe, and a flag patterned tie for the blue blazer crowd all send distinct visual messages, and between the collared priest with the Republican pin and the shapely legs in nylons with stars down the side, the gingham shirt adorned with the *I Only Sleep With Republicans* pin feels oddly at home.

Security taps into a more nuanced set of luxury life issues. It hits on the fragility of the male mid-life crisis, with its polished red Ferraris and its groping middle age hands (one image is masterfully titled *The Mogul's Touch*), and the cold exterior of the aloof female equivalent, with plastic wrapped dresses, heels adorned with tiny padlocks, and plenty of flowing platinum blonde hair and diamond jewelry. Towering iron gates and latex-gloved servers address the theme more literally, and even Vladimir Putin makes an appearance, as a lapel pin near a foppishly large velvet bowtie.

While there is a natural tendency when capturing the excesses of privilege to look for the exaggeration of caricature, Craig-Martin's pictures never fall into jokey comedy. Even when capturing a nude model in all-over gold body paint or the unlikely juxtaposition of a pink Chanel suit and the shiny genitals of a nearby male statue, her photographs never overtly laugh at her subjects. Instead, they consistently find that balance point where the everyday details of formal galas tip into a place of uncertainty, her eye deftly separating out the unique strangeness of these opulent fashions and extravagant customs, making them seem simultaneously normal and abnormal.

Collector's POV: The prints in this show range in price from \$2800 to \$7500, based on size, with the large group *Freedom* priced at \$25000. Craig-Martin's work has little secondary market history, so gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.