

PRESS RELEASE

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Property

Artwork by Paolo Cirio.

These works reflect on the stock photography company Getty's dominance in the market, capitalization, and control of images on the Internet. The series adopts the semantics of appropriation art through transforming images into compositions of colored shapes and texts, which overlay with the prints of the original photos appropriated from Getty's websites. *Property* examines images as a form of capital accumulation, bound by intellectual property laws, trade agreements, legal contracts, and litigations. Getty aggregates images from public archives, agencies, and photographers; then it repackages them with legal terms to exclusively license and sell millions of photos. Images become an asset and a revenue stream, with Getty Inc becoming a monopoly and a gatekeeper of photos (see gettyimages.com, photos.com, images.com, etc). To dominate the economy of images at a time in which the Internet allows easy reproduction and sharing, Getty Images Inc aggressively controls and polices the use of photos through extensive legal threats and litigations. While limiting access, Getty Images Inc, acquires archives and collections by any means and strikes agreements with search engines and publishers to lure viewers to their sites. These often deceptive and aggressive business practices are necessary for Getty to gain control over the market of photos.

With the series ***Property, White House***, Cirio found historical photographs of U.S. presidents in the public domain that Getty Images Inc. licenses and sells on their platform. This series questions the use, trading, and ownership of photo archives through utilizing direct evidence of Getty's deceptive marketing of public domain images. Cirio appropriated photographs of nine U.S. presidents from the White House Archive, the Library of Congress, and the National U.S. Archives, and then compared them with the identical photos marketed by Getty. The final presentation of physical photographic replicas are illustrated with the original captions, indication of the source, and conceptual reframing.

With the series ***Property, J. Paul Getty***, Cirio collected photos of the founder of Getty and overlays them with legal clauses from the contract license agreements of photos sold by Getty Images Inc. By appropriating photos of the art collector himself, this work questions the role of patronage and the ownership of art. J. Paul Getty symbolically represents the accumulation and concentration of wealth in the form of the aggregation, marketing, and the sale of photos. Reminiscent of the extractive business of the oil magnate founder of the company, metaphorically, images are the new oil of the contemporary visual capital. The artworks overlay text from legal clauses pertaining to the licensing agreement on portraits of J. Paul Getty, bringing the images' legal and economic value into dialogue with its visual qualities.