

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Roe Ethridge, "Feature," *Artforum*, May 2016.

# ARTFORUM



Roe Ethridge, *Chanel Necklace for Gentlewoman*, 2014, C-print, 34 3/8 × 51 3/8".

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## **ROE ETHRIDGE**

**IT SEEMS TO ME** that the two worlds of art photography and commercial photography are like parallel universes. Both go through their ruthless cycles, aware of each other but too busy with their own internal battles to look outward. There are many exceptions—instances where the universes *do* intersect—and I am grateful for those. But I think there are functional differences between the fields that may never be resolved.

Some of these differences are actually important to me, and I would hate to see them disappear. For example, within the commercial image there is generally an understood edge or boundary, a set of rules. But within that space, there's a kind of play that can happen. There's something mercenary in the fact that the images have to happen *that day*. We are not returning to the "rental atelier" next week to try again. It has to happen today. That pressure is productive—stressful but productive. In my art photography, there isn't that impetus to make decisions and execute them quickly. Having the opportunity to contemplate is productive too, but I think the ideal situation is one in which I can switch back and forth between the two tempos.

My dad was an amateur photographer. I grew up with these racy '70s "art" photography magazines, occasionally brushing past history-of-photography books, maybe glancing through the most interesting ones—I remember seeing Lee Friedlander's work and being confused and excited by how casual yet beautiful and strange his images were. To me at age twelve, they were equal—Friedlander's incredible photographs on one hand and cheesy lens-flare softcore on the other. Later in adolescence I got a camera, took some "creative" pictures of leaves, and bricks, and my girlfriend. Went to college, learned about "deconstruction," tried to make things that looked conceptual. At the same time, I would spend a lazy hour at the grocery store looking at magazines. *Vogue*, *Modern Bride*, *How to BBQ*, etc. It was all fascinating, and I wanted to know how to make images that looked like that. I was interested in pictorialism because it was such a no-no in the art world. Only after realizing that the Paul Outerbridge images I loved were actually made for ads and, in turn, that the outtakes from the beauty shoot I did one day were as good as the "art" image I made the next, did I understand that I had been and would be living in both universes.

*Roe Ethridge is an artist and photographer based in New York.*