

ARTFORUM

Gerard Byrne

PROTOCOLINEMA | NEW YORK

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At a vacated corner store on the Lower East Side, dried dirt marks the interior's tile floor while the storefront's awning, lined with Chinese script, is the remainder of its previous owners' aborted entrepreneurial pursuits. For now, the space also houses Gerard Byrne's film and photography installation *Why It's Time for Imperial, Again*, 1998–2002. Pristine images of pages from *National Geographic* line a wall, documenting an advertisement for the 1981 Chrysler Imperial. The promotional copy consists of a scripted conversation between Lee Iacocca and Frank Sinatra, the latter questioning what it takes to build a luxury car and the former asserting "why it's time for Imperial."

In the center of the space, Byrne's film component conjures a rewritten past. Two actors recite the aforementioned advertising copy, interrogating the value of the Chrysler while pacing around desolate suburban locales: a playground, a diner, a bridge, and an industrial zone. But in Byrne's film Iacocca falters over the scripted responses and Sinatra is sweaty and clumsy. Byrne's camera surveys the men from a distant, inconspicuous perspective, adding a conspiratorial air to the proceedings. The suited spokesmen, their characters appearing equal parts *All the President's Men* and *The Odd Couple*, evoke a mixture of skepticism and pity. The advertisement's script is recited ad nauseum throughout the film, making publicity for the Imperial sound exhausted before the product's release.

Other mounted photographs show crooked stacks of *National Geographic*s stuffed into a messy bookcase. Their fading spines tear and the trademark gold covers appear tawdry. Issues pile up everywhere in a sign of overgrowth, and the surrounding excesses of other publications situate the magazines as nothing more than part of a larger mess. The Chrysler Imperial's future paralleled that of the magazine stacks and the shop that once filled this exhibition space: Sales of the car fizzled and production halted after three years. The artist's work puts a cinematic gloss over advertising's falsities, and by presenting these fantasies together, he exposes facts. Like many people, Byrne's hindsight vision is 20/20—what's less common is how his work comes full circle.

— Nicolas Linnert



View of "Why It's Time for Imperial, Again," 2012.