

# SELECTED SUPPLEMENTARY WORKS



Start in London, by way of Paris. Meet Léa.  
Meet MUK. A detour via New York. Jump the Bosphorus. Back to the Big Apple.  
Meet an artist, don't see his work.  
Buy his mixtape instead. Across to Chinatown. Explore a continent through its objects. Breathe.

Seth Price is an artist whose work comprises sculpture, film, painting, and performance. We don't intend to show you much of that. Not because it isn't worth your time – it is. But because Price's supplementary output, which dates back to the turn of the millennium and includes all manner of physical ephemera – CDs, mixtapes, books, handbags, calendars, zines, t-shirts – feels as relevant to understanding his work as anything you might see in MoMA PS1 or Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. All of it is 'work,' some of it just costs more.





**In this feature, Price speaks to another artist, Brad Phillips. Like Price, Phillips also writes and has a penchant for releasing absurdist printed ephemera, such as a t-shirt bearing a photo of the late author David Foster Wallace, with the caption 'Stephen King' rendered in Disney's signature typeface. Together, Price and Phillips discuss the similarities and peculiarities of their respective practices.**





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**WORDS:**  
Brad Phillips

**IMAGES:**  
Courtesy of **Seth Price.**

**BP:** Ok here we go. Hi Seth. I think you're around my age. Not young. Not yet old, in the classic sense. How do you feel, physically?

**SP:** I'm good. I do a lot of Qigong now, man. I just feel lucky, me and my family are in good health.

**BP:** Qigong seems smart. I've wanted to learn Tai Chi here in New York, but I'm too shy to hang out in Chinatown parks and learn from observation. Health is everything, which seems obvious, but it took me getting older to take my own seriously. You have kids? What's that like?

**SP:** It's a trip, like everyone tells you. Families are like gangs. You got your own code, your own rituals, your own politics. You walk down the street in this little self-enclosed world that's perpetuating itself. I have a daughter, she just started high school here.

**BP:** That sounds exotic and appealing. We don't have kids and aren't going to make any, and I like that we have freedom, but my awareness of aging has lately made me wonder who'll take care of us when we're old. So, like me, you make art and you also write. People often ask me if there's a connection between my paintings and my writing, so I'll ask the same thing of you.

**SP:** When I set out to make a painting or a piece of writing I don't have a map, and I don't have a particular destination in mind. But I do have the same intuition, so that's got to point me in similar directions, over time. I just don't know if I'm the person to make those connections. Sometimes it's better not to know, it can play tricks with your head.

**BP:** That sounds right to me. I never have an answer to that question myself. Everything is part of the same project, some ideas are just suited for writing, some for art. I like that you mention intuition, because it's all I really care about. Meaning and intention I don't find interesting. I heard you tried writing a young adult novel. What was that about?

**SP:** Weirdly, that was one of the few times when I really set out to do something, as opposed to working off fantasies and intuition and seeing where I end up, and of course it went nowhere. I tried to write a Christian sci-fi novel in 2002, and it failed, then I attempted a YA novel around 2009. I wanted to take these mass cultural forms, which were kind of alien and even repellent to me, and do something with them. That's the best I can explain it.

**BP:** That's interesting to me, because I wrote a novel in 2021/22 that had a sort of classic, pulp crime novel feel. I had experience with the subject matter—family trauma, addiction—but not with the structure. I think the ideas were served well by mimicking genre fiction. I don't find those mass cultural forms alien or repellent though. I find them comforting. They employ this problem/solution logic that's absent from most 'literary fiction' and I like that. I've been interested in this for a few years, exploring what people think of as mass or broad cultural forms. I think it's much harder to make tens of millions of people happy, the way someone like Stephen King does, than it is to make a small, specialized group of people happy, the way people like us do. Or ostensibly do.

- 1 8-4 9-5 10-6 11-7, 8-Hour Audio File, (Distributed History: New York, 2007)
- 2 *Industrial Fist*, Cassette Tape, (New York: free103point9, 2003)



**SP:** I don't mean the forms themselves were repellant, that's wrong. I love genre fiction. I'm writing sci-fi at the moment. Of course, it's like how all music is mood music: it's all genre, even the realist stories about adults and their jobs and their feelings. Have you ever read the "how to write a genre novel" books that Stephen King and Patricia Highsmith and Raymond Chandler wrote? Those fascinated me. But the thing that was uncomfortable, the bruise I couldn't help pushing, had to do with the way that genre rules could be exploited, like with the Left Behind series of evangelical sci-fi, which seemed so cynical. I was trying to face that head on by reproducing the same move of instrumentalization, but as art, like, how do you do that but make it real, keep it hot, and live, and personal? It touched on something uncomfortable, I don't know how to explain it really, but think about how people decide they want to be painters: it seems fantastic, and they start painting something that they think of as abstraction, maybe, and why not, it looks like art, and now they're going along, and doing it. . . It's not cynical, exactly, because I think of cynicism as being about cowardice or greed, but it's adjacent. It's hard for me to explain. I think all those writing exercises were like testing my own faith. That's been the function of writing, for me: a pit stop, before getting back on track.

**BP:** This is all interesting to me. I've read that Stephen King book, yeah. It was helpful, not that I took any of his advice. Patricia Highsmith has been one of my favourite writers for a long time. I collected this entire Penguin series of her books like 20 years ago, and then my ex-wife threw them out when we got divorced. My current wife bought them all again for me one Christmas. The interesting thing with Highsmith is that, because she used genre fiction to write about serious or classic 'big ideas', she was never taken seriously by the literati inner circle, and it really drove her nuts. The highbrow disdain for putative 'genre fiction' is self-defeating, and generates the neverending glut of navel gazing bullshit that defines so-called literary fiction. Life happens inside of genres—mysteries, horror stories, tales of man against nature etc—so why not utilize these forms? What's an analog in art for you? It's funny you mention the decision to become an artist. I've never identified as a painter (something I'm sure real painters would agree is appropriate) but I make paintings. I wanted to be an artist, and painting was something I knew artists did. But I feel very detached from the medium, which maybe doesn't serve me well. You also make paintings, and they sometimes feel 'painterly', but I would never describe you as a painter.

**SP:** Everything you're saying hits close to home. It used to bug me. I would make a large, multi-year series of photographs, for example — I'm thinking of the giant photos of human skin I did back in 2015 — and no one would refer to them as photographs, they'd be referred to as light boxes, which, yes, they were, or "conceptual", which means nothing and should be outlawed, or "skin works." Curators were calling them "conceptual imagery," or whatever, but they weren't measured against the field of photographic images. I was like, hold on, they do push the form, they don't look like photos I've seen before, but the fact is that I used a camera to take a portrait of a person, and made a print, and exhibited it in an art space. This still happens: I just did a show of paintings in London, and a British zine interviewed me for a profile, and when it came out, the guy wrote, "to be clear, these are not paintings." Just flatly says that. I kind of scratched my head, like, funny, because I used brushes and paint, and they're flat and rectangular, and they hang on the wall. . . But I can laugh about it now, because this is exactly where I want to be. If you can distort a discipline enough that it's unrecognizable, you're doing okay. And the distortion can be slight, it can take very little, because these disciplines are fragile, they're based on almost nothing. At the same time, to slip through the disciplinary cracks is a skill and a power, because they represent a kind of policing. But I must say, to stop worrying about all this was definitely a struggle, because I had to work through my own bullshit around names and labels. I didn't call myself an "artist" until I was able to quit my day job, in 2005, and had to write an occupation on my tax return. Before that, I'd tell people, "I make art," but I'd never say, "I'm an artist," I'd actually deny it, even to friends of mine. I thought of art as something you do, not something you are: yes, I'm an artist when I'm making art, or standing in front of it in my own show, but how about when I'm eating breakfast? I don't think so. But that was immaturity. I had to work through some stuff. To really disregard labels and identities means ignoring the ones people put on you, and taking a position of lightness and distance.





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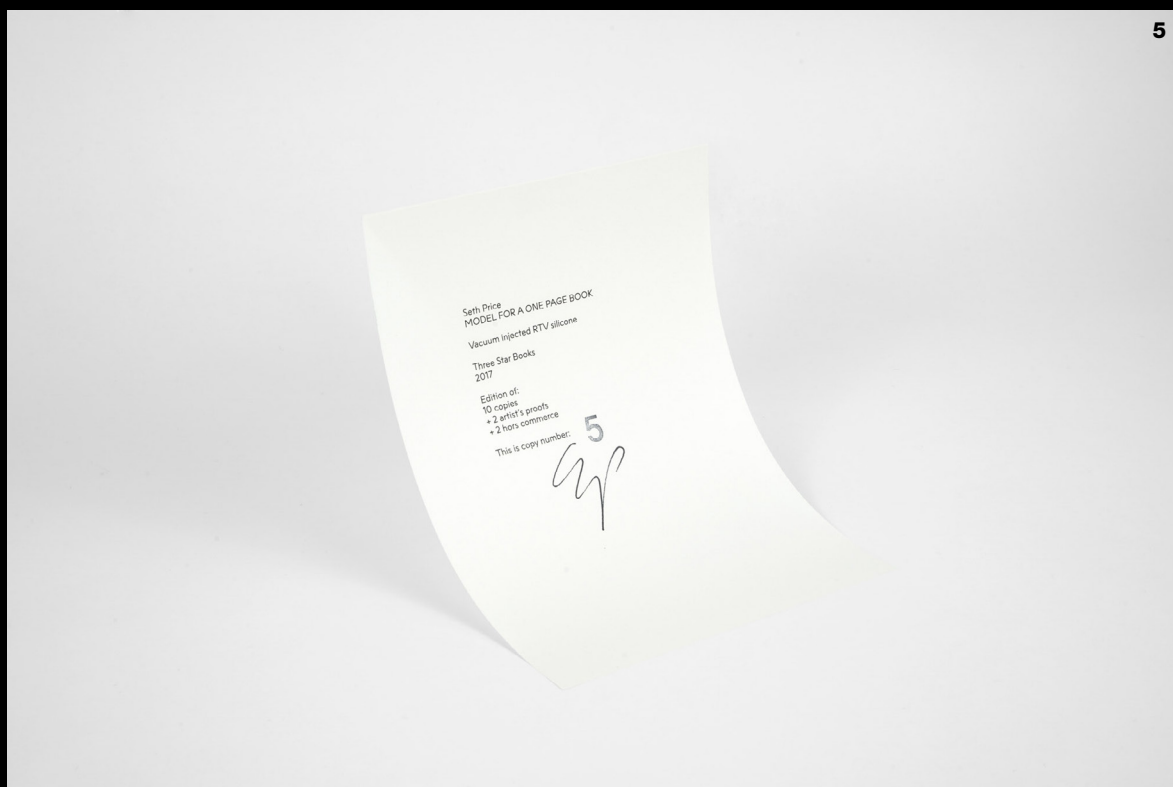
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- 3 *Danny and Hannah*, by Seth Price, both 2015. Photographs dye-sub printed on synthetic fabric, LED matrix, and aluminum. Installation at the Museum Brandhorst, Munich. Photo: Constanza Melendez
- 4, 5 *Model For A One Page Book*, by Seth Price, 2017. Silicone, cardboard box, tyvek.





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**BP:** I think the idea of being called an 'artist' is just inherently uncomfortable because the people who proudly proclaim that they're artists tend to be somewhat corny. I know I don't like being called a 'painter' because it reminds me of people who love the smell of turpentine and walk around with paint splattered pants. A lot of this is my own judgement, and probably just judgement of myself. I've often felt like I pigeonholed myself by making paintings, and feel somewhat envious of people like you who have the confidence to work in different mediums. As I write this, I realize the only person stopping me from experimenting with other forms is myself. It's good you have the sense to laugh at something that annoyed you, when that guy said 'these are not paintings'. I want to be read incorrectly, or to confuse people, but when people publicly get me wrong, I'm annoyed. Nobody can win inside of my mind, especially me. I hate to ask the obvious question, but what are you working on now?

**SP:** That's exactly why I was hung up about it, too, the idea that if you go around calling yourself an artist, you're clearly a poser. Like you, I'd get uneasy when someone was singing the praises of vine charcoal and the smell of 'turps', or, "these are the most luxurious brushes." I mistrust tools, because they invite mastery and expertise, and I don't think being an artist is special. That's probably why I avoided art school, because in my high school art classes, which by the last two years were just independent studies for developing a portfolio to apply to art school, it was turning into a stupid craft-fest, and the other kids were super serious about artsiness. Like I said, I had to work through a lot of stuff. Anyway, I'm making paintings for a show in Paris in June, at Chantal Crousel, and I'm writing. I'm trying to put together the two pieces I did for Heavy Traffic magazine into a book. I think we might publish it later this year.

**BP:** I relate to all this a lot. I went to art school very briefly, but beyond gaining some friends and a hash connection, the experience was off putting. I think craft or expertise is tricky. Because I really do value craft, and whatever I make, I want it to be as well made as possible. And craft is also about knowing the tradition you come from, which I think is something people overlook to their detriment. But a lot of people vastly more skilled than me make horrible work. There's a sweet spot I try to get into, where I'm sort of clueless and adept at the same time. I think I get bored of things that I've figured out how to do well, and need to feel challenged all the time. So are you making paintings with actual brushes again for this show?

**SP:** Actual brushes, for sure, and pours, and reverse transfers, and spray paint, and whatever else comes along.

**BP:** And who's the 'we' who might publish that writing? I really loved your pieces in Heavy Traffic.

**SP:** I think Heavy Traffic is looking to start publishing, so they'd do it. And thanks for saying that, because I never know if anyone even reads my stuff!

**BP:** I get that. I've always been jealous of my musician friends, because people fucking cheer for them. I also wanted to ask you about the mixtapes and other, objectively cheaper things you've made, like calendars, etc... Things like these aren't big money makers, but they're more accessible, and I wondered about the impulse behind making tangible, more affordable objects that people can hold in their hands, and use in their lives.

**SP:** Yeah, music and writing and video, so much to say about that. It's dematerialized art, or let's say it's both material and immaterial. It can be an affordable object, but it can also have no package, and you copy it, or stream it. You can buy the package, but it will never be unique, and that's fine, because the special part is somewhere else, somewhere invisible, and it comes to life inside you, and becomes your own unique experience. It's like you transcend your body and meet it transcending its own body. I love that. I work in these forms because I love them. It allows me to have other experiences, talk to other people, everything you can't do with unique objects. When you make a record, or a book of poems, you wind up talking to a lot of people who could not care less about some object in a room. And I've been doing all this since before I had a gallery, or a studio, or was even sure I wanted to make objects.

The other thing is that when you start out, nothing is a money maker, it's all equal. You mentioned the Calendars: those are actually paintings which sell for real money, but when I made them in 2003 and 2004 I didn't have a gallery, and no one knew who I was, and it was five years before anyone bought one. The real question is, how do you keep doing all the different things when some of them start to make real money, but others, which take just as much time and energy, just cost you? I'm lucky, because I work in a lot of different areas, and people want to buy some of it, and that subsidizes the other activities. If I had to do certain things and not others, even if I made more money, I'd probably get worn out and depressed. Like, isn't the whole reason we do such weird things, because we love it?



**BP:** Okay, let's finish in a classic interview way, where you tell me what an ordinary day looks like for you.

**SP:** I get up around seven and feed the cat, get peoples' breakfast ready, help my daughter get out the door. Me and Bettina do Qigong two or three times a week with some other people. In the mornings I sometimes write, because the world is more spacious, you can pour yourself out and just mix, but most days I leave for work at nine or nine thirty. When the trains are tight, it's 25 minutes. I have a car, and during the pandemic I'd drive, and it was fourteen minutes. Then midtown traffic came back. At the studio, I rotate from one thing to the other constantly: different paintings, or drawing, or computer stuff, or music, or writing, or looking at books. I don't ever sit and do one thing for three solid hours. Except writing. Monday through Wednesday I have a couple people helping me, but Thursday and Friday it's just me. I try to make room for playing around and drifting. No appointments, no meetings, ignore the phone and the emails. Sometimes I use those days to go see art or something. Around five or six I go home. When we had our daughter, I stopped working nights and weekends. I hated it at first, but it turned out to be good for my head, and I never went back. We always eat together, and then people go off and do their own stuff. I might

read, or try to watch something. I say try, because I have a hard time watching anything. These days I really only watch YouTube. Putting it on my TV made a huge difference, so I can't see the browser and tabs and be tempted to do something else. I've been watching #liminal channels, and Backrooms videos, and channels where people walk around for hours recording everything from a camera strapped to their body. Anything boring and slightly creepy.

**BP:** Your morning sounds just like mine, except I wake up at six, and instead of kids, I'm just getting myself ready. The inside of my mind feels like a bunch of screaming toddlers. Boring and slightly creepy describes my YouTube preferences too. The background at my studio is usually The 30 Most Haunted Restaurant Bathrooms, or The 30 Creepiest Sitcom Episodes. I rarely go see art, despite living in a city littered with good art. I should maybe try that. I'm the same in that I shift from one project to another throughout the day, but I find it stressful and unproductive more often than not. I'm trying to create a schedule, something like Mon-Wednesday writing, Thursday/Friday painting. I like that you eat dinner with your family every night, and that you do QiGong with other people in the mornings. Your life sounds healthy, not overly stimulating. Maybe we can end here, unless you've got something shockingly profound to say.

**SP:** Man, if you ever catch me stepping up to the mic with the goal of being shockingly profound, it's time for me to stop.

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- 7 Akademische Graffiti, CD,  
(New York: Distributed History, 2005)  
8 Seth Price, *Fuck Seth Price: A Novel*  
(New York: Leopard Press, 2015)

